Wordsworth and Coleridge

Lyrical Ballads

1798 and 1802

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

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WILLIAM WORDSWORTH and
SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

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1798 and 1802

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by

FIONA STAFFORD

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LYRICAL BALLADS

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH was born in Cockermouth, in Cumberland, in 1770. He lived to become Poet Laureate to the young Queen Victoria in 1843, seven years before his death in 1850. Wordsworth travelled through France during the turbulent period of the Revolution, where he met Annette Vallon, who became the mother of his first child, Caroline. After his return to England, he published *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* in 1793, continued to frequent radical circles, but experienced severe psychological turmoil later recalled in his great autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*. Once reunited with his sister, Dorothy, Wordsworth began a period of poetic composition which was greatly enhanced by the close friendship with Coleridge. *Lyrical Ballads*, a joint enterprise, was published anonymously in 1798, and an enlarged edition in two volumes was published under Wordsworth's name in 1800, with further additions in 1802. Wordsworth visited Germany before settling in the Lake District, which became his home for the rest of his life. He married Mary Hutchinson in 1802.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE was born in Ottery St Mary, in Devon, in 1772. He was a supporter of the French Revolution and worked as a political lecturer and journalist, publishing his first collection of *Poems* in 1796. With the poet Robert Southey he planned to establish an egalitarian society in America, and married Sara Fricker, sister of Southey's wife Edith. He moved to Somerset where he met Wordsworth and worked with him to produce *Lyrical Ballads*. After travel in Germany, in 1800 he moved to the Lakes to be nearer Wordsworth. He was afflicted by poor health, opium addiction and domestic unhappiness for much of his life. In 1817 he published *Biographia Literaria*, a personal account of his critical and philosophical opinions, which was to prove enormously influential. A slim volume of earlier, unpublished poems, including 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel', was brought out in 1816, followed by the more substantial *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817. Coleridge died in 1834.

FIONA STAFFORD is Professor of English at the University of Oxford. Her books include *Reading Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012) and *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford, 2010), and editions of Jane Austen's *Emma* (Penguin, 2003) and *Pride and Prejudice* (Oxford World's Classics, 2004).

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANY editor of *Lyrical Ballads* is indebted to the remarkable work of the most distinguished Wordsworth and Coleridge scholars. The list of works below includes the books that have been most helpful in the preparation of this volume and to which the editorial material refers most frequently. Additional studies and critical works are cited in the notes and in the Select Bibliography.

BL	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and Walter J. Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1983).
Butler and Green	William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1989).
CL	*The Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1956).
CP	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, 3 vols. (Princeton, 2001).
EY	*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787–1805*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967).
Gamer and Porter	*Lyrical Ballads, 1798 and 1800*, ed. Michael Gamer and D. Porter (Toronto, 2008).
Gill	*William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford, 2010).
GJ	Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere Journals*, ed. Pamela Woof (Oxford, 1991).
Guide	William Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, with introd. Stephen Gill (London, 2004).
Hazlitt	*The Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London, 1930–4).
Herd	David Herd, *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs*, 2 vols. (1776; Edinburgh and London, 1973).
IF	*The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London, 1993).
Jacobus	Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads 1798* (Oxford, 1975).
Johnson	Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1755).
Journals	Dorothy Wordsworth, *Journals*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2 vols. (London, 1941).
LY	*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, 1821–1853*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, rev. Alan G. Hill, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1978–88).
Mason	*Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Michael Mason (London, 1992).

McCracken	David McCracken, *Wordsworth and the Lake District* (Oxford, 1984).
MY	*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, 1806–1820*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, rev. Mary Moorman and Alan Hill, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1969–70).
Newlyn	Lucy Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Language of Allusion*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 2001).
Notebook	*The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 10 vols. (1957–2002).
Percy	Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, ed. H. B. Wheatley, 3 vols. (London, 1885).
Prose	*The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1974).
Reed	Mark L. Reed, *Chronology of the Early Years 1770–1779*; *The Middle Years, 1800–1815*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1967, 1975).
Ritson	Joseph Ritson, *Scottish Songs*, 2 vols. (London, 1794).
WH	T. W. Thompson, *Wordsworth's Hawkshead*, ed. Robert Woof (London, 1970).
Woof	*William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*, i. *1793–1820*, ed. Robert Woof (London and New York, 2001).
Wu	Wu, Duncan, *Wordsworth's Reading*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1993–5).

