

Wordsworth & the Sonnet as Epic Prelude: A Response to Stephen Fallon and Henry Weinfield*

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Stephen Fallon's "The Equanimity of Influence: Milton and Wordsworth" and Henry Weinfield's "'When Contemplation like the Night-Calm Felt': Religious Considerations in Poetic Texts by Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth" appear together in two bibliographic ways: in volume twenty-six of *Connotations* and in the journal's debates section under the title "Between Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth" (<https://www.connotations.de/debate/between-shakespeare-milton-and-wordsworth/>). While Fallon reexamines "how Wordsworth makes his poetry out of Milton's poetry, and particularly his *Prelude* out of *Paradise Lost*" (126), Weinfield plots a Shakespeare-to-Milton sonnet lineage manifested in Book V of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Each article concerns authorial influence—for Fallon based on "equanimity" and for Weinfield involving a potential "threat" (116)—and focuses on beginnings and endings, making and remaking, echoes and allusions, transience and permanence. Fallon argues that Wordsworth discovered in Milton's epic narrator a lyric model for presenting the growth of the poet's mind toward equanimity "in the face of sorrows and adversity" (127). Weinfield contends that Milton's Sonnet

*References: Fallon, Stephen. "The Equanimity of Influence: Milton and Wordsworth." *Connotations* 26 (2016/2017): 126-40.

<https://www.connotations.de/article/stephen-m-fallon-equanimity-influence-milton-wordsworth/>

Weinfield, Henry. "'When Contemplation like the Night-Calm Felt': Religious Considerations in Poetic Texts by Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth." *Connotations* 26 (2016/2017): 115-25.

<https://www.connotations.de/article/henry-weinfield-contemplation-like-night-calm-felt-religious-considerations-poetic-texts-shakespeare-milton-wordsworth/>

XIX mediation of Shakespeare's sonnet XV moved Wordsworth toward "a third-order meditation [...] reflecting on the nature of contemplation itself" amidst the certainty of material transience (121). My response builds on their respective arguments about the beginning of Book I (Fallon) and Book V (Weinfield) of *The Prelude* (c. 1804-1805) and involves a form not discussed in their articles: Wordsworth's blank verse sonnets. I aim to spotlight how central blank verse sonnet making was for Wordsworth's thinking and development as an epic poet.

I propose that Wordsworth's blank verse sonnets in the thirteen-book *Prelude* enable him to find the equanimity of mind and the surviving form that Fallon and Weinfield describe. To lay the groundwork for my argument, I first examine how, in his *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), Wordsworth aligns and transposes his epic poetry and sonnets in the deleted "Advertisement," dual Latin epigraphs, and sonnet "Nuns fret not." I have chosen the 1807 volumes' "Advertisement," epigraphs and "Nuns fret not" sonnet to illustrate how Wordsworth's collective lyric progress—particularly his Milton- (and Shakespeare-) inflected sonnet formations—dynamically shaped his poetics as an epic poet from 1802-1805. Then, I turn to three of *The Prelude's* blank verse sonnets: Book I's opening lines, Book V's "strains of thankfulness" (174), and Book XIII's closing benediction. I argue that these *Prelude* sonnets not only extend the solace and liberty that he found in composing pastime sonnets for his 1807 *Poems*, but also authorize his epic voice, ground his epic labor, and monumentalize his epic progress through a cycling lyric form that sings of greater things by little.¹

Wordsworth's first near-public announcement of how integrally bound his shorter poems are with his epic endeavors appears in the prose "Advertisement" that he canceled during the proof stages for his 1807 *Poems*. This half-page introductory note, which was set to follow the title page, juxtaposes his epic progress with the lyric poems "of which these Volumes consist" (527).² He declares that these

short Poems [...] were chiefly composed to refresh my mind during the progress of a work of length and labour, in which I have for some time been engaged; and to furnish me with employment when I had not resolution to apply myself to that work, or hope that I should proceed with it successfully. (527)

