

Literary Allusion and Poetic Economy: Billy Collins's "Albany" and William Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud"*

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A versatile and variform literary device, allusion serves a wide range of purposes in imaginative writing. As part of his 2007 historical analysis of allusion studies, Gregory Machacek presents a useful conceptual model, distinguishing between two basic types of allusion: "learned or indirect reference," on the one hand, and "phraseological appropriation," on the other, i.e., "playful and creative adaptation of a precursor's language" (526, 528). While both types can contribute to thematic and linguistic economy in a literary work, the second tends to foster richer and more intricate compression. Learned references require only that author and reader share a cultural tradition, a body of knowledge. "In the case of phraseological adaptation, however, the nature of this shared tradition is a little more complex," as Machacek explains. "Author and reader must have been exposed to the same text, which therefore must be highly valued by the author's and the reader's cultures—valued, moreover, in a way that encourages minute attention to verbal detail and remembering of such detail" (526). Invited to remember the original context of borrowed, or reprised language, readers bring to the new literary work a host of associations—historical, thematic, and tonal, for example—which instantly expand its potential range of significance.¹ Yet these associations occupy no space on the written page.

In exploring allusion in works by poets from John Dryden to David Ferry, Christopher Ricks consistently emphasizes the economical effects of this device: when handled ably, allusion achieves more than

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the sum of its parts. "The calling into play of the words or phrases of a previous writer" serves as more than mere flavoring or homage (156). The second writer is actively engaged with the source material, creatively manipulating its language and thereby establishing a relationship to it. Readers are encouraged to explore the tension between two different sets of auctorial design, the second of which in some manner includes or acknowledges the first, thereby discovering "a newly true combination of similitude and dissimilitude" (85). "What was so well said has now become part of my way of saying," the second writer seems to insist, and instead of merely repeating a predecessor's words, the maker of an allusion is "rotating them so that they catch a new light" (33). Allusion functions paradoxically in that it wrests new meanings from used materials: it is "a way of looking before and after, a retrospect that opens up a new prospect" (86).

A recent poem by Billy Collins (U.S. Poet Laureate 2001-2003) illustrates the efficiency with which allusion can trigger recollection of an existing text. Throughout "Albany," published in *Nine Horses* (2003), Collins alludes unobtrusively to "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (1807), a poem written by William Wordsworth almost two hundred years earlier. Engaging playfully with a highly recognizable literary artifact, the allusion effectively extends purpose and statement in Collins's poem, together with its historical reach. Collins is well known for his humorous send-ups of famous poets and poems, "Taking off Emily Dickinson's Clothes" (1998), for instance, or "Lines Composed Over Three Thousand Miles from Tintern Abbey" (1998). Less elaborately, he offers occasional nods to well-known works by Yeats, Frost, Emerson, Coleridge and others. An academic career has preserved the immediacy of literary classics for him, he explains: "I keep teaching *The Norton Anthology*, and many of my poems show an awareness of that" (qtd. in Plimpton). By means of repeated rereadings of canonical texts ("taking that ride again and again"), a potpourri of well-wrought phrases, images, and rhythms has insinuated itself into his mental landscape. Collins has observed, too, that his allusions to earlier texts tend to be straightforward, "open [...]"

instead of veiled" (qtd. in Plimpton). "Albany" may qualify as something of an exception in this respect, however: its reprise of Wordsworth's poem, though clearly deliberate, is both subtle and artful. The first hint of the allusion emerges in the opening stanzas:

As I sat on the sunny side of train #241
looking out the window at the Hudson River,
topped with a riot of ice,

it appeared to the untrained eye
that the train was whizzing north along the rails
that link New York City and Niagara Falls.

But as the winter light glared
off the white river and the snowy fields,
I knew that I was as motionless as a man on a couch

and that the things I was gazing at—
with affection, I should add—
were really the ones that were doing the moving ("Albany" 1-12)

Likening himself to "a man on a couch," Collins launches what readers may not identify as allusion until this first reprise has been augmented with further examples of phraseological adaptation from "I wandered."