INTRODUCTION

ANYONE glancing over the opening page of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 might well have been rather put off. Instead of enticing readers with the promise of great art, deep wisdom, exciting or heart-rending tales, the Advertisement offered a caveat—these poems were 'experiments' and unlikely to suit everyone's taste. Prospective purchasers were even warned that should they 'persist in reading this book to its conclusion', they would have to 'struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness'. This could hardly be further removed from today's glossy superlatives. That a book published in 1798 should seem less instantly eye-catching than a modern volume is not surprising, given the steady advances in book design and sales techniques in the years intervening, but the literary world of the later eighteenth century was already a jostling marketplace, with booksellers eager to meet the demand that came with improved literacy, social aspiration, and increased leisure among the middle classes. In an age when collections of poetry were increasingly prefaced by brief lives and frontispiece portraits, however, *Lyrical Ballads* entered the world without so much as a hint about the identity, education, or background of the man behind the work. The 'author' even concealed the fact that 'he' was really 'they'. Was this merely commercial ineptitude? Or reluctance to treat poetry as a consumer item, dependent on the whims of unknown readers? Or was the Advertisement the perfect threshold to a volume that was meant to surprise, challenge, and perplex those who dared to continue? The opening portrayal of the bewildered reader looking around 'for poetry' is very hard to resist.

Scholarly research has uncovered a great deal about the composition of *Lyrical Ballads*, but there is still something to be said for approaching the collection with its original readers in mind, who were picking up a slim, anonymous volume of new poems. Many modern readers have been conditioned to read the collection in relation to its famous Preface, often treated as a manifesto not only for its authors, but for the entire Romantic movement. The substantial essay was not written until 1800, however, and so those encountering the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 had only the anonymous Advertisement by way of preparation. Here, very few poems attracted special mention—'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', 'The Thorn', 'Expostulation and Reply', and 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere'—and there was little

guidance as to meaning. What it did suggest, among the tongue-in-cheek warnings about style, was that the poems were nevertheless 'a natural delineation of human passions, human characters and human incidents'. Four years later in 1802, the third edition of *Lyrical Ballads* would be introduced with an eloquent account of the poet as 'a Man speaking to men', but even in the first, anonymous edition, the emphasis was on the human dimensions of the poems.

For those willing to respond sympathetically came the invitation to 'consent to be pleased in spite of that most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own pre-established codes of decision' (p. 3). In other words, *Lyrical Ballads* was intended primarily to please, but the poems would only succeed with those prepared to abandon their prejudices and allow themselves to be moved by the unexpected. The speaker in 'Expostulation and Reply' observes that 'we can feed this mind of ours | In a wise passiveness' (ll. 23–4), and so the brief, apparently humorous, reference to the poem in the Advertisement was also a gentle pointer towards open-mindedness as the condition for mental growth. When the collection was reorganized for the second edition in 1800, 'Expostulation and Reply' and its companion, 'The Tables turned', were moved to prime position at the start of Volume I. Those who bought the expanded, two-volume *Lyrical Ballads* were thus advised to stop reading—'Close up these barren leaves'—by the time they reached the second poem. In this larger edition, however, the extensive—and evidently serious—new Preface provided a considerable counterweight to the quiet wit of the poems themselves. In the original 1798 volume, the joke in 'The Tables turned' seemed lighter and, since the short lyric was positioned towards the end of the collection, remained imperceptible until readers had been very persistent.

