

# Wordsworth and Current Memory Research

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In the last twenty years, important developments have occurred in the study of memory among researchers from different fields of psychology, including cognitive psychology, neuroscience, clinical, personality, and social psychology, among others. Recent advances in memory research can be attributed largely to the fact that these various subdisciplines, which formerly operated in relative isolation, are now communicating and sharing discoveries, methods, and theories in what Jefferson A. Singer and Peter Salovey call “a healthy and blossoming cross-fertilization.”<sup>1</sup> Not only do many of the new memory researchers embrace an interdisciplinary collaboration among fellow psychologists, but they also draw upon the work of writers and artists who have anticipated scientific findings about the operation of memory and who, in the words of Daniel Schacter, can illuminate more effectively than scientists “the personal, experiential aspects of memory” and its “impact . . . in our day-to-day lives.”<sup>2</sup>

One writer who is unquestionably an appropriate candidate for interdisciplinary memory study is William Wordsworth, whose poetry is preoccupied with the role of memory in individual life. As Christopher Salvesen argues, the modern sense of the self in time, which gave new priority to memory as a foundation for individual identity, was “first given clear and powerful expression, and turned to poetry, by Wordsworth.” One of Wordsworth’s innovations, Salvesen notes, was to turn “remembered incident”

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into “poetic event.”<sup>3</sup> Even the briefest survey of Wordsworth’s oeuvre will document the importance of memory for this writer. Many of his best-known poems, such as “Tintern Abbey” and the “Intimations Ode,” directly explore the workings of memory as the speaker in each compares his present self to an earlier self and struggles to come to terms with what has been lost and what gained with the passage of time. Wordsworth famously characterized poetry as “emotion recollected in tranquillity,” making clear that he believed memory to play an essential role in the creative process.<sup>4</sup> In addition, in *The Prelude* Wordsworth redefines the epic for his era as the story of his own life, in which “spots of time” or core, emotionally charged memories form the climaxes of the work as well as its organizing principle.

Several prominent memory researchers recognize Wordsworth’s relevance to their studies and quote from his poetry.<sup>5</sup> Literary scholars, however, have neglected the work of these psychologists. Most psychological interpretations of Wordsworth have followed a Freudian model, applying concepts such as repression and screen memories to the poet’s treatment of the past.<sup>6</sup> Recent memory research has challenged many of Freud’s notions and offers new and, I would suggest, more fitting theories for understanding the nature and function of memory in Wordsworth’s poetry. Applying many of the new findings about memory’s operation to a study of Wordsworth’s poetry can open up fresh avenues of interpretation and clear up some misconceptions that have prevailed in Wordsworth criticism.

One of the chief points established by current research is that memory does not operate according to the models that have often been used to characterize its workings. It is not like a computer that stores and retrieves data, nor is it like a video camera that plays back tapes of recorded scenes from the past.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary researchers also would reject Thomas De Quincey’s well-known metaphor of the brain as a palimpsest, in which memories accumulate in successive layers over time but remain permanently engraved and accessible under appropriate conditions.<sup>8</sup> In fact, there is no such thing as an immutable, comprehensive, or objective memory. To begin with, we do not remember everything we experience. Instead, we remember only what we encode of any given scene or event. To ensure vivid memories, we must first of all pay attention to what is going on around us and encode specific details and nuances of our daily lives. As Schacter says: “If we operate on automatic pilot much of the time . . . we may pay a price by retaining only sketchy memories of where we

have been and what we have done.”<sup>9</sup> Research has shown that depressed people tend to have overly general memories, in part because they are not very attentive to their surroundings and tend to encode experiences in a global manner.<sup>10</sup> No one encodes every detail of a scene or incident, however; instead, what we encode is determined by our interests, needs, and established system of knowledge. This is why several people who have shared the same experience or witnessed the same event often remember it differently, each person having focused on the elements most meaningful to him or her.<sup>11</sup>