To demonstrate the signal importance of these “short” lyrics for his growth as a serious poet, Wordsworth describes them in apposition with “a work of length and labour.” The 1807 *Poems* have taken time away from direct epic composition (neither *The Recluse* nor *The Prelude* is named), but they also have relieved fatigue, restored “hope,” and conditionally habilitated “the progress” of his “larger work” (527). More than a mere recreation (an entertaining and pleasurable pastime), these lyrics have afforded him time and space to “refresh” (restore and renew) his blank verse epic compositions. Although Wordsworth nearly apologizes for publishing these lyrics ahead of his unfinished “larger work,” he also proffers their collective power: “They were composed with much pleasure to my own mind, and I build upon that remembrance a hope that they may afford profitable pleasure to many readers” (527). Grounded on his memory of their compositional affect, Wordsworth posits the 1807 *Poems* as one amalgamating, pleasure-giving form with benefits exceeding the sum of its lyric parts. And, as Wordsworth’s opening and concluding epigraphs for the volumes might suggest, the sonnet’s “scanty plot of ground” significantly marks and fosters a continuum of recursive pathways for poetic development (“Nuns fret not” 11).

None of the hundred-odd poems in the 1807 volumes were written in blank verse measure, and approximately half of them are sonnets—the one genre for which reviewers widely praised Wordsworth and for which he partially accounted in an initial and a concluding Latin epigraph.³ As Nicola Trott has shown in “Wordsworth’s Career Prospects,” Wordsworth was at pains during the proof copy stage for the 1807 volumes to fashion his career progression according to a Milton-inflected “‘*rota Virgiliana* or Wheel of Virgil’” (283). Wordsworth’s opening epigraph—ostensibly from Virgil’s *Culex*⁴ and likely filtered

through Spenser's *Virgil's Gnat*—recalls the developmental turn of that wheel from a lower, pastoral mode to a middling, georgic mode (both associated with lyric poetry) and then to a weighty, epic mode: "*Posterius graviore sono tibi Musa loquetur / Nostra: dabunt cum securos mihi tempora fructus.*"⁵ With neither a prose introduction nor an initial section title, the 1807 volumes lean heavily on this epigraph to guide readers, and, reciprocally, the half-title page epigraph (also inserted during the proof stage) before the final poem in volume II—"Ode"—returns to Virgilian guidance: "*Paulò majora canamus.*" Taken from the opening invocation in Book IV of Virgil's *Eclogues*, this epigraph has been translated variously as "Let us sing a loftier strain," "Let's sing a nobler song," "Let us sing of somewhat more exalted things," and "Let us sing of matters greater by little."⁶ The "Ode's" epigraphic rise toward the epic and separation from the volumes' previous poems (implied in the first two translations) have been recognized often. The second two translations, however, qualify that generic teleology and remind us that a wheel and the cycling seasons have no end point. In the third and fourth translations, the words "more exalted" and "greater" highlight the elevated genre status of his "Ode" while "somewhat" and "by little" describe an incremental movement that implies less a growing out of youthful short lyrics into mature epic compositions and more a growing into the variegated lyric makeup characteristic of epic formations.⁷

Singled out in the 1807 *Poems'* "Contents" page as the "Prefatory Sonnet" to two sonnet series—*Miscellaneous Sonnets* and *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty*—"Nuns fret not" (c. 1802) announces the fitness of Wordsworth's ensuing sonnets to balance the shifting weight of epic progress. The octave-to-sestet turn in this Italian sonnet suggests how Wordsworth's sonnet series anticipate one translation of the ode's epigraph, "Let us sing of matters greater by little." Falling midway through line nine, that volta presents an inductive leap, which follows the octave's examples of nuns, hermits, students, maids, a weaver, and bees working "contented" in self-enclosed spaces: "and hence to me, / In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound / Within the son-