The allusion is supported by more general commonalities in subject matter, as a quick overview of the two poems reveals. Both poems address the topic of visual perception, exploring its potential significance and value. More grandly phrased, both poets are concerned with the relationship, philosophical and psychological, between the Me and the Not-Me.² In each case, a personal speaking voice, apparently autobiographically grounded, locates phenomenological musings in a subjective, readily accessible framework. Wordsworth proclaims the benefits, direct and indirect, of his perceptual experience. He derives a twofold gain from the sight of a field of daffodils, which delights him once in the initial perceptual act and then again, potentially many times over, through the operations of visual memory. He concludes that optical confrontation with things outside himself (par-

ticularly features of the natural world) contributes importantly to his emotional well-being. Relying on “the act of seeing” as “a gateway into the world of nature,” he is “storing up imagery and emotions for future benefit” (Salvesen 72). Collins, in contrast, describes an experience of perceptual frustration: objects outside himself resist his efforts to examine them adequately. His desire to give thoroughgoing visual attention to things of this world is repeatedly thwarted. In theme and in tone, Collins’s poem operates in clear counterpoint to Wordsworth’s: fulfillment is countered by its absence, joyful gratitude by baffled disappointment.

Speakers in both poems are journeying. Wordsworth’s is engaged in an amorphous, apparently aimless *wandering*, “lonely as a cloud,” while Collins’s defines himself as a train traveler (cf. line 1). Employing a modern mode of transportation, one not available at the time “I wandered” was written, he locates himself on a particular train, #241, moving north from New York City to Niagara Falls and now “somewhere below Albany” (39). Despite the specificity of such details, he resembles Wordsworth’s speaker in that his destination, like his purpose in traveling, remains undefined. Collins’s attention is focused instead on the landscape visible from the train’s window; what is important for purposes of the poem is not where he is going but what he can see. His attempts to study individual objects (evergreens, puddles, and water towers, for example) are rendered ineffectual by the speed with which the train is carrying him. Before he can take in any one image properly, the train has borne him past it. He highlights his frustration by presenting as literal fact an optical illusion commonly reported by train travelers: the disorienting sensation that the vehicle is standing still while things glimpsed through the window go speeding by. He is sitting, Collins asserts, on an “absolutely stationary train” (38). It is not #241 that is “whizzing north” but the objects outside that are “really [...] doing the moving” (5, 12).

His insistence that what cannot actually be happening *is* happening, that the optical illusion corresponds to reality, is underlined by his initial borrowing from Wordsworth’s poem: “I knew that I was as

motionless as a man on a couch" (9). There is amusing reversal in this reprise, since Wordsworth's speaker lies on his couch only when his journeying, together with his initial joyous perception of the daffodils, is done: "oft, when on my couch I lie" (19). Relaxing indoors, no longer positioned to see flowers, hills, lake, and trees directly, he rejoices in the secondary but infinitely renewable "pleasure" of perceptual recall, enjoying the flowers once again via the "inward eye" (23, 21). Collins places his speaker in a passive, "motionless" position at the outset; despite his location on a fast-moving train, the journeying person is paradoxically immobile, helpless to bring his perceptual efforts to a satisfying conclusion. If the "man on a couch" phrasing does not immediately trigger recollection of Wordsworth's poem, the reprise that quickly follows is likely to do so. In Stanza 5, Collins names "the things [he] was gazing at— / with affection" (10-11), choosing the same verb Wordsworth employs so emphatically when he is enjoying the spectacle of the daffodils: "I gazed—and gazed" (17). As Wordsworth *gazes*, he is drinking in his fill of a glorious sight: "sparkling waves" and "fluttering [...] flowers" (14, 6). Collins's gaze, in contrast, brings him all-too-brief glimpses of things that seem to be eluding his inspection intentionally, "dashing forever from [his] view" (19). Reprising a crucial verb, he emphasizes his inability to replicate the earlier poet's gratifying experience *even when engaged in the very same action*, i.e., observing the phenomenal world.

