

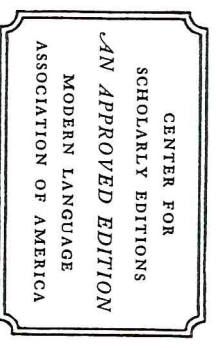
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The Cornell Wordsworth

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The Borderers

by William Wordsworth

Edited by
ROBERT OSBORN

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[On the Character of Rivers]

Let us suppose a young Man of great intellectual powers, yet without any solid principles of genuine benevolence. His master passions are pride and the love of distinction. He has deeply imbibed a spirit of enterprize in a tumultuous age. He goes into the world and is betrayed into a great crime.

That influence on which all his happiness is built immediately deserts him. His talents are robbed of their weight; his exertions are unavailing, and he quits the world in disgust, with strong misanthropic feelings. In his retirement, he is impelled to examine the reasonableness of established opinions and the force of his mind exhausts itself in constant efforts to separate the elements of virtue and vice. It is his pleasure and his consolation to hunt out whatever is bad in actions usually esteemed virtuous and to detect the good in actions which the universal sense of mankind teaches us to reprobate. While the general exertion of his intellect seduces him from the remembrance of his own crime, the particular conclusions to which he is led have a tendency to reconcile him to himself. His feelings are interested in making him a moral sceptic and as his scepticism increases he is raised in his own esteem.

After this process has been continued some time his natural energy and restlessness impel him again into the world. In this state, pressed by the recollection of his guilt, he seeks relief from two sources, action

1 Moorman, I, 304, suggests that the opening of the essay is "self-descriptive," but compare the early history of Falkland in *Caleb Williams*, whose upbringng promoted pride without sufficient "genuine benevolence," Godwin's criterion for moral worth in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), the second edition of which WW read on its publication in 1796 (*ET*, p. 170). Compare *Lines left upon a Seal in a Yew-Tree* (and see *M of H*, p. 66, and the discussion above, p. 5):

In youth, by genius nurs'd,
And big with lofty views, he to the world
Went forth, pure in his heart, against the taint
Of dissolute tongues, 'gainst jealousy, and hate,
And scorn, against all enemies prepared,
All but neglect: and so, his spirit damped
At once, with rash disdain he turned away,
And with the food of pride sustained his soul
In solitude.

[*Lyrical Ballads* (1798), 13-21]

5 No paragraph break in MSS.

6-19 Compare Rivers's account of the psychological consequences of his crime, IV.ii.75-164.

19 No paragraph break in MSS.

and meditation. Of actions those are most attractive which best exhibit his own powers, partly from the original pride of his character and still more because the loss of Authority and influence which followed upon his crime was the first circumstance which impressed him with the magnitude of that crime and brought along with it those tormenting sensations by which he is assailed. The recovery of his original importance and the exhibition of his own powers are therefore in his mind almost identified with the extinction of those painful feelings which attend the recollection of his guilt.

Perhaps there is no cause which has greater weight in preventing the return of bad men to virtue than that good actions being for the most part in their nature silent and regularly progressive, they do not present those sudden results which can afford a sufficient stimulus to a troubled mind. In processes of vice the effects are more frequently immediate, palpable and extensive. Power is much more easily manifested in destroying than in creating. A child, Rousseau has observed, will tear in pieces fifty toys before he will think of making one.

From these causes assisted by disgust and misanthropic feeling, the character we are now contemplating will have a strong tendency to vice. His energies are most impressively manifest in works of devastation. He is the Orlando of Ariosto, the Cardenio of Cervantes, who lays waste the groves that should shelter him. He has rebelled against

26-27 Here the text of MS. 2 contains a haplographical error, and the missing portion of the sentence is supplied from DG MS. 27.

31 No paragraph break in MSS.

36-39 Compare Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emilius and Sophie: or, a New System of Education*, trans. "by the translator of *Eloisa*" (4 vols.; London, 1767):

A child will often put things into disorder, will break every thing it comes near, will grasp a sparrow, as it would a stone, and kill it, without knowing what it is doing. And why? . . . Whether it makes or mairs, it is all one to a child, provided the situation of things be changed; as every change necessarily implies action. If it seem to have a propensity to destroy things, it is not from a vicious principle, but because the action, necessary to make or compose any thing, is tedious and slow, whereas that of spoiling and breaking things to pieces, being quicker, agrees better with its natural alertness and vivacity. [I, 77-78]