net's scanty plot of ground" (9-11). As the sestet emphasizes, the sonnet has the capacity to hold in productive tension greater and little subjects within its "scanty plot of ground." Wordsworth's conclusion that the sonnet "was pastime" foregrounds its recreational (hobby-like) function, but "pastime" also is a closed compound form of "past time" (a passing or elapsing of time) that elides while also implying Wordsworth's acknowledgment that he came late to sonnet writing and would have benefited greatly from earlier sonnet recreation. These "pas[t]time" meanings correspond with the kind of purposeful recreation described in the deleted "Advertisement," and the sonnet's "ground" aligns with the deleted section title "Orchard Pathway" (and companion motto poem) and the opening Latin epigraph.⁸ Within the sonnet's "scanty plot," the poet has "found" an incremental structure to mete out "the weight of too much liberty" (13).⁹ Matching form and content, line thirteen's "liberty" introduces the only extra syllable in an otherwise pentameter poem. Instead of extending this extra-syllable through enjambment, however, Wordsworth delimits it with a comma that marks the sonnet's capacity to foster and pause over the liberty he has gained in expressing "sundry" (miscellaneous) emotional states. As the "Prefatory Sonnet" to *Miscellaneous Sonnets* and *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty*, "Nuns fret not" forecasts how the sonnet form can provide "short solace" for the poet (and, he hopes, for readers) that alleviates the "weight of too much liberty," which Wordsworth associates with composing more free-flowing, blank verse epics (whether *The Recluse* or *The Prelude*).¹⁰

The thirteen-book *Prelude* begins with the "solace" (relief and comfort) of an unrhymed sonnet that transforms the initial "weight of too much [blank verse] liberty" into a joyful lyric that "sing[s] of greater things by little."¹¹ In Book I, Wordsworth openly (and repeatedly) questions how and why to begin a blank verse epic. Although his resounding "Was it for this?" begins the two-book *Prelude* (1799) and has been singled out often as *The Prelude's* initial locution, that question does not begin its 1804, 1805, or 1850 versions.¹² Instead, Wordsworth inaugurates the thirteen-book *Prelude* with fourteen emancipa-

tory lines containing a prominent volta: "Now I am free, enfranchised and at large / May fix my habitation where I will" (9-10). He couches his new-found freedom in a sonnet "habitation" that gives form to his ensuing questions about where (and how) to turn next:

What dwelling shall receive me, in what vale
 Shall be my harbour, underneath what grove
 Shall I take up my home, and what sweet stream
 Shall with its murmurs lull me to my rest? (11-14)

His enjambed exuberance in search of a "home" comes to "rest" at the sonnet's conventional close, and that full-stop sets up and authorizes his revelatory interpretation of *Paradise Lost's* ending as a new beginning¹³: "The earth is all before me—with a heart / Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty," (15-16). Marked by a comma (as in "Nuns fret not") and inspired by the movement of "this gentle breeze / That blows" (1-2), his open-hearted pause over "liberty" builds on the freeing spontaneity celebrated in the octave's two full-stop quatrains (1-8). This joyful and structurally contained spontaneity enables him to liberate and make room for his emergent epic voice through a lyric form that reframes past physical and mental "[em]prison[ment]" (8). In this fourteen-line blank verse sonnet, Wordsworth associates his newly "enfranchised" voice with a sonnet pattern which, like this "gentle breeze," invigorates, concentrates, and inaugurates his epic beginning (9, 1).

The majority of Wordsworth's rhymed and unrhymed sonnets have a Petrarchan structure, but he also altered conventional sonnet forms to fit his subject matter. Though written well after the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth's often quoted 1833 letter to Reverend Alexander Dyce details his longstanding fascination with sonnet variations. In this letter, his enthusiasm for Dyce's forthcoming edited collection of sonnets (dedicated to and featuring fifteen sonnets by Wordsworth) leads him to ask if Dyce will include "a short preface upon the construction of the sonnet" (31) and then to rough out his own quasi-sonnet preface. His subsequent account of the sonnet's make-up