Besides being dependent on the past and on the encoding process, memories are affected by the cues that evoke them and the environment in which they are recalled. If an appropriate cue is not provided, an encoded memory can be inaccessible indefinitely.<sup>12</sup> In addition, a person’s beliefs, concerns, and expectations in the present can influence or alter memories, a phenomenon known as “retrospective bias.” Greg Markus conducted an experiment in which people in 1973 were asked their opinions on controversial social issues such as aid to minorities, legalization of marijuana, and women’s rights. When these people were interviewed again in 1982 and asked to state what their opinions had been nine years previously, it was discovered that their recollections were much more reflective of their current views than of their past beliefs.<sup>13</sup> In addition, a phenomenon termed “mood congruent retrieval” or recall operates whereby our present moods evoke memories consistent with that mood and also color past memories, making them more in keeping with the present emotional state. For example, one study revealed that when people are depressed they tend to recall their parents as having been harsh to them in childhood, but when the same people are not depressed they remember their childhood relationships with their parents more positively. A similar effect has been observed in chronic pain patients. Their memories of the intensity of past pain are affected by how much pain they are experiencing in the present.<sup>14</sup> These examples of the ways in which a person’s present state of mind shapes recollections of the past demonstrate that memories are not snapshots retrieved from the brain’s storage file but subjective, imaginative constructions that combine past and present.

Other kinds of memory distortions commonly occur. Memories of similar experiences can blend, so that we combine in one memory elements from various different episodes. Danish psychologist Steen F. Larsen wrote down his circumstances when he first heard the news that the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme

had been assassinated. Larsen had heard the news on the radio early in the morning. When he later recalled this memory, he included his wife in the scene, even though as his written account made clear he had been alone at the time. Many experiences of spending the morning with his wife had merged with this one specific incident and caused Larsen to insert his absent wife into his memory.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, memories can fade and become less accessible, especially if the memory is not often rehearsed, either in personal meditation or in narration to others. We simply do not remember everything we have experienced; some impressions and events are never encoded and therefore not available for retrieval, and other recollections grow dim with the passage of time.<sup>16</sup>

Wordsworth reflects an awareness of many of these aspects of memory's operation. The idea that our past experiences shape our present perceptions, so that what we pay attention to and encode is largely determined by our established personalities, is central to Wordsworth's outlook, most succinctly and memorably expressed in his claim that "The Child is father of the Man."<sup>17</sup> Wordsworth also conveys an understanding of the importance of effective encoding for vivid and long-lasting memories. The purpose of the *Lyrical Ballads* poems, according to Wordsworth's 1800 Preface, is to promote the cultivation of alert attention to subtle details of everyday life.<sup>18</sup> In Coleridge's well-known account, Wordsworth's "object" in his *Lyrical Ballads* poems was "to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us."<sup>19</sup> Wordsworth's concern to "look steadily at [his] subject," to practice himself and encourage in others a habit of close attention to the world around us, parallels Schacter's point that people who are not very alert to or focused on their surroundings will "be left with impoverished recollections."<sup>20</sup>

A passage that reveals Wordsworth's awareness of the selectivity of the encoding process occurs in *The Prelude*, book 7, where Wordsworth describes a beautiful boy who arrested his attention at the theater in London. "The mother, too," he notes,

Was present, but of her I know no more  
Than hath been said, and scarcely at this time  
Do I remember her; but I behold  
The lovely boy as I beheld him then.<sup>21</sup>

As Wordsworth makes clear, it was the child who mattered to him and on whom he focused his attention at the theater. The boy’s mother was also part of the scene, but since he did not encode her appearance, he did not remember her later with the vividness with which he recalled her son.

