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The Cycle of Waters in Wordsworth's Lake District

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William Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* was the best-selling work in his lifetime (Reed 1: 59, 72, 73, 104) and widely read in the Victorian era: it is a famous anecdote that 'one of the pilgrims [to Rydal Mount], a clergyman, asked him if he had ever written anything besides the Guide to the Lakes' (Arnold vi). Wordsworth worked on writing and revising this guidebook for more than a quarter of a century until 1835, when the fifth and final authorized edition was published. Through the repeated revisions his *Guide* gradually changed its nature,¹ but its core remained essentially the same, where the poet reflects on nature and human life in the Lake District. This part, titled 'Description of the Scenery of the Lakes' in the 1835 edition, is subdivided into three sections: Section First: 'View of the Country as Formed by Nature', Section Second: 'Aspect of the Country, as Affected by Its Inhabitants', and Section Third: 'Changes, and Rules of Taste for Preventing Their Bad Effects'. Probably the most famous passage is in the opening of Section First, where Wordsworth uses the image of spokes of a wheel to delineate the topographical outline of the Lake District. Asking his readers to stand in imagination upon a cloud, hanging midway between Great Gable and Scafell, two high mountains in the centre of the district, he exhibits lakes and valleys radiating like the spokes of a wheel. By this image we can grasp the topographical layout of the whole region. Perhaps less famous, though one of Wordsworth's favourite passages,² is the opening of Section Second, where he once again requests readers to take the same aerial view of the Lakes, and this time, he asks them to 'people the vallies with lakes and rivers: the coves and sides of the mountains with pools and torrents', and to form 'an image of the tides visiting and re-visiting the

¹ Through the five editions (1810, 1820, 1822, 1823, and 1835), this prose, commonly called *Guide to the Lakes*, changed its title, too; I will use the fifth 1835 edition: *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*, included in *Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 2, edited by Owen and Smyser.

² Wordsworth, *Letters, Middle Years* 1: 404.

friths, the main sea dashing against the bolder shore, the rivers pursuing their course to be lost in the mighty mass of waters' (*Guide* 194). Thus the skeleton map of the Lake District is here animated by waters, such as tides, waves, and rivers. Wordsworth wants us to imagine moving waters in the landscape.

In the *Guide to the Lakes*, we find numerous images of water changing its form from rain, torrents, streams, waterfalls, tarns and lakes, to mists, haze, and vapours; these moving waters bring life to the Lake scenery, by affecting its appearance and sometimes even by physically making and changing the shape of the land. Waters also affect how travellers experience the Lake District. In this essay, I would like to examine various images of water in the *Guide* and some relevant poems of Wordsworth, considering the central roles of water imagery in his understanding of the topography of the Lake District and his structuring the text of the *Guide*. I will also explore how Wordsworth's poetical rendition of the watery landscape inspired other writings about the Lake District.

1. Streams as Companions to the Traveller

First, I would like to take a brief look at the preparatory and practical part: 'Directions and Information for the Tourist', preceding the main text. Although Wordsworth called it 'a humble and tedious task' to supply 'the Tourist with directions how to approach the several scenes in their best, or most convenient, order' (*Guide* 155), he still seems to have enjoyed doing that, from his own experience of walking around the Lakes.³ What is noticeable is that instead of giving detailed directions about what to see and what routes to take, he suggests that the tourist should follow brooks and streams. Wordsworth's lifelong fascination with rivers is also observable in the *Guide*, and in this practical part he introduces many streams, both named and un-named. For instance, from Ambleside, he recommends four walks along the river Rothay, Brathay, Stockgill Beck and Scandale Beck. The walk upstream along the River Brathay will eventually lead the traveller to Little Langdale, and to a view of Blea Tarn, the setting of Book 2 of *The Excursion*, from which Wordsworth quotes a passage (lines 347–68) that made the place popular among Victorian tourists. In the paragraph about Ullswater, he introduces 'the curious Traveller' to as many as ten 'tributary Streams' around the

³ This can be surmised from the fact that Wordsworth once prepared a longer, more detailed guidebook during the period 1811–12 (Wordsworth, *Prose Works* 2: 128–29).

