

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,
Wordsworth caps his great Alpine burst
Of inspiration with 'of first,
And last, and midst, and without end',

Paraphrase of a line of verse
(In *Paradise Lost*) from Revelation
Paraphrased. Place them in quotation
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
His own contortions so entangled
He like a python dies, self-strangled,
With the last word on his lips, Why?*

*The 'damaged archangel', Coleridge.
'Simplon Pass' episode (Prelude VI).*

*'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning
and the end, the first and the last.'*

Posture-master: contortionist. [Mr V]

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,
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.



Simplon Pass.