Wordsworth also conveys an awareness of the retrieval process and of the ways in which present moods and circumstances can alter memories. His habit of consulting his sister’s journal accounts of scenes and incidents they experienced together attests to his recognition that appropriate cues can activate memories. Even if Dorothy Wordsworth, with her own personal interests and history, did not encode all the same details as her brother did (as is reflected by differences in descriptions of the same episode in her journal and his poems), her entries would still be specific and effective retrieval cues for William.<sup>22</sup> In “Tintern Abbey,” the sister’s “wild eyes” (line 119) also serve as a cue to resurrect the speaker’s memory of his earlier response to the landscape. The scene itself is also a powerful cue that activates the speaker’s memory of his visit there five years earlier. As Stuart M. Sperry Jr. remarks, even though the speaker has often rehearsed the landscape’s “beauteous forms” in his memory during the intervening five years, “it is only when he is able to reexperience the scene directly and immediately that they begin to assume a heightened vitality and significance.”<sup>23</sup>

Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, lamenting Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s absence in Malta, tells his friend:

the lordly Alps themselves  
 .....  
 are not now  
 Since thy migration and departure, friend,  
 The gladsome image in my memory  
 Which they were used to be.

(10.990–5)

This passage records an experience of mood congruent retrieval, in which Wordsworth’s present sorrow alters a previously happy memory. “Elegiac Stanzas” is the most extreme example of this phenomenon; in that poem, Wordsworth’s grief over his brother’s death in a shipwreck causes him to reject as invalid all of his youthful memories of a benign natural world.

Several passages in *The Prelude* speak to the overall sense of the subjective quality of memory, in particular the way in which

subsequent experience and reflection alter one's impression of the past. In the midst of an account of his life at Cambridge, Wordsworth interrupts his narrative with this disclaimer:

Of these and other kindred notices  
 I cannot say what portion is in truth  
 The naked recollection of that time,  
 And what may rather have been called to life  
 By after-meditation.

(3.644–8)

In book 7, Wordsworth questions whether or not he should describe the London sights he witnessed during his first residence there in 1791, wondering,

Shall I give way,  
 Copying the impression of the memory—  
 Though things remembered idly do half seem  
 The work of fancy.

(lines 145–8)

Finally, in the most striking passage of this kind, Wordsworth near the beginning of book 4 (lines 247–64) develops an extended metaphor comparing the review of his past life to the effect of gazing in a still lake, in which the objects under the water cannot easily be distinguished from the reflections on its surface. In the same way as a person looking at the lake “often is perplexed, and cannot part / The shadow from the substance” (lines 254–5), so the person engaged in reminiscence has trouble distinguishing original impressions from subsequent emotions, experiences, and meditations that have shaped and altered them.

Wordsworth notes other kinds of memory distortion. In a passage describing the happy period of roaming the countryside around Penrith with Dorothy and Mary Hutchinson in 1787, Wordsworth is inclined to include Coleridge in the scene, even though he had not met Coleridge at the time. “O friend, we had not seen thee at that time,” Wordsworth writes, struggling with the images his mind presents to him, “And yet a power is on me and a strong / Confusion, and I seem to plant thee there” (6.246–8). Like Larsen who inserted his wife into his memory of hearing the news of the Swedish prime minister's assassination, Wordsworth “plants” Coleridge in his memory from the summer

of 1787. No doubt later experiences of similar happy outdoor walks with Coleridge, Dorothy, and Mary Hutchinson had merged with the earlier memory.

Wordsworth's poetry contains many eloquent statements on the fading of memory. Unlike De Quincey, Wordsworth was acutely aware of the fact that all memories are not retained indelibly in the mind and available for retrieval under appropriate circumstances. Probably the most explicit and moving expression of Wordsworth's apprehension of the steady and irrevocable deterioration of early memories is the "Intimations Ode," where growing older is characterized as a relentless march away from the light of childhood recollection and into the darkness of forgetting. *The Prelude* contains the poignant passage:

The days gone by  
Come back upon me from the dawn almost  
Of life; the hiding-places of my power  
Seem open, I approach, and then they close;  
I see by glimpses now, when age comes on  
May scarcely see at all; and I would give  
While yet we may, as far as words can give,  
A substance and a life to what I feel:  
I would enshrine the spirit of the past  
For future restoration.

(11.333–42)

One of the initial impulses behind Wordsworth's desire to commence work on a major poem, moreover, was

Reading or thinking, either to lay up  
New stores, or rescue from decay the old  
By timely interference.