39 No paragraph break in MSS.

43 Compare *Orlando Furioso*, XXIII, 131-135. Though Cardenio, like Orlando, is described as attacking the local shepherds, he does not lay waste the groves in which he hides. WW probably had in mind Don Quixote's discussion of models he should draw on when abandoning himself in lovesick madness, which occurs immediately after Don Quixote has encountered the deranged Cardenio in the Sierra Morena:

Very well, quoth *Sancho*, but pray, Sir, what is it that you mean to do in this Rag-and-copy *Amadis* in his Madness, Despair, and Fury? At the same time I will imitate the valiant *Orlando Furioso's* Extravagance, when he ran mad, after he had found the unhappy Tokens of the fair *Angelica's* dishonourable Commerce with *Melior* at the

the world and the laws of the world and he regards them as tyrannical masters; convinced that he is right in some of his conclusions, he nourishes a contempt for mankind the more dangerous because he has been led to it by reflexion. Being in the habit of considering the world as a body which is in some sort at war with him, he has a feeling borrowed from that habit which gives an additional zest to his hatred of those members of society whom he hates and to his contempt of those whom he despises. Add to this, that a mind fond of nourishing sentiments of contempt will be prone to the admission of those feelings which are considered under any uncommon bond of relation (as must be the case with a man who has quarrelled with the world): the feelings will mutually strengthen each other.

In this morbid state of mind he cannot exist without occupation, he requires constant provocatives, all his pleasures are prospective, he is perpetually ch[al]sing a phantom, he commits new crimes to drive away the memory of the past. But the lenitives of his pain are twofold: meditation as well as action. Accordingly, his reason is almost exclusively employed in justifying his past enormities and in enabling him to commit new ones. He is perpetually imposing upon himself; he has a sophism for every crime. The *mild* effusions of thought, the milk of human reason, are unknown to him. His imagination is powerful, being strengthened by the habit of picturing possible forms of society where his crimes would be no longer crimes, and he would enjoy that

Fountain: at which time in his frantic Despair, he tore up Trees by the Roots, troubled the Waters of the clear Fountains, slew the Shepherds, destroy'd their Flocks, fir'd their Huts, demolish'd Houses, drove their Horses before him, and committed a hundred thousand other Extravagances worthy to be recorded in the eternal Register of Fame. [Miguel de Cervantes, *The History of the Renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. Peter Motteux (4th ed., revised by John Ozell, 4 vols.; London, 1719), I, 259–260]

54 Compare "common offices of love," Churchoyard Scene, l. 97, and discussion of it above, pp. 24–28. Common bonds of relation foster "established opinions" (Essay, l. 10, above). The misanthrope admits feelings based on "uncommon bonds," that is, the experience of "a heart which had been turn'd aside / From nature" (*Prelude*, X, 886–887). Thus the experience of alienation is self-reinforcing, and rather than fostering genuine independence of mind, leads to a redefinition of morality in uniquely subjective self-serving terms. Owen and Smysler note a parallel with the discussion of "unwarranted antitheses" in the second of WW's *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1809–10).

56 No paragraph break in MSS. DC MS. 27 reads "chusing," though it is possible that the copyist misread an open "a" in the (postulated) holograph. In MS. 2, the vowel has been erased, leaving a hole. "Chasing" is the more likely intended word, though "chusing a phantom" is an appropriate description of one suffering from "repetition compulsion."

61–62 Owen and Smysler note the comparison of WW's discussion in *Essays on Morals* (1798), published in *Prose*, I, 103–104: "when we have been unworthily employed. . . we are all activity & keenness; then it is that we repair to systems of morality for arguments in defence of ourselves; & sure enough are we to find them. . . lifeless words, & abstract propositions, will not be destitute of power to lay asleep the spirit of self-accusation & exclude the uneasiness of repentance."

estimation to which from his intellectual attainments he deems himself entitled. The nicer shades of manners he disregards, but whenever upon looking back upon past ages, or in surveying the practices of different countries in the age in which he lives, he finds such contrarieties as seem to affect the principles of *morals*, he exults over his discovery and applies it to his heart as the dearest of his consolations. Such a mind cannot but discover some truths, but he is unable to profit by them and in his hands they become instruments of evil. He presses truth and falsehood into the same service. He looks at society through an optical glass of a peculiar tint: something of the forms of objects he takes from objects, but their colour is exclusively what he gives them, it is one, and it is his own. Having indulged a habit, dangerous in a man who has fallen, of dallying with moral calculations, he becomes an empiric—and a daring and unfeeling empiric. He disguises from himself his own malignity by assuming the character of a speculator in morals and one who has the hardihood to realize his speculations.