ranges from Aristotelian plotting (“a beginning, a middle, and an end”) to formal logic (“the three propositions of a syllogism”), visual borders (“the frame of metre”), musical aesthetics (“to gratify the ear by variety and freedom of sound”; 32), and architectural design (“making a whole out of three parts”; 32). Following this multivalent description, Wordsworth praises Milton because “in the better half of his sonnets the sense does not close with the rhyme at the eighth line, but overflows into the second portion of the meter [...] giving that pervading sense of intense unity in which the excellence of the sonnet has always seemed to me mainly to consist” (32). Wordsworth further compares the “intense unity” of his preferred sonnet form to “the image of an orbicular body,—a sphere or a dew drop” (32).¹⁴ He presents this “image” in macro- and micro-cosmic sizes that align the largeness of an astronomic “body” with the smallness of a budding “dew drop” through the universal form of a geometric “sphere” (32).¹⁵ Wordsworth’s metaphysical imaging suggests that the sonnet’s bounded form has the capacity to hold the largest of universal truths as well as the smallest descriptive details. In *The Prelude*, his blank verse sonnet in Book XIII follows Milton’s orbicular sonnet model with its late turn toward expansive, prophetic truth. By contrast, the early turn and binary division of Book V’s blank verse sonnet reverses the sonnet’s conventional movement from an earthly octave to a transcendent sestet and draws his prophetic narrative back to a lyric resounding with loco-descriptive details.

Heading a new verse paragraph, this Book V sonnet (lines 166-79) functions as a check on the poet’s progress and a holding space of recovery that recollects epic poetry’s mixed genre make-up. The sonnet curtails his apocalyptic ruminations about the mortality of the physical book—“Poor earthly casket of immortal verse”—and turns his despondency into “strains of thankfulness” (164, 174).¹⁶ Instead of using a conventional volta to signal that grateful turn, as in Book I’s opening sonnet, Wordsworth divides this sonnet in half with a rhetorical question: “How could I ever play an ingrate’s part?” (172). The shortened octave arrests his apocalyptic thinking and recalls his past

and present gratitude for the natural world. The lengthened sestet extends his mental recovery as he imagines “intermingl[ing] strains of thankfulness” with “thoughtless melodies” (175) and then humbly welcomes the natural world’s rhythms of song along with the power of lower poetic modes “to tell again/ In slender accents of sweet verse some tale/ That did bewitch me then, and soothes me now” (177-79). This echoing genre recycling (“to repeat/ Some simply fashioned tale”) of a tale within a sonnet, within his epic, composes his mind and enables him to find his epic footing anew through “slender accents” that “resound” (176-77, 173).¹⁷ Wordsworth celebrates the tempering power of lower poetic modes in a sonnet that balances and realigns (a three-line and a four-line full stop followed by a foreshortened three-line and an extended four-line full stop) his shifting affective responses with the enduring rhythms of the natural world. As a familiar pastime genre, the sonnet enables him to delimit his prophetic reach, locate inspiration anew, and find a narrative pathway forward that depends on the staying power of just such “portable,” adaptable, and recurring lyric patterns.¹⁸

The blank verse sonnet before the close of Book XIII (lines 428-41) foregrounds the monumental significance of his cycling sonnet labor. This sonnet begins *The Prelude*’s final verse paragraph, and it follows his characterization of the entire *Prelude* as an “offering of [his] love” for Coleridge (427). In this position, it stands as a synecdoche for *The Prelude*. Through its enjambed turn—“we shall still/ Find solace in the knowledge which we have”—the sonnet offers the “solace” of its complete structure, which forecasts epic completion in *The Prelude* and *The Recluse* (435-36). Its octave provides room for Wordsworth to project an end-stopped time when “all will be complete” and an epic “monument of glory will be raised” (429-30) while also voicing his anxieties about a possible future in which “this age fall back to old idolatry,” “men return to servitude as fast / As the tide ebbs,” and “nations sink together” (432-36). At the sonnet turn, Wordsworth rises from the weight of these projected cultural counterturns to find faith in poetic labor as “work” that can bring about reconciliation (439). In

the last four lines of this sestet benediction, Wordsworth and Coleridge become:

United helpers forward of a day
 Of firmer trust, joint labourers in the work—
 Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe—
 Of their redemption, surely yet to come. (438-41)

Wordsworth prophesies collective “redemption” (liberation) in a miniature form that aligns his grandiose thoughts with patterns of return in the natural world. With the “grace” of “Providence,” Wordsworth and Coleridge appear “forward of a day” that will come as “surely” as the turning of the earth. At once representing and predicting that forthcoming micro- and macro-cosmic turn (“we shall still / Find solace”), this sonnet captures the creating mind’s capacity to gather together, recycle and transcend temporal limitations.¹⁹ As an “image of an orbicular body,—a sphere or a dew drop,” this blank verse sonnet serves as a structural monument celebrating Wordsworth’s capacity to sing of greater things by little.