Just a few lines later Collins extends the allusion by mentioning "flashing puddles" as an element of the landscape he is trying unsuccessfully to fix in his vision (18). He calls to mind the most potent statement in Wordsworth's poem: in recollection, the daffodils "flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude" (21-22). Here, again, lexical adaptation sets up a comparison which underlines the second poet's more negative experience. Wordsworth's daffodils "flash" in the positive sense of sudden illumination: they present themselves to that man on the couch with vivid immediacy, even in recollection. The puddles Collins sees *flashing by* are merely moving too rapidly for proper inspection; his participial use of "flash" here

emphasizes the elusiveness of the observable world. He then brings into his poem two items that play a crucial role in his predecessor's experience: "eye" and "flower." Announcing that he is "a devotee of things," an "admirer" of particulars, he avers that it is "unfair" for his attentiveness to be repaid so meagerly (29, 28, 22). He asks if he has perhaps not "stopped enough times along the way / to stare diligently / into the eye of a roadside flower" (34-36) but his question appears to be teetering on the edge of the rhetorical. Acknowledging that close observers are repaid with vivid and enduring images, he asks himself whether he may be guilty of insufficient perceptual attentiveness, even as he assures himself and his readers that this surely is not the case. Like Wordsworth, he has looked long and "diligently" at flowers, but he has not obtained the same benefits (35). To appreciate the high degree of poetic economy at work here, it is crucial to remember that the contrast between the two poets' experiences rests entirely upon readers' ability to recall portions of "I wandered" not recapitulated in "Albany." As Machacek points out, allusion operates by means of "recontextualized" verbal snippets: an "incorporated fragment [...] discernibly excised from its original situation" invites readers to recollect that which has been *omitted* (527). The alluding poet exploits this omitted material, which is located in the databank of a reader's memory rather than in the new text.

Readers encounter a final reprise from "I wandered" in Stanza 14, as the objects careening past the speaker's gaze are said to exit from his view with a "kangaroo-like sprightliness" (42). After mentions of the "man on a couch," of earnest "gazing," of things that "flash," of "eye" and "flower," readers certainly will not regard selection of the term "sprightliness" as accidental. The daffodils that entranced Wordsworth with their "sprightly dance" have been replaced by objects bounding buoyantly away from a yearning observer (12). The coupling of "sprightly" with "dance," to describe the movement of flower blossoms in a breeze, seems unexceptional and quaint beside the bold wit of "kangaroo-like sprightliness" to personify objects eluding human observation. Collins helps himself to Wordsworth's adjective,

using it to create an exotic and whimsical image. The comic effect of his new phrasing is enhanced by the implied comparison with both wording and context in "I wandered": readers who recognize the reprised language enjoy an intertextual in-joke.

In making copious use of personification throughout his poem, Collins imitates his predecessor, but he infuses the device with conspicuous hyperbole. Wordsworth animates the scene he observes, certainly: flowers congregate in "crowds"; they "toss their heads" and, together with the waves, they "dance." Wordsworth also attributes human feeling, chiefly "glee," to both flowers and lake water; the verb "dance" clearly implies joyful as well as aesthetically pleasing movement. The personification dominating the poem serves to suggest a cosmic unity: vegetative growth (flowers, trees), elemental and astronomical phenomena (water, stars), and human being imitate and repeat one another's actions, coming together in joyful "dance."³ The personification in "Albany" serves no such harmonious end; contrastingly, it emphasizes heterogeneity and incongruity. A hodgepodge assortment of objects, some natural, some manmade, is "dashing" past the would-be observer. The personified phenomena (ice, swing set, trees, tractor) bear no apparent relationship to one another. They appear briefly, one after another rather than all at once, in random sequence. The train track serves as ironic equivalent of the "never-ending line" of daffodils "stretched [...] / Along the margin of a bay," creating a visual pattern that is arbitrary rather than significant, frustrating rather than cheering (9-10). The objects fleetingly visible to the rail rider are said to "flee" and "forsake" him, "running as fast as they could / on their invisible legs" (27, 13-14). The poet attributes deliberately evasive "purpose" to non-human things (both natural and manmade): "how unkind of them [...] to forsake an admirer such as myself." His choice of the verb "forsake," with its quasi-religious overtones, heightens the disappointment that is central to his reported experience—and so different from the straightforward expression of gratitude and praise characterizing Wordsworth's. Behind his hyperbole lurks an unstated question, together with a self-admonitory

response, namely, "why *should* the world submit to his desires or accommodate his investigatory urges?" The sportive energy of the personification throughout "Albany" attests to his reluctance to take his own frustrations all too seriously.