It will easily be perceived that to such a mind those enterprizes which are the most extraordinary will in time appear the most inviting. His appetite from being exhausted becomes unnatural. Accordingly, he will struggle so [] to characterize and to exalt actions little and contemptible in themselves by a forced greatness of *manner* and will chequer and degrade enterprizes great in their atrocity by grotesque littleness of manner and fantastic obliquities. He is like a worn out voluptuary—he finds his temptation in strangeness. He is unable to suppress a low hankering after the *double entendre* in vice, yet his thirst after the extraordinary buoys him up, and supported by a habit of constant reflexion he frequently breaks out into what has the appearance of greatness; and in sudden emergencies when he is called upon by surprize and thrown out of the path of his regular habits, or when dormant associations are awakened tracing the revolutions through which his character has passed, in painting his former self he really *is* great.

80 Both MSS. contain the lacuna "so [] to," but the passage makes sense if "so," is omitted. The lacuna may be the result of an incomplete cancellation mark in WW's postulated holograph.

92–100 The syntax here is somewhat involved, but it appears that WW intends to classify two kinds of situation in which such a villain rises to greatness: (1) when he is "thrown out of the path of his regular habits" by a crisis; (2) when his powers of association have been awakened and remind him of the "revolutions through which his character has passed," so that he becomes preoccupied with autobiography. These two kinds of "greatness" correspond to the two moments in the play at which Rivers rises to the occasion most strikingly: in II.ii.326–429, when his plot has been endangered by the unexpected arrival of Lacy and Wallace, and he responds by delivering a fine "set" speech in praise of the concept of sacrificial justice (a concept that he privately despises); and in IV.ii. where he recounts his past history to Mortimer.

Benefits conferred on a man like this will be the seeds of a worse feeling than ingratitude. They will give birth to positive hatred. Let him be deprived of power, though by means which he despises, and he will never forgive. It will scarcely be denied that such a mind by very slight external motives may be led to the commission of the greatest enormities. Let its malignant feelings be fixed on a particular object and the rest follows of itself.

Having shaken off the obligations of religion and morality in a dark and tempestuous age, it is probable that such a character will be infected with a tinge of superstition. The period in which he lives teems with great events which he feels he cannot controul. That influence which his pride makes him unwilling to allow to his fellow-men he has no reluctance to ascribe to invisible agents: his pride impels him to superstition and shapes out the nature of his belief: his creed is his own: it is made and not adopted.

A character like this, or some of its features at least, I have attempted to delineate in the following drama. I have introduced him deliberately prosecuting the destruction of an amiable young man by the most atrocious means and with a pertinacity as it should seem not to be accounted for but on the supposition of the most malignant injuries. No such injuries, however, appear to have been sustained. What are then his motives? First it must be observed that to make the nonexistence of a common motive itself a motive to action is a practice which we are never so prone to attribute exclusively to madmen as when we forget ourselves. Our love of the marvellous is not confined to external things. There is no object on which it settles with more delight than on our own minds. This habit is in the very essence of the habit which we are delineating.

But there are particles of that poisonous mineral of which Iago speaks gnawing his inwards; his malevolent feelings are excited and he hates the more deeply because he feels he ought not to hate.

110 See III.iv.19-40. But in the play, Rivers appears to be strikingly without superstition, in contrast with Mortimer, Robert, and the Beggarwoman: see above, pp. 15-16. WW is perhaps seeking additional grounds for defending Rivers's credibility here; compare the use of "superstition" to define and defend the character of the "retired" sea captain in the prose apology added to *The Thorn* in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).
129-131 Cf. Iago:

For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof
Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards;
And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am even'd with him . . .
[*Othello*, II.i.307-311]

We all know that the dissatisfaction accompanying the first impulses towards a criminal action where the mind is familiar with guilt acts as a stimulus to proceed in that action. Uneasiness must be driven away by fresh uneasiness; obstinacy, waywardness and wilful blindness are alternatives resorted to, till there is an universal insurrection of every depraved feeling of the heart.

