***With Wordsworth in the Mountains***

***Or: Good Lord, How Did I Get Here?***

 *My audience at Père Lachaise*

*includes Mr Wordsworth, whom*

*I, without quite meaning to, have*

*by thinking about him invoked.*

1.

Originality is built on

What’s ‘unattempted yet in prose

Or rhyme’—words of Ariosto’s

Boldly translated into Milton;

And speaking to his damaged Friend, *The ‘damaged archangel’, Coleridge.*

Wordsworth caps his great Alpine burst *‘Simplon Pass’ episode (*Prelude *VI).*

Of inspiration with ‘of first,

And last, and midst, and without end’,

Paraphrase of a line of verse

(In *Paradise Lost*) from Revelation *‘I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning*

Paraphrased. Place them in quotation *and the end, the first and the last.’*

Marks, then, my Dears, those ‘characters

Of the Apocalypse’ (I omit

The word ‘great’, for it doesn’t scan.)

Now Wordsworth was an honest man

Much-haunted by the Infinite.

He knew it when he was a boy,

It condescended to reveal

Its presence as a thing you feel

When Nature overflows with joy

Like a great waterfall your heart

Installed there, Capability Brown

Of inner gardens overgrown

Since then, rough landscapes of our Art.

2. *Wordsworth Heckles Me*

*Oscar the posture-master, by Posture-master: contortionist.* [Mr V]

*His own contortions so entangled*

*He like a python dies, self-strangled,*

*With the last word on his lips,* Why?

But I, O mighty Laureate,

Am not a *moralising* cad.

Your treatment of Annette was bad,

Which does not make your poems less great.

*I did my best for her, and for*

*Our child.* Then is the bastard father

To the man? Each is his own author.

Bad chapters, too, make up the score.

The Revolution and the Wars

Caught all your generation up;

In that great tempest a teacup

Is private romance. But the scars

Remain that history leaves upon us

As the triumphal juggernaut

Or chariot of life’s onslaught

Passes us by, or tramples on us.

3.

*I can recall when my dear Friend*

*And I saw Hazlitt running past*

*Us, and, behind him, gaining fast,*

*Angry villagers bent to rend*

*The man, it seemed, to pieces. Why?*

*For liberties that he had taken*

*With a young maid he’d have forsaken,*

*Having defiled her modesty.*

*We laughed at first at this Don Juan,*

*But when we learned the unsavoury*

*Details, we laughed no longer: he*

*Had made himself a moral ruin,*

*‘Twas plain that he was in the grasp*

*Of sexual perversion. It*

*Had crawled into his mind and bit*

*Into his spirit like an asp.*

*Poisoned was he, and poisonous*

*To know. The breach could not be mended.*

*‘Twas no great friendship that thus ended.*

*But my dear Friend, he also was*

*A prey, if so he could be called.*

*To laudanum: it took the best*

*Of his great mind, left him obsessed,*

*Mendacious, narrow, self-appalled.*

Ah, but he saw those caves of ice!

That pleasure dome, those splendidly

Unreal shapes of Tertiary

Imagination, Paradise

Of pure Illusion! Constipated

Pantheist, the austere Spinoza’s

Weak-willed and gifted scion, roses

I strew o’er the Dream you created,

Bravo, I cry, and close the book. A

Fine opium-tainted cigarette

Is my own little minaret;

Though some prefer to ply the hookah.

4.

*I will not moralise or crow*

*Upon a man broken as you are.*

Mercy from one so very pure

Is mercy in spades, England’s Rousseau. *A ‘dig’ at ‘To Wilkinson’s Spade’.*

You transformed, not the way we think,

But, deeper still, the way we *feel*.

An influence so deep and real

In its effects is apt to sink

From view beneath the transformations

It everywhere has wrought in us.

Fascinating and tedious

At once are the long meditations

That constitute *The Prelude*; now

We are for-ever in the debt

Of one we’d rather at times, forget,

For your confessions are somehow

Both too obscure and too prosaic,

Thou mystic of the commonplace

Who made each poet turn his face

Inward towards the mind. O laic

High Prophet, you became that lost

 Leader who knew not where or when

The child-sire might be found again;

You felt his joy, though, more than most.

On mountain or on darkling coast

You heard the thunder of the waters, *Simplon Pass.*

O Moses of the mind who brought us

Back to the Wilds we thought we’d crossed.

*Farewell! Perhaps, for all we know,*

*Our paths will cross at Simplon Pass?*

Your feet will tread the rocky grass;

I from a cable-car will blow

Down kisses and best wishes as

You walk into your vast Sublime

For a refreshing spot of time.—

And so he passed into the Pass.