With his slightly desperate but nonetheless witty depiction of "things" racing by so quickly that they escape apprehension by the human senses, Collins vividly illustrates the brevity of life, a topic that does not form any part of Wordsworth's contemplations in "I wandered." There is, of course, nothing novel about the theme of human mortality *per se*, but its ordinariness is effectively countered by the playful inventiveness of Collins's imagery. Speeding through the landscape, a train evokes an exaggerated appreciation of the rapidity with which the individual human is progressing toward death. No matter how intently we attempt to explore the physical universe with our human senses, Collins avers, life goes by too swiftly for us to assimilate its details to our satisfaction.⁴ The very time we spend contemplating the "unfair[ness]" of this situation, moreover, further undermines our attentiveness, distracting us from our efforts to know the world. The last line of the poem underlines this realization: even as the thwarted observer articulates his problem, another small piece of reality, "a trestle bridge," is irrevocably vanishing, or "flying by" (48). The metamorphosis of "the twigs / of the moment into the open sky of the past" is inevitable and unstoppable (20-21). The human gaze, so often described as *arresting*, proves unable to interrupt the ceaseless flux of existence by seizing images for present, or future, contemplation.

In making this point, Collins takes the topic of visual perception, as well as the relationship between observer and observed, in a direction unanticipated by his predecessor. Time plays a role in "I wandered," to be sure, but Wordsworth associates its passage with purely benign effects. Having perused the daffodils with leisurely satisfaction (devoting twelve lines to fulsome description), the poet-speaker later is able to summon up both the image and the "glee" it communicates (14). The elapsed time between initial perception and remembered

image is “relatively unimportant,” as Geoffrey H. Hartman notes, for it does not diminish the psychological boost gained by the observer: “renewal” (of both “image” and “inner person”) occurs “despite time” (269-70). The “golden” color of the flowers is transmuted into “wealth” that is neither tangible nor time-bound, a stored memory to be recalled repeatedly (“oft”) as an antidote to “vacant or [...] pensive mood” (4, 18, 20). Wordsworth brings his readers glad tidings: we can be re-energized, cured of unproductive (“vacant”) introspection, through visual engagement with the natural world in all its glorious vitality, i.e., by experiencing “the power that beautiful or gigantic or terrifying sights have to rivet our attention, taking us out of ourselves” (McConnell 100). And what we see has the ability to raise our spirits over and over again. This after-the-fact effect of perceptual engagement, which Hartman appropriately names the “after-image,” is the principal focus of the poet’s praise (269-70). Wordsworth salutes the power of visual memory (perception assisted by something like imagination) to re-create reality for us, and so to provide important sources of emotional sustenance (Joplin 68). The creative force of memory, as it replays scenes from the past, might be said to lengthen the subjective experience of living via repetition: thus considered, Wordsworth’s poem takes a stand precisely opposite to Collins’s. “Seizing and immobilizing a fragment of time” (Benston 13), he points to a human capacity that effectively challenges the negative effects of temporal process.⁵

In Wordsworth’s poem, furthermore, there is a before, a during, and an after: first the “lonely” wandering, then a mood-altering perceptual experience, and finally the pleasurable recollection of an indelible image (see Milstead 89). Collins’s poem remains stuck in the “before” stage of this process. Because his perceptual intent is thwarted, he never gets to enjoy the two-stage benefits his predecessor reports. By means of the implied comparison to “I wandered,” he highlights his failure to achieve perceptual satisfactions that Wordsworth presents as natural, easy, and universal. The “wealth” the nineteenth-century observer accrues from his sensory engagement with the world is

replaced by “a vast store devoted to the purveyance of speed” (45). In this “store” nothing is accumulated, and the reason for its emptiness is the inaccessibility, or resistance, of the phenomenal world to human examination. The allusion thus serves to underline Collins’s rejection of well-known nineteenth-century claims, emphasizing instead “the speed and distractions of our time” that interfere with “profound recognition of place” (Brackett 323). In lieu of Romantic ideas of connectedness, Collins offers his own postmodern experience: a fast-paced trip through a world of incongruous and apparently unrelated appearances. The Me derives no comfort, no “bliss,” from its breathtakingly brief visual encounters with the Not-Me, though not for lack of trying.