(1.125–7)

Wordsworth was aware of the fact that memories decay, and his writing in many ways functioned as a means of suspending that process of deterioration.

Despite the fading and the many distortions to which memory is susceptible, Schacter emphasizes that "our memories for the broad contours of our lives are fundamentally accurate."<sup>24</sup> If autobiographical memories cannot be considered wholly accurate, objective snapshots of the past, they are not total fabrications

either. "There is a fundamental integrity to one's autobiographical recollections," cognitive psychologist Craig Barclay insists.<sup>25</sup> Memory loss can even be shown to have some advantages. Individuals would be overwhelmed by a chaos of impressions if they remembered everything.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the loss or consolidation of specific details into more generalized memories is necessary for many higher level thinking abilities. Case studies of people with phenomenal memory recall reveal that such people have trouble generalizing from their experience or grasping abstract concepts.<sup>27</sup>

Another benefit of memory loss or distortion has been proposed. A number of psychologists argue that these are useful mental strategies that permit individuals to develop and retain a unified identity that confirms their implicit assumptions about themselves. No coherent sense of self would emerge from a mass of remembered details, and we therefore encode, rehearse, and recall the information that fits certain themes and reinforces our self-images and preferred interpretations of our lives. In addition, if memories from the past are not consistent with our self-conceptions, these memories may be altered or adjusted to allow for a unified identity. Most people's self-images are positive, but they can also be negative; for psychic well being, human beings require a consistent sense of self and a coherent life story, even if they see themselves and their lives as flawed and tragic.<sup>28</sup> According to Freudian psychoanalysis, memory loss and distortions are signs of neurosis, and the goal of therapy is to help patients resurrect buried memories or purge inaccurate ones of defensive distortions. Current memory research challenges the ideas that all memories are recoverable and that objectively true memories are stored intact in the brain's archives. Many psychologists today also believe that memory loss and distortions are consistent with and even necessary for mental health. Shelley E. Taylor, for example, argues that normal human perception and memory are biased in a way that "promotes benign fictions about the self, the world, and the future" and that such positive illusions, far from hampering our ability to function effectively, actually help us adapt to stress and traumatic life events.<sup>29</sup> A healthy, functioning individual is one who is in command of a coherent life story and sense of identity, even if that story and identity involve omissions or deviations from the historical record.<sup>30</sup>

Once again, these points about positive aspects of memory loss and distortion have corollaries in Wordsworth's poetry. In the "Intimations Ode," the speaker recognizes that, though his



memories of childhood have suffered significant deterioration, some traces or “embers” remain (line 129); the memories do not disappear altogether, and

Those shadowy recollections  
 . . . be they what they may,  
 Are yet the fountain light of all of our day,  
 Are yet a master light of all our seeing.

(lines 149–52)

As Schacter and others note, there is a core reliability or integrity to our memories that we can trust and on which we can anchor our identities. In both “Tintern Abbey” and the “Intimations Ode,” Wordsworth struggles to come to terms with his increasing distance from his youthful self and to find “[a]bundant recompense” in his present condition (“Tintern Abbey,” line 88). In both poems, he declares that with age he has gained greater intellectual abilities or a “philosophic mind” (“Intimations Ode,” line 186). He recognizes that, with the loss of the immediacy of his youthful impressions or the fading and blurring of his recollections of that vivid state, he has gained a greater ability to abstract and generalize from his experience. He now sees not only how his youthful experiences can be subsumed in a broader, more complex sense of himself, but he also regards his own experience as representatively human, as he relates his personal feelings to “the still, sad music of humanity,” to his sister Dorothy (“Tintern Abbey,” lines 91, 111–59), and to “human suffering,” “man’s mortality,” and “the human heart” (“Intimations Ode,” lines 184, 198, 200).