With nothing but a warning to abandon all preconceptions, then, the first readers of *Lyrical Ballads* were plunged into the opening poem—'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere'. And what could be more disconcerting than this? The 'Argument' promises 'strange things' in a voyage to the remotest parts of the earth, while the central figure is identified only by his occupation and age. And if the comment that the poem imitated 'the *style* as well as . . . the spirit of the elder poets' (p. 4) meant that its old-fashioned diction was not wholly unexpected, nothing prepared readers for the sudden appearance of the Mariner, with his 'long grey beard' and 'glittering eye', nor the predicament of the Wedding-Guest, who remains in his power, baffled and terrified, throughout. Eighteenth-century readers were more accustomed than modern audiences to traditional ballads, which had

been enjoying a major revival through the printed collections of Allan Ramsay, Thomas Percy, David Herd, and Joseph Ritson,[1] but none of the familiar folk narratives or old songs was quite like this. The 'Rime' may open with a wedding, but it is no love story. It tells of a voyage, but there is no obvious objective: no king's command, no princess to be escorted, no wrong to be righted, no quest to be accomplished, no land to be discovered, no treasure to be found. And yet, as the tale continues, the reader, like the Wedding-Guest, 'cannot chuse but hear' (l. 22). It may be the Mariner's bright eye that overpowers the Wedding-Guest, but readers are entranced by the sound of his words:

> Listen Stranger! Storm and Wind,
> A Wind and Tempest strong!
> For days and weeks it play'd us freaks—
> Like Chaff we drove along. (ll. 45–8)

Throughout, the poem works aurally and visually. The chaff-like ship, the 'mast-high', emerald-green ice, or the 'broad and burning face' of the sun, peering out through prison bars, all make an indelible impression on the imagination, but equally powerful are the accompanying sounds, 'With heavy thump, a lifeless lump', or the deathly silence, without 'breath ne motion'. Perhaps most striking of all, though, is the strong rhythm and insistent rhymes that propel the poem through the long sea miles and 151 stanzas:

> The Ice was here, the Ice was there,
> The Ice was all around:
> It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd—
> Like noises of a swound. (ll. 57–60)

We accept the strangeness of the acoustics largely because of the satisfying metre and internal rhyme—'It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd': the rightness of the sound enables the animation of the towering icebergs and intensifies the pervasive sense of apprehension. The rhyme gives momentum to the verse, even as the words suggest painfully slow progress through a terrifying frostscape. Like the Wedding-Guest, the Mariner has been trapped by forces greater than

[1] On the ballad revival, Nick Groom, *The Making of Percy's Reliques* (Oxford, 1999); Maureen Maclane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, 2008); Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini (eds.), *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500–1800* (Farnham, 2010). See also Jacobus for the popularity of Bürger's ballads and reprints of William Taylor's English translations of 1796.

himself, and the reader experiences a similar powerlessness as the poem slows and speeds on its way.

Although the poem appears to adopt a simple, ballad form, its stanzas vary in length and pattern, often reflecting the twists and turns of the narrative. Unexpected metrical disruptions contribute directly to the overall uncertainty and, as the breeze drops, for example, so does the jaunty third-line rhyme: 'And we did speak only to break | The silence of the Sea' (ll. 105–6). The visual resemblance of 'speak' and 'break' recalls the full rhymes of the previous stanza, but it is as if the verse is registering its own fault-lines, for in the ensuing stanzas, the third lines are distinguished by the absence of their internal chime. In what is perhaps the best-known stanza of the entire poem, the third line not only lacks a rhyme, but seems so drained of energy that it fails even to muster new words:

> Water, water, every where
> And all the boards did shrink;
> Water, water, every where,
> Ne any drop to drink. (ll. 115–18)