Collins portrays himself as eager to establish closeness with the things he glimpses; in yet another reversal, he packs his poem with far more particulars than Wordsworth supplies. Readers know his geographic location, the number of the train on which he rides, the name of the river that flows beside the tracks. The un-Romantic nature of many of the individual things entering briefly into his field of vision is emphasized by the detail with which they are named. While Wordsworth speaks very generally of “stars” or “waves,” Collins offers more exact delineation: “blue oil drums,” “duck blinds,” “a trestle bridge,” “train #241” (17, 49, 1). There is an amusement factor, no doubt, in such specificity: readers are bound to wonder how the human spirit might benefit from establishing connections with things so banal. Collins appears to be questioning the ease with which Wordsworth stumbles upon a beautiful and inspiring sight; mundane objects such as abandoned tractors or duck blinds prove far more common, he hints, than dancing daffodils.

“I wandered” has generated plentiful controversy and comment from the time of its first publication, from Coleridge through post-colonial voices, eliciting reactions ranging from admiration to derision, but it is evident that Collins does not seek to join in this critical fray.⁶ He is not commenting on the merits of the poem, but using it, playfully and non-judgmentally (with the same “affection” he lavishes

on the “things” surging past his train window) as a cultural and personal reference point. Probing the never finally explainable relationship between self and environment in the larger context afforded by literary allusion, he indicates the ongoing nature of the inquiry to which his poem contributes. The economy with which he executes his allusion is unmistakable: he works with a small number of significant, immediately recognizable spurs from “I wandered,” employing them with maximum impact in a new context. Belying complaints that he indulges himself and his readers in “the easiest possible references” (Merrin 206), Collins handles this allusion with understated elegance. Scattering his carefully crafted reprises fairly evenly throughout “Albany,” rather than clumping them, he in effect layers his poem atop Wordsworth’s, inviting readers to compare the experiences of two poet-observers moving through the sensory world.⁷ In layout and length, Collins’s poem makes a more elongated appearance than Wordsworth’s. With its forty-eight lines, “Albany” is exactly twice as long as “I wandered,” and its tercets create a choppy, less compact shape on the page than do Wordsworth’s sestets. The shortness of the stanzas helps to convey the sense of a world rushing by in bits-and-pieces. Other formal choices, including sporadic, unpatterned rhyme and the free-verse rhythm, reinforce the impression of a physical environment largely unsusceptible to the ordering forces of perception and memory.

The allusion to “I wandered” emphasizes the thwarted purpose of Collins’s poet-speaker, who seeks but does not find the “wealth” enriching Wordsworth’s “solitude,” but at the same time, paradoxically, it lightens the load of the poet-speaker’s existential frustrations. Implicitly measuring his own dissatisfaction against Wordsworth’s reported “bliss,” he emphasizes his sense of deprivation. Yet the very literary device that establishes this dismaying contrast also works to undermine its negative effects: one of the chief functions of literary allusion, after all, is to create—and exhibit—bonds among writers. In excising well-known fragments from precursors’ texts and incorporating them into their own, writers defy time and space. They extend

greetings across the generations, as it were, resurrecting their predecessors' writing by introducing it into new contexts. Even though Collins is unable to establish a satisfying or lasting connection between himself and the *things* around him, he can at least forge connections to the art of William Wordsworth (a poet who earns frequent mention in his prose as well as in his verse) and, by extension, to the larger world of his literary heritage.⁸ By his own admission, Collins revels in the companionship afforded him by a host of predecessors: "the poet is never alone when he writes because he is always accompanied by all the lines of other poets that are stuck in his head" (Collins, "Poetry, Pleasure" 32). Readers are invited to renew their companionable connection, via this new composition, to a poet and a poem already present in the scrap-bag of the "involuntary memory" (Collins, "Poetry, Pleasure" 30). Since allusion inevitably works to create cultural-historical connectedness of this kind, if Collins had wanted to present his experiences in an unremittingly tragic light, he would not have put Wordsworth's phraseology into play in his poem.