Finally, in both “Tintern Abbey” and the “Intimations Ode,” Wordsworth strives to retain a connection to his earlier self. In the first poem, he insists despite evidence to the contrary that he is “still / A lover of the meadows and the woods, / And mountains” as he was in his youth, and that he in fact now worships nature “With warmer love” than he did five years ago (lines 102–4, 154). Similarly, despite the fact that the “Intimations Ode” is all about a profound change in the speaker’s response to the natural world, he eventually rejects “any severing” of the intimate relationship with nature he experienced in his childhood and claims that his losses are minor, as he has “only . . . relinquished one delight / To live beneath [nature’s] more habitual sway” (lines 188, 190–1). In “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth also reexperiences his youthful self momentarily through Dorothy and at the end of the poem commands her to keep him alive in her

memory. Clearly Wordsworth strives to retain a sense of continuity in his identity. He recoils from a “severing” or stark separation from his youthful self and clings to memory, his own or other people’s, or even distorts the record of the past or of his present experience to allow for that desired consistency. Whereas this tendency has sometimes been deplored as a sign of weakness or pathology, however, we can see it in the light of current psychological theory as a typical, even healthy human impulse.<sup>31</sup>

The phrase Schacter uses repeatedly to characterize memory is “fragile power.” As he explains in his introduction: “This important duality—memory’s many limitations on the one hand and its pervasive influence on the other—is at the heart of [his] book.”<sup>32</sup> A recognition of the “fragile power” of memory could be considered a central theme in Wordsworth’s poetry as well. *The Prelude* is filled with moments in which a powerful memory from the past flashes into the present, as when Mary of Buttermere’s image rises vividly in Wordsworth’s mind and prevents him from returning to his argument (7.347–51); or when the recollection of French republican soldiers going off to battle brings tears into the present-day Wordsworth’s eyes (9.273–80); or when, after narrating childhood pastimes, he exclaims:

Unfading recollections—at this hour  
The heart is almost mine with which I felt  
From some hill-top on sunny afternoons  
The kite, high up among the fleecy clouds,  
Pull at its rein like an impatient courser.

(1.517–21)

At the same time, as we have seen, the poem contains poignant statements about the erosion of memory. Another well-known passage expresses a feeling of radical separation from, rather than unity with, the youthful self whose experiences Wordsworth is narrating in the poem.

A tranquillizing spirit presses now  
On my corporeal frame, so wide appears  
The vacancy between me and those days,  
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind  
That sometimes when I think of them I seem  
Two consciousnesses—conscious of myself,  
And of some other being.

(2.27–33)

As previously discussed, “Tintern Abbey” and the “Intimations Ode” also speak to both a sense of alienation from one’s past as memories fade and an ongoing sense of continuity through memory. The myth of a preexistent state incorporated into the “Intimations Ode” also captures the paradoxical nature of memory’s fragile power for Wordsworth. In his claim that we are born with memories of a former life Wordsworth reveals his inability to conceive of human consciousness without memory. Our “first affections” in the poem are already “recollections” (lines 148–9). On the other hand, as Sperry argues, the poem characterizes birth as “a sleep and a forgetting” (line 58), and one’s earliest recollections are “shadowy” (line 149); the dreary process of memory loss begins with birth itself, simultaneous with the period of memory’s greatest vividness and accuracy.<sup>33</sup>

Besides providing insights into particular Wordsworth poems, recent memory research can also shed light on a number of controversies in Wordsworth criticism. A great deal of debate has occurred over Wordsworth’s revisions to *The Prelude* and the question of which version of the poem should be considered the best. Many of the most virulent attacks on the 1850 *Prelude* focus on revisions that alter beliefs expressed in earlier versions of the poem. For example, the 1850 *Prelude* contains a passage praising Edmund Burke (7.512–43), which did not exist in the 1805 text. As the editors of the Norton Critical Edition note, these lines, first added in 1832, “record an admiration certainly not felt by the younger, republican Wordsworth for Edmund Burke.”<sup>34</sup> Critics also complain about revisions that introduce a more explicitly Christian belief system into the poem than prevailed in the pantheistic early versions. For example, the lines “I worshipped then among the depths of things / As my soul bade me” in 1805 (11.233–4) becomes in 1850, “Worshipping then among the depth of things, / As piety ordained” (12.184–5). Critics have charged that such changes in belief introduced by later revisions constitute “a betrayal of the Wordsworth who wrote 1805 . . . he is betraying his earlier self, which wasn’t like that.”<sup>35</sup> Norman Fruman states that “In later years Wordsworth’s opinions and feelings did change, about many things, from politics to religion to the proper language, technique, and subjects of poetry. And the consequence of these deep changes in feeling and thought was to impose upon the 1805 *Prelude* another consciousness.” Fruman also complains several times that the 1850 *Prelude* deviates from the truth. “Whatever else *The Prelude* is,” he asserts, “it purports to tell the truth about the growth of the poet’s mind.