To my mind, the close of Book XIII’s sonnet also harkens back to the line following Book I’s opening sonnet and the line preceding Book V’s sonnet. Just as Book I’s emancipatory sonnet authorizes his ensuing revelation—“The earth is all before me” (15)—this closing sonnet authorizes his succeeding claim that he and Coleridge are “Prophets of Nature” (442). Likewise, Book XIII’s sonnet characterization of them as “joint labourers” recalls Book V’s characterization of “Shakespeare or Milton, labourers divine” (439, 165). This dual recall, moreover, draws me back to Fallon’s and Weinfield’s articles, which concern Miltonic legacies and lyric remainders in *The Prelude*. I have attempted to extend Fallon’s and Weinfield’s respective claims to the sonnet itself, which I see as the most significant lyric mediator and enduring symbolic form in *The Prelude*. Not coincidentally, after *The Prelude*’s final sonnet mediation, Wordsworth declares his capacity to “speak / A lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason and by truth” that “Instruct[s] [...] how the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth / On which he dwells, above this

frame of things" (442-44, 446-48). Much like the closing movement of a sonnet, in these lines the mind of man paradoxically rises "mid all revolutions" above its earthly "frame" to "remain unchanged": "In beauty exalted, as it is itself / Of substance and of fabric more divine" (451-52). Wordsworth's expansion of the thirteen-book *Prelude* into the fourteen-book *Prelude* (1850), perhaps, best exemplifies his enduring faith in the power of the sonnet's adaptable, fourteen-line form to authorize, ground, and monumentalize the revolutions of the epic poet's mind at work. If we train our attention on how Wordsworth employs blank verse sonnets in *The Prelude*, we learn about how joy (both great and little) can be found and created, cycled and recycled through the formal constraints of sonnet recreation. For Wordsworth, the sonnet can serve as an epic prelude, interlude and postlude that recalls our connective growth, speaks to our enduring relationship with the natural world, and prophesies our collective liberation of mind and union of spirit.

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NOTES

¹I build on Jennifer Ann Wagner's claim in *Revisionary Poetics and the Nineteenth-Century English Sonnet* that for Milton and Wordsworth "sonnet and epic would ultimately come to be tropologically connected [...] Wordsworth seems to have apprehended the way Milton used the sonnet as a synecdoche of his epics" (37-38). See also Jay Curlin's "Chaos in the Convent's Narrow Room: Milton and the Sonnet," which focuses on the epic stretch and near-blank verse prosody of Milton's sonnets and mentions Milton's embedded blank verse sonnets in *Paradise Lost*. Wordsworth's admiration for Milton's rhymed sonnets has been well established since at least R. D. Haven's *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (1922), and Lee M. Johnson has made much of Wordsworth's 1836 remark to his friend Henry Crabb Robinson about finding in *Paradise Lost* "a perfect sonnet without rhyme" (86). In his "Appendix" to *Wordsworth and the Sonnet*, Johnson identifies "several dozen blank verse sonnets embedded in *The Excursion*, *The Prelude*, and in other blank verse poems" (174), including "over thirty fourteen-line passages" in *The Prelude*. Although Johnson hesitates to call all of these sonnets—"the purpose or function of blank verse sonnets in *The Prelude* [...] would still require

further clarification" (180)—he identifies two "authentic" blank verse sonnets in *The Prelude*: Book I (lines 428-41 in 1805; lines 401-14 in 1850 version) and Book XIII/XIV (lines 428-41 in 1805; lines 432-35 in 1850) (180). In *Wordsworth's Metaphysical Verse*, Johnson details the structural and thematic significance of over a dozen blank verse sonnets in *The Recluse*.