lake (*Guide* 166), including Aira Beck and Glencoin Beck. He recommends tracing these streams to get acquainted with seven valleys, most of them explorable only for foot-travellers.⁴

Instead of an elevated perspective that enables an instantaneous, comprehensive understanding of the area, in this section Wordsworth takes a pedestrian viewpoint, which gradually reveals changing landscapes led by a guiding stream. By following streams, one can experience the contours of the Lake District; also, without missing the way, one can explore regions that are concealed from those travelling by the highway. Wordsworth was reluctant to give a scrupulous, attentive guide, which, he says, 'would lessen the pleasure of the Traveller by anticipation' (240); instead, he offered becks and streams as natural guides, which would lead travellers to 'hidden treasures' (203), without depriving them of the delight of discovery; we may recall how in the Duddon Sonnets the poet-narrator walks with the river Duddon, calling it 'My partner and my guide' (XXXIII, line 1).

2. Brooks and Torrents that Make and Change Landscapes

Now, let's move to the main body of the *Guide*. The river, serving as a guide for foot-travellers, also assists inhabitants when they decide where to live. '[E]ven of the smallest rills', Wordsworth observes, these streams have 'either found, or made for themselves, recesses in the sides of the mountains or in the vales', tempting 'the primitive inhabitants to settle near them for shelter; and hence, cottages so placed, by seeming to withdraw from the eye, are the more endeared to the feelings' (*Guide* 188). Thus, Wordsworth suggests, streams have produced the inhabited landscapes of the Lake District, like one depicted in the following lines of *Home at Grasmere*, which were extracted in the *Guide* before the publication of the whole poem:

Cluster'd like stars some few, but single most,
And lurking dimly in their retreats,
Or glancing on each other cheerful looks,
Like separated stars with clouds between. (MS.B. 141–44, *Guide* 201–2)

⁴ They are Matterdale, the winding vale of Eamont, Glencoin, Glenridding, Grisedale, Patterdale and Deepdale.

Wordsworth explains elsewhere that topographical features, including the inclination of the land, watercourses, and the nature of the soil, influence choices about where, what, and how to build, producing different yet harmonious inhabited landscapes of the Lake District (*Guide* 178–79).

Streams are especially important in this process in that they define how people use the land, and also affect the landscape on the geomorphological level. In explaining the effect of moving waters, Wordsworth again attracts our attention to a ‘smallest rivulet—one whose silent influx is scarcely noticeable in a season of dry weather—so faint is the dimple made by it on the surface of the smooth lake’. Following this poetic description, he explains that even such a small rivulet will be useful ‘in shaping, by its deposits of gravel and soil in time of flood, a curve that would not otherwise have existed’ (181–82). Then he moves onto more powerful streams:

But the more powerful brooks, encroaching upon the level of the lake, have, in course of time, given birth to ample promontories of sweeping outline that contrasts boldly with the longitudinal base of the steeps on the opposite shore; while their flat or gently-sloping surfaces never fail to introduce, into the midst of desolation and barrenness, the elements of fertility, even where the habitations of men may not have been raised. (182)

In this passage, Wordsworth tries to elucidate how rivers’ eroding, transporting and depositing powers have contributed to the shaping of landscapes. Shortly before this paragraph, he has argued how ‘Nature’s first great dealings with the superficies of the earth’ resulted in sublimity, while its secondary, subsequent operations have contributed to the production of variegated landscape (181). One example of Nature’s secondary agents that Wordsworth picks up is the flux of waters. He thinks that this has hitherto worked to produce beauty, fertility and variegation, but further imagines how the power of moving waters can transform the landscape in a negative way (at least from the aesthetic viewpoint):

These alluvial promontories, however, threaten, in some places, to bisect the waters which they have long adorned; and, in course of ages, they will cause

some of the lakes to dwindle into numerous and insignificant pools; which, in their turn, will finally be filled up. (182)⁵

Wordsworth is evidently thinking in terms of long geological time, as he does when he thinks of the pre-inhabited era of the Lake District. Although his geological inquiry is comparatively brief, it is notable for showing his understanding that the Lake District landscape is not static or stable but constantly changing and in flux.