When, at the end of this section, the rhyme is restored, its impact is all the more powerful: 'Instead of a Cross the Albatross | About my neck was hung' (ll. 138–9). The unfamiliar spellings also draw attention to the sight and sound of the words, as when the famished sailors, 'With throat unslack'd, with black lips bak'd' (l. 149), both invite and discourage an internal rhyme. For a modern readership, thirst would demand a throat 'unslaked' rather than 'unslack'd', a suggestion strengthened by the rhyme with 'bak'd'. However, pressure from the 'black' lips works to render the throat 'unslack'd' and the line more awkward and prolonged—as befits the desperation being conveyed. 'Unslack'd' or 'unslak'd'? In later versions of the poem, the ambiguity was resolved as the word was revised to 'unslaked', but the first readers of *Lyrical Ballads* had the disconcerting—and exciting—experience of two possibilities simultaneously. Since the origin of the verb 'slake' relates to loosen, relax, or slacken, the line in 'The Ancyent Marinere' was effectively recalling the earlier meaning and in doing so, revitalizing commonplace language and restoring a metaphor long dimmed by familiar usage.

In the later eighteenth century, the language of the older poets was increasingly admired for its natural energy and figurative character. To imitate the spirit of past masters also meant being true to their original genius—so an enterprise that might risk descending into pastiche

could, in fact, be highly innovative. A ballad was no longer traditional once its form had been stretched to embrace the travel account, natural history, true adventure, ghost story, imaginary voyage, spiritual autobiography, confession, Gothic drama, conversion narrative, and even medical case-study. The timelessness of the encounter between the Wedding-Guest and Mariner, with its unspecified location and uncertain conclusion, gave readers the freedom to make what they would of the tale. Why does the Mariner act as he does? Is what follows the consequence of his crime, or a random sequence of events, wrestled into order by a traumatized victim? The poem conveys a deep sense of guilt, but offers little by way of explanation.[2] If some lines invite religious readings, much of the detail suggests the influence of modern scientific exploration. Traditional ballads carried stories that had been repeated over centuries, with different meanings for successive generations and so, too, 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere' came laden with unpredictable possibility. *Lyrical Ballads* opened with a poem that was at once traditional and experimental.

Since 'The Rime' ran to fifty pages of the first edition, with its small pages and spacious page layout, its original readers may well have experienced something of a shock when it finally came to an end. If they turned the page expecting a further narrative in brisk ballad stanzas, they were in for another surprise, for here was 'a dramatic fragment' in blank verse, offering a dialogue between two women. It was a 'Tale', but no more a ballad than what came next: 'Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree'. After this there was more blank verse in 'The Nightingale', but instead of being a retrospective on solitude, this was a 'Conversational Poem', and a very recent one, judging by the subtitle: 'written in April, 1798'. Presumably these were some of the 'Few Other Poems' advertised on the title page? Most of what followed was stanzaic: some ballad-like, some lyrical, some Spenserian, and some almost resembling nursery rhymes. For readers expecting traditional ballads, 'The Mad Mother' might have recalled the 'Lament of Lady Anne Bothwell' and 'The Thorn', 'The Cruel Mother', both widely familiar from popular folk collections. Lyrics such as 'Lines written in early spring' also had something in common with Scottish songs featuring the arrival of spring, which eighteenth-century editors often included alongside older ballads. Those who had thrilled to recently published translations of German Gothic ballads might also have noticed in 'The Thorn' a similarity to Gottfried Bürger's

[2] Coleridge added the marginal glosses to the poem in 1817 (see App. 1).

'The Lass of Fair Wone', or to Leonora's ghostly night-ride in 'The Idiot Boy'. No previous ballad, however, had dared to take as its subject matter the feelings of a mother so desperate to help a sick friend that she despatched her mentally impaired child on horseback at night to fetch the doctor, nor to treat a tale of this kind with such high-spirited good humour. The comic portrayal of Susan Gale's illness, Johnny's disability, or Betty Foy's mounting panic can make us laugh *and* wince, while simultaneously inviting participation in the very real emotions that drive the poem. As the Advertisement warned, most of the pieces were 'absolute inventions' or 'personal observations' and any assumptions based on earlier reading were to be set aside.