Besides, in a course of criminal conduct every fresh step that we make appears a justification of the one that preceded it; it seems to bring back again the moment of liberty and choice; it banishes the idea of repentance and seems to set remorse at defiance. Every time we plan a fresh accumulation of our guilt we have restored to us something like that original state of mind, that perturbed pleasure, which first made the crime attractive.

If after these general remarks [I am asked] what are Rivers's motives to the atrocity detailed in the drama?—I answer they are founded chiefly in the very constitution of his character; in his pride which borders even upon madness, in his restless disposition, in his disturbed mind, in his superstition, in irresistible propensities to embody in practical experiments his worst and most extravagant speculations, in his thoughts and in his feelings, in his general habits and his particular impulses, in his perverted reason justifying his perverted instincts. The general moral intended to be impressed by the delineation of such a character is obvious: it is to shew the dangerous use which may be made of reason when a man has committed a great crime.

There is a kind of superstition which makes us shudder when we find moral sentiments to which we attach a sacred importance applied to vicious purposes. In real life this is done every day and we do not feel the disgust. The difference is here. In works of imagination we see the motive and the end. In real life we rarely see either the one or the other, and when the distress comes it prevents us from attending to the cause. This superstition of which I have spoken is not without its use, yet it appears to be one great source of our vices; it is our constant engine in seducing each other. We are lulled asleep by its agency and betrayed before we know that an attempt is made to betray us.

I have endeavoured to shake this prejudice persuaded that in so doing I was well employed. It has been a further object with me to shew that from abuses interwoven with the texture of society a bad man

145 A gap was originally left in both MSS. "I am asked" was added in pencil in DC MS. 27 in 1841-42.
157-166 For a discussion of this "difficult paragraph," see *Prose*, I, 85.

may be furnished with sophisms in support of his crimes which it would be difficult to answer. 170

One word more upon the subject of motives. In private life what is more common than when we hear of law-suits prosecuted to the utter ruin of the parties, and the most deadly feuds in families, to find them attributed to trifling and apparently inadequate sources? But when our malignant passions operate, the original causes which called them forth are soon supplanted, yet when we account for the effect we forget the immediate impulse and the whole is attributed to the force from which the first motion was received. The vessel keeps sailing on, and we attribute her progress in the voyage to the ropes which first towed her out of harbour. 180

To this must be added that we are too apt to apply our own moral sentiments as a measure of the conduct of others. We insensibly suppose that a criminal action assumes the same form to the agent as to ourselves. We forget that his feelings and his reason are equally busy in contracting its dimensions and pleading for its necessity. 185

Parallel Texts of the Early Version (1797–99) and the Late Version (1842)

The reading text of the early version (on the left-hand pages) is based on the 1799 fair-copy readings of DC MS. 23, which is reproduced also below as MS. 2. The spelling and capitals of the fair-copy text have been preserved, but a few obvious copyist's errors have been mended, and corrections made by the copyist in the course of transcription have been incorporated, as have the few minor revisions made in 1799 (cited in the notes). Uncertain readings are shown with question marks in brackets, and empty brackets enclose spaces left in the text in 1799. Punctuation has been sparingly modified; apostrophes have been supplied where necessary and ampersands expanded. In the stage directions and speaker identifications, conventions established in the printed version of 1842 have been followed, and a *dramatis personae* has been constructed to match that of 1842. The 1842 text, in *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*, is reproduced as the late-version (on the right-hand pages), emended in eleven cases by reference to the manuscripts and to later printed editions. These emendations are noted in the *apparatus criticus*, as are variant readings introduced in the three later lifetime London editions of the play, identified as follows:

- 1845 *Poems* (1845; reissued 1847, 1849)
1846 *Poetical Works* (7 vols., 1846; reissued 1849)
1849 *Poetical Works* (6 vols., 1849–50)

The early version is numbered by act, scene, and line; the late version is numbered continuously and its line numbers correspond to those of the Selincourt's text in *PW*, I. Bracketed line numbers in the right-hand margin of the early version key it to the late text. Beneath the early version are critical and interpretive notes, most of which apply equally to the late version.

Appendix III

Wordsworth's Notes to *The Borderers*

In *PELL*, in which Wordsworth misdated *The Borderers* a year early, the first of the following notes appears. A manuscript copy of it may be found in DC MS. 151/4, formerly MS. Verse 102(3), comprising a single sheet of white rolled paper, 32.2 by 19.7 centimeters. On one side of the paper, which bears no watermark, is the text of the note in the hand of Mary Wordsworth; on the other side, John Carter has entered a partial list of the contents of *PELL*. The text given below, drawn from *PELL*, is accompanied by an apparatus that records all manuscript variants except Mary's miswriting of single letters and her use of ampersands. No variants appear in the later lifetime printings of the note (1845, 1846, 1847, and 1849).