3. Moving Waters that Give Life to Landscapes

(1) Variety of Motion, Mood, and Character

Moving waters change the landscape on a daily basis, too, which is observable by the attentive traveller. Compared with the rivers in the Alps, the streams in the Lake District lack power, but to compensate for that weakness, Wordsworth emphasises how they please us with their 'unrivalled brilliancy', 'impetuosity', and 'variety of motion, mood, and character' (231). A fine example can be found in the Duddon Sonnets, which account how the poet travels along one particular river, observing its 'protean' (IV, line 3) changes as he walks, inviting the reader to do the same. In the *Guide*, Wordsworth deals with these mountain streams in more general terms. In accordance with the geographical and geological differences of their courses, these mountain streams change their speed, strength, volume, forms, colours, sounds, and mood; and they are accordingly called by different names: rill, rivulet, river, brook, beck, gill, water-break, cascade, torrent, water-fall, and water-force. They also transform their character in responding to seasonal and weather conditions, affecting the mood of landscapes and acting on human feelings as well. For instance, in 'It was an April morning, fresh and clear', Wordsworth notes a tonal change in a brook from winter to spring:

⁵ Wordsworth's friend, Adam Sedgwick the geologist, who would contribute five geological essays to the expanded editions of Wordsworth's *Guide* from 1842 to 1853, while admitting the rivers' power of transforming the landscape, comments that their influence has continued only for a few thousand years, and the topography of the Lake District had been shaped much earlier by earth's crustal movements (Sedgwick 172–74).

The Rivulet, delighting in its strength,
 Ran with a young man's speed, and yet the voice
 Of waters which the winter had supplied
 Was soften'd down into a vernal tone. (2–5)

The sounds of the stream awaken 'all living things' (7)—the lamb, the dog, linnets and thrush—and together they make a song of 'common pleasure' (25), which cheers the poet-narrator. In the *Guide*, Wordsworth tells us how in May the notes of birds, 'when listened to by the side of broad still waters, or when heard in unison with the murmuring mountain-brooks, have the compass of their power enlarged accordingly' (228). Weather conditions also influence the character of small streams. Wordsworth explains how in 'dry and sunny weather', small waterfalls give us a 'sense of refreshing coolness', while once flooded by heavy rain, 'the whole stream rushes along in foam and tumultuous confusion' (232). Wordsworth encourages us to appreciate these kinds of daily changes in landscape according to weather.

Whereas tourists expected an expression of sublimity or power from waterfalls, Wordsworth reveals the more delicate beauties of smaller waterfalls. Their principal charm, he says,

consists in certain proportions of form and affinities of colour, among the component parts of the scene; and in the contrast maintained between the falling water and that which is apparently at rest, or rather settling gradually into quiet in the pool below. The beauty of such a scene, where there is naturally so much agitation, is also heightened, in a peculiar manner, by the *glimmering*, and, towards the verge of the pool, by the *steady*, reflection of the surrounding images. (232)

In such phrases as 'proportions of form', 'affinities of colour' and 'the component parts', one may perceive the influence of picturesque aesthetics, but Wordsworth's picture is not static—it is not viewed from one fixed point but in a more dynamic perspective in that it captures the movement and transformation of water; the contrast is both spatial and temporal, produced by the precipitous water's gradual settling into a quiet pool. Even subtler differences in the water reflections are captured, too, between the quivering images near the centre and those steadier at the verge.

When contrasting the river and the lake, Wordsworth focuses on the transition point between moving and still waters, at the outlet of a lake, where 'the stream

pushing its way among the rocks' forms a 'lively contrast with the stillness from which it has escaped' (180). As in the famous *Prelude* passage of the 'froward brook ... boxed / Within [the] garden' of Ann Tyson's house at Hawkshead (iv. 40–41), here the stream is personified as if it were an 'unruly child' with its own will and feeling; its 'noisy and turbulent motions' are compared with 'the gentle playfulness of the breezes, that may be starting up or wandering here and there over the faintly-rippled surface of the broad water' (*Guide* 180). Again Wordsworth perceives that even the calm water is not motionless, but is ruffled by the light breeze.