Whatever the title, *Lyrical Ballads*, may have suggested, the recommendation to abandon 'pre-established codes' was reiterated throughout. In 'The Nightingale', age-old literary conventions were explicitly overturned, as the eloquent speaker invites his readers to reconsider the traditional association of nightingales with melancholy, through listening directly to the birds. The baby's laughter at the nightingale's 'skirmish and capricious passagings, | And murmurs musical and swift jug jug' (ll. 59–60) demonstrates the wisdom of 'The Tables turned', that 'One impulse from a vernal wood' teaches more 'Than all the sages can' (ll. 21–4). The underlying seriousness is almost lost amidst the immediate celebration of love and nature—and the running joke about the perils of reading. Such powerful evocation of first-hand experience is nevertheless part of the wider emphasis on reconsidering inherited truths and tired language. Here nothing is to be taken for granted and 'wise passiveness' is really a means to independent thought. *Lyrical Ballads* gives pleasure by evoking emotion: grief, sorrow, joy, laughter, indignation, and resignation; but it also makes readers think—and rethink.

Even the seemingly simplest poems had the capacity to wrong-foot readers. In 'We are Seven', the limitations of the opening voice are quickly revealed, as conventional thinking about mortality is challenged by the larger, imaginative understanding of one whose ideas have yet to be conditioned by her elders. In 'Simon Lee', the surprise is delivered by an older figure, whose experience punctures both the speaker's assumed superiority and the reader's comfortable sense of poetic norms. The lively rhythm and simple opening images evoke a traditional hunting song, making its subsequent revelation of the physical facts of illness, poverty, and old age all the more distressing. Rather than joining in any jolly chorus about running with the hounds or hallooing down the hillside, we are left to make what we can of

Simon's tale, by the subdued voice of a narrator prompted to mourning by 'the gratitude of men'. 'Old Man travelling' is equally unsettling, not on account of the physical facts of ageing, which are presented much more calmly, but because of the direct speech that suddenly overturns the earlier, third-person, perspective. At first, everything seems to lead naturally from the subtitle, 'Animal Tranquillity and Decay' towards a state of 'perfect peace'. Conversation with someone so composed that even the wild birds are unafraid seems oddly intrusive, and yet, when he is at last invited to speak, his words challenge everything that has seemed so settled. Far from being a distant figure, quite beyond feeling or social interaction, the intensely human quality of the old man floods the poem, leaving the voice of the observer entirely submerged.

This is a volume in which nothing is quite as it seems, where what appears to be the guiding voice of a poem is repeatedly exposed as unreliable or in need of redirection. From the very first poem, readers were disconcerted and dislocated, and the mysterious voyage led into poems set all over England and Wales, and even North America. Some characters in *Lyrical Ballads* are named, but most of the speakers are identified only by their situation or state of mind—a Forsaken Indian Woman, the Mad Mother, the Female Vagrant. One of the few directions offered in the Advertisement is to read 'The Thorn' not as the words of the author, but of a 'loquacious narrator' whose character 'will sufficiently shew itself' (p. 4). What may initially appear to be a sensational ballad about abandonment, infanticide, and insanity might be better understood as a dramatic monologue, an exploration of storytelling, or perhaps of the workings of superstition on suggestible minds. Like 'The Thorn', many of the poems seem to direct attention to a particular figure, but increasingly reveal more about the speaker than the ostensible subject. Often, startling moments of clarity occur when the most unlikely figures command attention, making readers reassess almost everything hitherto taken for granted. For many poetry readers of the 1790s, the idea that the homeless, the uneducated, the abandoned, the poor, the very old or very young should not only matter, but have things to *teach* those whose lives were rather more secure, was decidedly unsettling. In the decade of the French Revolution, the suffering of those unprotected by wealth and rank was evident everywhere, but so too were the measures designed to contain any internal threat to national stability. To find new poems expressing not so much pity as sympathetic admiration and even reverence for those whose lives had fallen outside the pale of respectability was to encounter

revolutionary voices, whose meaning went beyond matters of literary style. This was perhaps another reason for the anonymity of the collection.