Collins has written an entertaining poem on a disquieting subject. With its focus on the short span and fast pace of life, the resistance of the world to human examination, and the thwarting of expectations inherited from earlier generations of poet-observers, "Albany" puts forward an apparently troubling set of ideas. Yet the poem does not exert a primarily dispiriting effect upon readers, nor is it intended to do so. Consistently the poet-speaker counters the potential bleakness of his musings with deflating wit. Because "the wilfully comic can be so much more serious than the willedly funereal" (Ricks 77), Collins can poke fun at his foiled purposes without dismissing their legitimacy and importance. The contrast he implies, via allusion, between his experience and Wordsworth's enables him to increase the historical and philosophical resonance of his poem's statement, while his creative adaptation of his predecessor's language opens the way to otherwise unobtainable humorous effects. Mocking his dissatisfactions in the very act of formulating them, Collins communicates an earnest wryness—or rueful amusement—that could only be the product of a

late twentieth-century sensibility. His exuberant employment of the device of allusion adds to the distinctly postmodern impression his poem is bound to make, with its heterogeneous mixture of phenomenological complaint, existential anxiety, self-ironizing wit, and linguistic exhilaration. With its many-layered and thought-provoking range of suggestiveness, "Albany" demonstrates a central principle of allusion, namely, that "one way of being brief is by compacting one's own words with another's" (Ricks 300).

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NOTES

¹Following I. A. Richard's lead in coining the terms "tenor" and "vehicle" to identify the two parts of a metaphor, Machacek (528-30) addresses the "terminological deficiency that plagues the study of allusion" by offering the terms "spur" (original language, or source) and "reprise" (borrowed or adapted language).

²David Ferry, for example, identifies "the relations of the poet's mind to the universe" as the foundational subject matter of Wordsworth's poetry (41).

³Many commentators have addressed the intimate relationship between Wordsworth's "way of seeing" and his "feeling of unity with nature" (Salveson 70), his conception of "the whole of nature as involved in the tonality of the particular instance" (Whitehead 23). David Ferry, for instance, points out that "I wandered" is not an ode "to mere daffodils" but rather a "celebration of the metaphysical, the eternal, and one." The flowers, "so humble and modest in the great scheme of things," are to be read "as symbols of man's relation to the eternal" (40, 41). The human observer is implicitly caught up in the universal "dance" of flowers, waves, and stars (Schwab 145). Indeed, as Matthew C. Brennan spells out, "the poet perceives the unity not only of the dancing flowers themselves but of the whole panorama, which includes both 'the waves' dancing 'beside them' and himself as he "gazed—and gazed." In this moment of sublime vision, his imagination sympathetically unites him and the scene" (142). Harold Bloom discusses in similar vein Wordsworth's preoccupation with "a primal unity manifested simultaneously in all subjects and all objects" (99).

⁴Mortality is a persistent theme throughout *Nine Horses*. A number of the poems included in the collection address aging and death, e.g., "Obituaries," "Birthday," "Writing in the Afterlife," "The Parade." "Velocity," in particular, explores themes and images familiar from "Albany." In that poem Collins addresses the brevity of mortal existence, again using a train-ride to illustrate passage through life; "the locomotive [...] was pulling me / toward Omaha and whatever lay