(2) Rivers, Tarns and Lakes

If the surfaces of lakes are animated by airy motions, they are also brought to life by the currents of water. Using a phrase from Virgil's *Georgics* (ii. 469), Wordsworth argues that the lakes in the Lake District are '*vivi lacus*' or living lakes, since they are perpetually fed with 'internal springs' and a 'multitude of brooks and torrents', which 'circulate through them like veins' (*Guide* 185). As Owen and Smyser point out (Wordsworth, *Prose Works* 2: 396), here Wordsworth seems to draw on William Gilpin's explanation in his influential *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1772, on Several Parts of England; Particularly the Mountains, and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland* (1786). Unlike the fen and the pool, Gilpin observes,

[The lake] received originally the pure pellucid waters of some rushing torrent, ... and then discharged the stream ... through some winding vale, to form other lakes, or increase the dignity of some imperial river. ... From the brisk circulation of fluid through these animated bodies of water, great master of nature has nobly styled them, *living lakes*: '—*Speluncae / vivique lacus.* —' ... For besides the vital stream, which principally feeds them, they receive a thousand gurgling rills which trickling through a thousand veins, give life, and spirit to every part. (1: 94–95)

Like Gilpin, Wordsworth pays attention to how moving waters vitalize the lakes. Whereas Gilpin observed that lakes keep their purity by receiving and discharging waters from and to their connecting rivers, however, Wordsworth seems to think of a larger water circle—larger than a circulation among rivers and lakes; he thinks of a

water cycle that connects the sky and the earth, rolling through rain, becks, rivers, tarns, lakes, mists, clouds, and back to rain.

In this water cycle, the role of mountain tarns is important. ‘In the economy of nature’, Wordsworth argues, the mountain tarns are useful as ‘auxiliars to Lakes’. In storms, they serve as temporary receptacles of the rainfall, preventing inundation in the lower places by ‘a gradual distribution’ of waters. They also serve to keep ‘for a length of time, the vigour of many streams without a fresh fall of rain’, he observes (*Guide* 185–86). Mountain tarns adjust the volume, force and course of the rivers that run through the Lakeland landscape both in rainy and sunny weather. If rivers ensure the purity of lakes and enliven the landscape, mountain tarns control how waters flow.

(3) Rains and Rivers

The water movement on the land and in the sky is closely related to atmospheric changes. The ‘sublime forms of nature’ appear at such moments, for instance, in ‘the sight or sound of a storm coming on or clearing away’. ‘Insensible must he be’, says Wordsworth, ‘who would not congratulate himself upon the bold bursts of sunshine, the descending vapours, wandering lights and shadows, and the invigorated torrents and water-falls, with which broken weather, in a mountainous region, is accompanied’ (229). Drawing on this passage, a travel article in the *Penny Magazine* (1837) remarks that ‘even the stormiest [days] are most likely to present those occasional revelations of grandeur, which are remembered with delight, heightened rather than impaired, in the retrospect, by the recollection of the inconveniences with which they were purchased’. Following this is an extract of the lines from Book 2 of *The Excursion*, where the Solitary sees a vision of a mighty city, created by the ‘blind vapour’ after storm:⁶

Clouds, mists, streams, watery rocks and emerald turf,
 Clouds of all tincture, rocks and sapphire sky,
 Confused, commingled, mutually inflamed,
 Molten together, and composing thus,

⁶ ‘English Lakes’, *Penny Magazine* (1837), 295. The *Penny Magazine* is one of the earliest media that introduced the *Guide to the Lakes* to a much larger readership, by freely extracting many paragraphs. (They seem to have used the fourth, 1823 edition.)

Each lost in each, that marvellous array
Of temple, palace, citadel, and huge
Fantastic pomp of structure without name,
In fleecy folds voluminous, enwrapp'd. (ii. 888–95)

This dramatic passage captures how waters, empowered by the storm, transform themselves into clouds, mists, and streams, revolving through the earth and airs, energizing the mountain scenery, and stimulating imagination as well.