The early warnings of 'strangeness and awkwardness' related not solely to antique spellings or unadorned language, then, but to the whole reading experience. By the end of the volume, readers had witnessed such a range of human passions, human characters, and human incidents that they could no longer have any confident expectation about what the next poem might bring, nor what response it might elicit. The irony of the Advertisement's quip about the persistent reader struggling onwards only became fully apparent, however, at the end of the volume, for the final poem, 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', with its famous setting, fluid blank verse, and emphasis on returning to the familiar, was probably the least likely to seem strange or awkward and the most likely to satisfy those in search of poetry. As another of the 'Few Other Poems', its very existence was a hidden surprise. What was really unexpected, though, was the range, tone, and sheer beauty of the closing poem. In any other volume, 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' would probably have been the title poem, but here it was, lying almost like a postscript to the collection.

If many of the preceding poems had been table-turners, the final, blank verse performance seemed to shift the entire volume into a different mode. The contrast between the ambling anapaests of 'The Convict' and the confident, self-authenticating rhythm of the poem that follows could hardly be more marked. It is as if the last, tentative, word of 'The Convict'—'again'—has been caught up and transformed into a kind of refrain:

> Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
> Of five long winters! and again I hear
> These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
> With a sweet inland murmur.—Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
> Which on a wild secluded scene impress
> Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky. (ll. 1–8)

The unassuming 'again' appears only four times in the first fifteen lines of the poem, but because it is surrounded by so many repeating words and phrases, every detail seems to be uniting in an overall celebration of continuity and recurrence. The speaker is returning to a place of

perpetual renewal, where everything is connected and everything replenished, and where the sense of gratitude flows as surely as the rolling waters. As the poem moves on, the feeling of being part of 'something far more deeply interfused' (l. 97) is voiced in the hymn-like celebration of that which 'impels | All thinking things, all objects of all thought, | And rolls through all things (ll. 101–3). The poem meanders from individual experience to embrace an all-encompassing affirmation of spirituality, but already in the opening lines, a sense of connection is emerging through the description of the landscape.

For the first readers of *Lyrical Ballads*, the title of the poem would probably have raised expectations of a loco-descriptive poem, centring on Tintern Abbey. The site was a very popular tourist destination in the 1790s, made famous by books such as Thomas Whatley's *Modern Gardening*, William Gilpin's *Observations on the Wye*, and the fashionable discussions of picturesque landscape by Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price, who both owned estates in the Wye Valley. As with all the poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, however, preconceptions were not a reliable guide, and although by this stage in the volume readers were probably no longer looking round for poetry, they might still seek in vain for Tintern Abbey. The famous ruin never appears in the poem and despite the specificity of the title, with its precise date, 13 July 1798, the actual setting 'a few miles above' Tintern is rather less easy to identify. The Banks of the Wye run for many miles and any clues about the poem's location are oddly inconclusive; even the early footnote does little more than echo the vagueness of the title: 'The river is not affected by the tides a few miles above Tintern' (p. 87). Although this can be taken as an explanation for the 'sweet'—or unsalty—murmur of the waters, it also serves to emphasize the elusiveness of the scene. For such a confident poem, 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' is decidedly tentative in its development, constantly suggesting what is by what is not. The steady accumulation of negatives ('not', 'neither', 'nor', 'no more') throughout nevertheless produces an extraordinarily positive effect overall. Even in the opening passage, where the speaker's delight in seeing the landscape again is so vividly conveyed, the description is perpetually qualified, as if the immediate response is not quite full enough. The 'orchard tufts', which 'lose themselves' among the woods seem almost deliberately hiding from view, while the hedgerows are 'hardly hedgerows' and the wreaths of smoke are rising 'with uncertain notice'. The smoke may indicate 'vagrant dwellers' in the woods, or a hermit at his cave, but by now we are in the realms of speculation, not sight, led on by the poet's