The Fenwick note is reproduced from Edward Quillinan's transcription, the only surviving manuscript, DC MS. 153.

[The 1842 Note]

This Dramatic Piece, as noted in its title-page, was composed in 1795-6. It lay nearly from that time till within the last two or three months unregarded among my papers, without being mentioned even to my most intimate friends. Having, however, impressions upon my mind which made me unwilling to destroy the MS., I determined to undertake the responsibility of publishing it during my own life, rather than impose upon my successors the task of deciding its fate. Accordingly it has been revised with some care; but, as it was at first written, and is now published, without any view to its exhibition upon the stage, not the slightest alteration has been made in the conduct of the story, or the composition of the characters; above all, in respect to the two leading Persons of the Drama, I felt no inducement to make any change. The study of human nature suggests this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart, and the perversion of the understanding to which they may carry their slaves. During my long residence in France, while the Revolution was rapidly advancing to its extreme of wickedness, I had frequent opportunities of being an eye-witness of this process, and it was while that knowledge was fresh upon my memory, that the Tragedy of 'The Borderers' was composed.

sheet headed (To the Printer, the following to be added to the Notes already sent)

1 This] *The rev to* This title inserted with *no hyphen* Page,

4 Friends. *no commas*

5 M.S.,

8 revised *over res[?] erased* care;

8-9 but . . . not inserted with *caret replacing* without

10 has been made inserted with *caret*

11 Characters;

12 Persons *over ones erased*

13 following change the word especially inserted, then *del* The study of *del*, then *rewritten*

14 this *rev from* the truths with *s del* as inserted with *caret*

15-16 from . . . no] from qualities that [that inserted with *caret*] are their very opposites, there

17 may inserted with *caret*

20 process;

21-22 *no comma, no quotes*

[The Fenwick Note (1843)]

The Borders a Tragedy. Of this dramatic Work I have little to say in addition to the short printed note which will be found attached to it. It was composed at Race Down in Dorset: ^{re} during the latter part of the year 95 & in the course of the following year. Had it been the work of a later period of life it would have been different in some respects from what it is now. The plot would have been something more complex & a greater variety of characters introduced to relieve the mind from the pressure of incidents so mournful. The manners also w^d. have been more attended to—my care was almost exclusively given to the passions & the characters, & the position in which the persons in the Drama stood relatively to each other, that the reader (for I ~~never~~ ^{had then no} thought of the Stage) might be moved & to a degree instructed by lights penetrating somewhat into the depths of our Nature. In this endeavour I cannot think upon a very late review that I have failed. As to the scene & period of action little more was required for my purpose than the absence of established Law & Government—so that the Agents might be at liberty to act on their own impulses. Nevertheless I do remember that having a wish to colour the manners in some degree from local history more than my knowledge enabled me to do I read Redpath's history of the Borders but found there nothing to my purpose. I once made an observation to Sir Walter Scott in which he concurred that it was difficult to conceive how so dull a book could be written on such a subject. Much about the same time, but a little after, Coleridge was employed in writing his *Tragedy of Remorse*, & it happened that soon after thro' one of the Mr. Pooles Mr. Knight the actor heard that we had been engaged in writing Plays & upon his suggestion mine was curtailed, & I believe Coleridge's also was offered to Mr. Harris Manager of Covent Garden. For myself I had no hope nor even a wish (tho' a successful Play would in the then state of my finances have been a most welcome piece of good fortune) that he should accept my performance so that I incurred no disappointment when the piece was *judiciously* returned as not calculated for the stage. In this judgement I entirely concurred, & had it been otherwise it was so natural for me to shrink from public notice that any hope I might have had of success would not have reconciled me altogether to such an exhibition. Mr. C—s play was as is well known brought forward several years

after thro' the kindness of Mr. Sheridan. In conclusion I may observe that while I was composing this play I wrote a short *essay* illustrative of that *matchless* actions of bad men intelligible to careful observers. This was partly done with reference to the character of Oswald & his persevering endeavour to lead the man he disliked into so heinous a crime, but still more to preserve in my distinct remembrance what I had observed of transition in character & the reflections I had been led to make during the time I was a witness of the changes through which the French Revolution passed.