beyond" (23-24). As in "Albany," the rapidity with which the journey is proceeding amazes and unsettles him: we "rush along the road of the world, / as we rush down the long tunnel of time" (32-33). Even those who are not literally moving, "the man reading by the fire" or "the child asleep on a summer night," appear in his imagination to be surrounded by cartoon-like "speed lines" (35, 39, 36). The related preoccupation with observing "the scenery of the world," so central to "Albany," emerges in "The Parade" and even more strongly in "Roadside Flowers." Taking as his title a phrase from "Albany" ("Had I not stopped enough times [...] to stare diligently / into the eye of a roadside flower?" [34-36]), the poet jokes about the clichéd injunction to take to *stop and smell the flowers*, that is, to take time out of practically productive, goal-oriented activities to enjoy the small pleasures life affords us by the way. "These are the kind you are supposed / to stop to look at," he begins, but adds that he has given short shrift to this obligation (1-2). He has paused "just long enough / so as not to carry my non-stopping / around with me all day" (3-5). He assures the flowers that he will compensate for his neglect by writing about them later; he will "make it all up" to them by recording details of their existence (14). This poem takes as its starting point a feeling of guilt only faintly discernible in "Albany." Reproaching himself for neglecting particulars in his immediate environment, he implies that greater attentiveness on his part might create a more positive relationship between Self and Other.

⁵Wordsworth scholars have addressed his treatment of memory and time in a variety of contexts, typically mining richly pertinent materials in *The Prelude* and "Tintern Abbey." Christopher Salvesen's *The Landscape of Memory: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry* and Frank D. McConnell's *The Confessional Imagination: A Reading of Wordsworth's "Prelude"* offer especially thorough examination of these intertwined topics.

⁶Lionel Trilling points out, for instance, that Wordsworth's poetry is "often thought to be rather absurd and even a little despicable" (45). J. Edward Chamberlain summarizes the history of criticisms leveled at "I wandered," beginning with Coleridge's complaint that the speaker's emotional response is excessive, incommensurate to the occasion. Chamberlain goes on to discuss the negative reaction of many readers to Wordsworth's "(unacknowledged) appropriation of his sister Dorothy's journal description of the daffodils, and his (acknowledged, though the source is unidentified) appropriation of two lines ('they flash ... / ... of solitude') suggested by his wife Mary" (157). Chamberlain further explains how the poem "has somehow come to represent English literary imperialism, not to mention white male privilege" (154). He points out that despite its flaws, or supposed flaws, the poem remains much anthologized and widely known: "most people who know any poetry at all can recite some of its lines" (153).

⁷Elizabeth Bishop alludes to "I wandered" in "Crusoe in England" (1971), offering an illuminating contrast in method and effect. She signals her allusion conspicuously by framing the borrowed language in quotation marks. The speaker in her poem expresses his desire to comfort himself by "reciting" remembered texts but finds that his memory is "full of blanks" (95, 93). Quoting from the final

stanza of Wordsworth's poem, he forgets a critically important word: "'They flash upon that inward eye, / which is the bliss ...' The bliss of what?" (96-97). Stating that "One of the first things that [he] did / when [he] got back was look it up," he prompts readers to do likewise, should they be unable to supply the ironically missing "solitude" (98-99). Neither the title of "I wandered" nor its author is named, but there is nothing covert about Bishop's method: she incorporates a chunk of Wordsworth's text into her own with word-for-word fidelity. She does not modify the language she appropriates, and the one-word omission is flagged as such. The effect of her allusion is chiefly local, i.e., it does not extend by means of additional reprising from "I wandered" into other portions of her poem. Collins's allusion to the very same text in "Albany" is lexically leaner than Bishop's (he borrows fewer words) and far more unobtrusive. Because he reprises "I wandered" at several points in his poem, however, and because he is pondering subject matter similar in large outline to Wordsworth's, the allusion to "I wandered" assumes more importance in his poem than in Bishop's. This remains true even though some readers may fail to perceive the allusion in "Albany" and none will overlook that in "Crusoe in England." Collins surely is familiar with Bishop's much admired and frequently anthologized poem, but it seems unlikely, given the differences in topic and theme, that he had it in mind when composing "Albany." Chance appears to have led these two twentieth-century poets to mine the same well-known poem for very different purposes and, consequently, to employ very different methods in crafting their allusions.

⁸In addition to his elaborate, spoofing engagement with one of Wordsworth's best known poems in "Lines Composed Over Three Thousand Miles from Tintern Abbey," published in 1998 in *Picnic, Lightning*, Collins refers to the earlier poet in interviews (see Plimpton) and in prose commentary. He discusses Wordsworth in historical context in "My Grandfather's Tackle Box," for instance, considering Romantic influences on the confessional impulse in contemporary poetry (279-80, 285).

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