²For quotations from Wordsworth's 1807 *Poems* and related paratexts, I cite Jared Curtis's Cornell Wordsworth (*Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*).

³On the early positive reception of Wordsworth's sonnets and his epic contextualizing of them, see Simon Bainbridge's "'Men are we': Wordsworth's 'Manly' Poetic Nation." For more on the resoundingly negative reception of Wordsworth's 1807 *Poems*, see my *Wordsworth's Poetic Collections*.

⁴Though several arguments were made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries debunking Virgil's authorship of the *Culex* (*The Gnat*) in the *Appendix Vergiliana*, Wordsworth and many of his contemporaries held that Virgil was the author.

⁵Alun Jones has translated the epigraph as "Hereafter shall our Muse speak to thee in deeper tones, when the seasons yield me their fruits in peace" and points out that it corresponds with and stands in for the opening section title "Orchard Pathways," which Wordsworth deleted during the proof stage along with the "Advertisement" (XV).

⁶The first two translations are the most common. For the third translation, see Joseph Sitterson's *Romantic Poems, Poets, and Narrators*, in which Sitterson argues for the ode's epic characteristics and "generic comprehensiveness" which "for Wordsworth characteristically entails going beyond the lyric mode to the narrative" and which "includes lyric in a larger, narrative 'plot'" (93, 95, 98). For more on the composition and arrangement of the 1807 *Poems*, see Curtis's Cornell Wordsworth "Introduction: The Making of *Poems, in Two Volumes, 1800-1807*" (3-39).

⁷For an overview of the epic's lyric characteristics, see Barbara Lewalski's "The Genres of *Paradise Lost*." On embedded sonnets, see Lee M. Johnson's "Milton's Blank Verse Sonnets."

⁸That deleted motto poem is:

Orchard Pathway, to and fro,
Ever with thee, did I go,
Weaving Verses, a huge store!
These, and many hundreds more,
And, in memory of the same,
This little lot shall bear Thy Name! (283)

⁹For a recent discussion of related sonnet concerns from Romanticism through Modernism, see Matthias Bauer's "Self-Imposed Fetters": <https://www.connotations.de/article/matthias-bauer-self-imposed-fetters-the-productivity-of-formal-and-thematic-restrictions/>. My interpretation of "Nuns fret not," however, fundamentally differs from Bauer's (3-4).

¹⁰As John Kerrigan argues in “Wordsworth and the Sonnet,” “Wordsworth built his sonnets precisely for dwelling’s sake. The sonnet was a space in which being, for him, declared itself by being radically at home [...] Yet these many mansions are formally one home, revisited till the revisiting became dwelling” (58). See also Charles Mahoney’s brief reflections on “Nuns fret not” in “Poetic Pains in Formal Pleasures Bound” about the sonnet’s “kind of freedom which [Wordsworth’s] blank verse could not provide” (28), as well as Clifford Siskin’s observations in “Renewing Wordsworth” about Wordsworth’s fascination with “the disruption deep within the body of the sonnet suturing the parts into the whole” and with embedding sonnet structures into other poems (121).

¹¹To my knowledge, no Wordsworth scholar has recognized these fourteen lines as a blank verse sonnet. Daniel Robinson, however, comes close in “*The River Duddon and Wordsworth, Sonneteer*” when he notes a connection between “Nuns fret not,” sonnet making, and the opening lines of *The Prelude*: “[T]he formal demands of the sonnet provide ‘short solace’ for a poet who feels ‘the weight of too much liberty’—the same weight that drives Wordsworth’s poetic impulse in the first book of *The Prelude*” (293). As Don Bialostosky points out in “The Invention/Disposition of *The Prelude*, Book I,” Wordsworth’s use of the term “preamble” (Book VII, line 4) to characterize the opening lines of Book I recalls a tradition of Greek lyric poetry (140).