The following passage from Book 2 of *The Excursion*, describing a stormy sky over Langdale Pikes, was also popularly extracted in guidebooks, including those by Thomas Rose (1832) and William Loftie (1875):

And well those lofty Brethren bear their part
In the wild concert—chiefly when the storm
Rides high; then all the upper air they fill
With roaring sound, that ceases not to flow,
Like smoke, along the level of the blast
In mighty current; theirs, too, is the song
Of stream and headlong flood that seldom fails; (ii. 726–32)

Here, the stormy sky above Langdale Pikes is described with a focus on auditory impressions. The roaring sound of wind and rain, descending the mountainside, is captured as 'mighty current', merging with the sound of the stream dashing down the steep. The continuity between rain and river is thus expressed through the sound effects.

The Excursion has many lines describing atmospheric changes and their effects on the landscape; they are in a way a poetic rendition of what Wordsworth wrote in the *Guide to the Lakes*. Or we could say that passages in the *Guide* on meteorological effects might serve as footnotes to some of *The Excursion*'s finest poetry. Whichever the case, Wordsworth's descriptions of weather, both in prose and verse, were popularly quoted or referenced in Victorian guidebooks and travel articles.

(4) The Water Cycle and the Lake District Climate

Towards the end of Section First of the *Guide*, Wordsworth gives a long paragraph on the climate of the Lake District, which is worth close attention.⁷ Admitting that Lakeland weather is not very favourable, and that ‘twice as much rain falls here as in many parts of the island’, Wordsworth claims that:

The rain here comes down heartily, and is frequently succeeded by clear, bright weather, when every brook is vocal, and every torrent sonorous; brooks and torrents, which are never muddy, even in the heaviest floods ... (190)

As lakes are invigorated by rivers, so are the rivers by rain. Such a passage, celebrating the virtues of wet Lakeland weather, was readily utilized by later guidebooks including *Murray's Handbook* (1866), and travel articles. William Ford's guide of 1839, for instance, after quoting this passage, extracts some lines from *The Excursion*, Book 4, which describe streams after rain:

Descending from the region of the clouds
And starting from the hollows of the earth
More multitudinous every moment—rend
Their way before them, ... (iv. 528–31)

These lines, echoing the phrases ‘child of the clouds’ and ‘child-born stream’ in the Duddon Sonnets (I, line 1; XXXII, line 9), demonstrate how rain falling from the clouds pours into mountain streams. After rain, mountain becks get swollen and their voices become louder, as is captured in the following lines:

Loud is the Vale! the Voice is up
With which she speaks when storms are gone,
A mighty Unison of streams!
Of all her Voices, One! (‘Lines Composed at Grasmere’, 1–4)

⁷ This part was added in the third edition of 1822.

As should have been noticed from the several passages I have hitherto quoted, Wordsworth was sensitive to the auditory effects of water—sonorous waterfall, roaring torrent, murmuring brook in unison with birds' songs, or the quiet of still water. In particular, he encouraged his readers to attend to the tonal changes of water in accordance with seasonal and weather change. And there were certainly such tourists influenced by Wordsworth. Quoting these lines from 'Lines Composed at Grasmere' in his travel journal, 'A Walk around Grasmere' (1897), an American essayist Hamilton Mabie remarks that 'As one walks, the landscape grows vocal, and one understands for the first time what Wordsworth meant when he wrote' this poem (368). John Burroughs, an American naturalist, also quotes the poem in his travel essay, 'In Wordsworth's Country' (1884); pleased with the streams and cascades of the Lake District, he remarks that 'one's ear is everywhere haunted by the sound of falling water' (419). Mary Wordsworth's niece Sarah Hutchinson, too, recalled the poem when she saw and heard mountain streams rushing down after pouring rain.⁸

The freshness and brightness of a landscape after rain, 'haunted by the sound of falling water', are also evoked by the opening lines of 'Resolution of Independence':

There was a roaring in the wind all night;
 The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
 But now the sun is rising calm and bright;

 And all the air is fill'd with pleasant noise of waters.