¹²The composition date of the thirteen-book *Prelude*’s opening fourteen lines remains somewhat mysterious. Though most scholars follow John Alban Finch’s contention in “Wordsworth’s Two-Handed Engine” that Wordsworth composed his “glad preamble” (lines 1-54) in November 1799, Wordsworth only situated them as the opening fourteen lines of Book I in early 1804 (5). For this history, see also “Composition and Texts: *The Prelude* of 1805 and 1850” in Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850* (515-26).

¹³My argument echoes and further particularizes Fallon’s statement that “Wordsworth splices the beginning of his epic (and both the beginning and end of its first book) to the end of Milton’s, suggesting that he will begin where Milton ended and thus go far beyond him” (129).

¹⁴For the most recent work concerning Wordsworth and the word orbicular, see Thomas Owens’s “Orbicular Poetics” in *Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Language of the Heavens*, particularly his accounting of Milton’s use of the word orbicular in *Paradise Lost* (75-76). Though Owens does not mention the following, in “The Structure of Wit” P. G. Stanwood and Lee Johnson have shown that one of Milton’s most significant uses of the word orbicular occurs in the midst of a triple blank verse sonnet embedded in Uriel’s speech about the creation of the earth, near the close of *Paradise Lost*’s Book III (36-38).

¹⁵In his 1825 *Concise Dictionary of Terms Used in The Arts & Sciences*, Walter Hamilton defines orbicular as: “In *Geometry*, &c., spherical, circular,” and an orb as: “In *Astronomy*, a spherical body or space, contained under two superficies; the one concave and the other convex. 2. There are orbs concentric (having the same center) and orbs eccentric” (262). Reciprocally, Hamilton defines a sphere as: “In

Geometry, &c., a globe, an orbicular body, of which the centre is at the same distance from every point of the circumference" (378).

¹⁶My argument here reframes Weinfield's insightful claim that, in Book V, Wordsworth conceptualizes an individual's soul after death as being "joined to immortal being—no longer as an individual, however, but as part of the oneness of being" (122). As a formal extension, I contend that Wordsworth's Book V blank verse sonnet celebrates a recycling amalgamation of lower and higher poetic modes and kinds.

¹⁷I argue that Wordsworth's blank verse sonnet-making in Book V suggests a formal line of reasoning which would help delineate Fallon's general claim that Wordsworth plots a developmental trajectory over the course of *The Prelude*, leading him to an equanimity of mind—"a balance of joy and sorrow"—and to laud "the education of the soul or mind as it achieves calm of mind and discovers paradise in the quotidian" (126, 131). On the aesthetic, political, and gendered print market significance of the literary tale as a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century poetry and prose genre of repetition and remaking, see Stuart Curran's chapter 6, "The Romance," in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*; Mary Favret's "Telling Tales about Genre: Poetry in the Romantic Novel"; Ashley Cross's "From 'Lyrical Ballads' to 'Lyrical Tales'"; and Miranda Burgess's "The National Tale and Allied Genres, 1770s-1840s."

¹⁸In the ensuing lines, Wordsworth finds a compositional pathway forward, in part, by recalling the monumental influence of western poetry genres cycling from "Homer" and "Jewish song" to (203-204):

Our shores in England, from those loftiest notes
Down to the low and wren-like warblings, made
For cottagers and spinners at the wheel
And weary travellers when they rest themselves
By the highways and hedges: ballad-tunes,
Food for the hungry ears of little ones,
And of old men who have survived their joy— (207-13)

My use of the word "portable" builds on Daniel Robinson's characterization in "*The River Duddon and Wordsworth, Sonneteer*" of Wordsworth's sonnets as "portable, perfectly suited for itinerary poems" (296). I am indebted further to Robinson's several other publications about Romantic period sonnets dating back to his article "'Still glides the stream': Form and Function in Wordsworth's *River Duddon Sonnets*."

¹⁹The sonnet, thereby, exemplifies what Weinfield characterizes as Wordsworth's concern with salvaging the transient body amidst his certainty about the individual soul's return "to the source of life," and the sonnet fosters what Fallon describes as Wordsworth's finely balanced (Miltonic) equanimity of mind (122).

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