 The grass is bright with rain-drops; on the moors
 The Hare is running races in her mirth:
 And with her feet she from the plashy earth
 Raises a mist; which, glittering in the sun,
 Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run. (1–14)

⁸ 'Friday 9 August 1850: Pouring rain in the night until 3 o'clock, with one dash of thunder about noon, when the rain came down in torrents. The mountain streams rushed down this side as describes in dear Uncle's poem "Loud is the Vale". Very fine after dinner, and Sarah, Elizabeth and I took a walk to Green Head Ghyll, a most beautiful stream, at all times, but much more so today, after the heavy rains, from thence we had a glorious view of Grasmere and Easedale...' [WLMS Hutchinson H/2/6: Journals 6].

Extracting these lines, James Payn, in *The Lakes in Sunshine* (1867), comments that '[i]t is no wonder that, living in a locality where the glorious change from storm to sunshine is so common, Wordsworth should have described it with such eminent success' (90).

After describing a brightened landscape after rain, Wordsworth in the *Guide* goes on to describe the delicate beauty of rain itself:

Days of unsettled weather, with partial showers, are very frequent; but the showers, darkening, or brightening, as they fly from hill to hill, are not less grateful to the eye than finely interwoven passages of gay and sad music are touching to the ear. (*Guide* 190)

Virginia Woolf quotes this passage in her review of De Selincourt's edition of Wordsworth's *Guide* (1906) as an example of the poet's impressive combination of 'obstinate truth and fervent imagination'. Just as the mountain streams show a 'variety of motion, mood and character' (*Guide* 231), so do the Lake District's showers of rain. They affect the mood of the traveller, in a subtler and at times enhancing manner as in this passage:

Vapours exhaling from the lakes and meadows after sun-rise, in a hot season, or, in moist weather, brooding upon the heights, or descending towards the valleys with inaudible motion, give a visionary character to everything around them; ... Akin to these are fleecy clouds resting upon the hill-tops; they are not easily managed in picture, with their accompaniments of blue sky; but how glorious are they in nature! how pregnant with imagination for the poet! and the height of the Cumbrian mountains is sufficient to exhibit daily and hourly instances of those mysterious attachments. (190–91)

The visionary effects of mists and vapours, and their inspirational power for the poet's imagination, are to be found in several poems of Wordsworth, including *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*; in another passage in the *Guide to the Lakes* Wordsworth comments on the dramatic impact of vapours and mists on mountain scenery: 'the effect indeed of mists or haze, ... is like that of magic' (176).

What I would like to note, however, is the totality of Wordsworth's vision. After describing how rain falling from the clouds affects rivers, which become more vocal

and sonorous, dashing down the mountains, he shows us how mists arise from the lake, moving silently along the contours of the valleys, and how against the clearing sky the clouds hang around the mountains. Thus he makes us feel an entire cycle of waters—from rain, down to rivers, through lakes, mists, and up to clouds.

After tracing how water transforms through various forms, Wordsworth concludes his paragraph on the Lakeland climate as follows:

Such clouds, cleaving to their stations, or lifting up suddenly their glittering heads from behind rocky barriers, or hurrying out of sight with speed of the sharpest edge—will often tempt an inhabitant to congratulate himself on belonging to a country of mists and clouds and storms, and make him think of the blank sky of Egypt, and of the cerulean vacancy of Italy, as an unanimated and even a sad spectacle. (191)

Notably, Wordsworth sees the essence of his native country in ‘mists, clouds and storms’. The lakes and mountains are undoubtedly the main attractions of the Lake District, and fine weather may be better to explore these beauties of the Lake District, but Wordsworth dares to praise wet weather as better than the cloudless sky of Italy and Egypt. Pointing out Wordsworth's somewhat perverse partiality for the pluvial Lakeland, Edward Thomas in *A Literary Pilgrim in England* (1917) comments that ‘In his soberest and his wildest moments this country delighted [Wordsworth]’, adding, while he ‘could have written the earlier poems, perhaps, anywhere; the latter ones must have been very different, if they had come to birth at all, in other surroundings’ (265). Thomas seems to have considered Wordsworth's poems to be emanations born from the Lake District's moist climate.

One such poem inspired by the Lake District's watery landscape is ‘There was a Boy’, set in the valley of Windermere. In this poem, the lake is described as the ‘watery vale’ (12), as if the whole valley is filled with water—in all forms of waters from a lake, stream, waterfall, to vapour and mist. Or we can also interpret that Wordsworth is conscious not only of the lake's surface but also of its depth. The deep water resonates with the ‘pauses of deep silence’ (17), and with the depth of the boy's heart: ‘far into his heart’ (20), Wordsworth describes, ‘the voice / Of mountain torrents’ is carried with ‘a gentle shock of mild surprize’ (19–21). Then the landscape around the lake is also carried far into his heart, as is described in the following passage, which was extracted in all the five editions of the *Guide*:

The visible scene

Would enter unawares into his mind
 With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
 Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
 Into the bosom of the *steady* lake! ('There was a Boy', 21–25, *Guide* 179)

Here, by the emphasis placed on the 'steady' lake, the 'uncertainty' of the heaven also stands out, which may refer to uncertain, agitated weather; these lines again describe how a still water is susceptible to 'the changes of the atmosphere' (*Guide* 179).

Another passage, a prose equivalent of these poetic lines, was added in 1823 in the fourth edition of the *Guide*. In this evocative passage, Wordsworth describes a placid lake on a calm autumnal day, when the equinoctial gales are departed; 'while looking on the unruffled waters', he explains,

the imagination, by their aid, is carried into recesses of feeling otherwise impenetrable. The reason of this is, that the heavens are not only brought down into the bosom of the earth, but that the earth is mainly looked at, and thought of, through the medium of a purer element. The happiest time is when the equinoctial gales are departed; but their fury may probably be called to mind by the sight of a few shattered boughs, whose leaves do not differ in colour from the faded foliage of the stately oaks from which these relics of the storm depend: all else speaks of tranquillity;—not a breath of air, no restlessness of insects, and not a moving object perceptible— except the clouds gliding in the depths of the lake, or the traveller passing along, an inverted image, whose motion seems governed by the quiet of a time, to which its archetype, the living person, is, perhaps, insensible ... (192)

De Selincourt calls this 'perhaps the subtlest and most finely wrought passage in the book' (xxii). Here the lake is presented in perfect rest, its 'unruffled waters' inviting a reflective or introspective mood, carrying imagination into 'recesses of feeling otherwise impenetrable'. The lake and the mind are merged together, representing by analogy a Wordsworthian correspondence between mind and outer world.

What I would like to note is the phrase: 'through the medium of a purer element'. Here Wordsworth looks at the heaven and earthly landscape reflected quietly in the

pure water; the reflected world is presented as a sanctuary encapsulated in the 'quiet of a time'. Indulged in that perfect stillness, however, Wordsworth is also aware of the havoc brought by the storm whose trace can be seen in 'a few shattered boughs'. The clouds gliding silently in the water also suggest a trail of the passing storm. The air may still be moist. This calm quietness is only gained after destructive storm. So Wordsworth may well have thought of the changeable weather of the Lake District. He contemplated the calm landscape through the medium of the water cycle, the circulation of water through the sky and earth in the form of storm, clouds and lakes, that create the 'purer element' of the Lake District.

As we have seen, waters, transforming themselves into various forms, circulate through the pages of the *Guide to the Lakes*. Wordsworth describes how rivers have shaped and changed the landscape, decided where people live, and enlivened the Lakeland scenery, and guided the traveller. What invigorates the river is the rain, which through mountain becks and streams pours into the tarns and lakes, from which arise vapours that drift along the valleys and ascend the hills to become clouds, which eventually fall again in the form of rain, feeding the rivers. The moving waters ensure the purity of the lakes, whose tranquillity, in turn, invites contemplative and reflective moods. So it is that the cycle of waters that I have traced in this essay brings a flow of life into the Lake District landscape and ultimately affects human feelings. Water serves as a guiding spirit in the *Guide to the Lakes*, as well as an inspiration for several of Wordsworth's finest poems.

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