When we feel that Wordsworth is not telling the truth, or suppressing it, the poem suffers." Later he categorically states that in the 1850 *Prelude*, Wordsworth is "not telling the truth about the past."<sup>36</sup> Stephen Gill, writing about revisions in various poems, says this activity illustrates "how far-reaching was Wordsworth's compulsion to reuse his earlier poetry and to remould it in such a way that it becomes congruent with his current perception of himself or with his current flow of thought." "At key moments," Gill remarks disapprovingly, "he rewrites his history by rewriting his verse, and towards the end of his life, does not even scruple to offer the present as if it were the past," as when he published recently revised early poems in the 1842 volume, *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*.<sup>37</sup>

Comments such as these object to the older Wordsworth's tampering with early poems on the grounds that such alterations distort the accuracy of the poet's original experience. As we have seen, however, people commonly revise their memories of past experience to make them conform to their present moods and outlooks, even confidently attributing their present beliefs to their younger, more liberal selves. Readers may still find earlier versions of *Prelude* passages more effective aesthetically than later versions, but charges that imply Wordsworth is subversive, deviant, or pathological (Gill's "compulsion") in his rewriting of his personal past should be corrected in light of the knowledge that Wordsworth is doing what all of us do as we remember experiences at different periods in our lives. Salvesen claims that *The Prelude* illustrates "memory in action."<sup>38</sup> If this is the case, then the various revisions introduced at different stages of Wordsworth's life are essential components of the poem, providing evidence of the operation of memory over time. Singer and Salovey state that the most useful future research on memory will be longitudinal studies, tracing changes and continuities in people's memories throughout their lives. They cite as a relevant literary example of such a long-term study Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which was revised, rearranged, and expanded in a series of new editions over the course of thirty-seven years. In the same way, Singer and Salovey write, "so do we all add, delete, and alter our collection of self-defining memories until we reach a final edition brought on only by our own death. And who is to say that, in some crucial sense, the life that we remember is not the life we lived?"<sup>39</sup> These points about parallels between Whitman's much-revised poem and the workings of memory in all people certainly apply to the multiple versions of *The Prelude* as well.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the intense controversy that has arisen over revisions in later versions of *The Prelude*, a number of critics have pointed out that significant changes in statements of belief are actually quite rare and that the content and structure of the poem remain fundamentally consistent from one version to the next. Robert Barth argues that charges that Wordsworth violated the 1805 poem by inserting alien religious statements into it later are misguided or exaggerated for, as he documents, the 1805 version contains many Christian references too.<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Roe also argues for a fundamental consistency in the poem's political beliefs over time, saying that many later revisions constitute "an introspective Jacobinism" in keeping with the poet's youthful radical beliefs.<sup>42</sup> Even Herbert Lindenberger, arguing for the superiority of the 1805 text, admits that it is "surprising how many of Wordsworth's earlier sentiments remained in the final version."<sup>43</sup> Such points are in keeping with psychologists' claim that, although memories are subject to distortion, our recall of the broad contours of our experiences are generally reliable and not prone to radical change.

In addition, charges that the later Wordsworth had no business reworking his earlier accounts of youthful experiences because he had grown too distant from them should be qualified by the fact that, although older people have more trouble than younger people in accurately and vividly recalling recent events, their long-term memories remain fairly reliable, since much-rehearsed long-term memories appear to be stored in cortical networks outside the medial temporal regions, which are necessary for creating and accessing recent memories.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, although in general memories get weaker with the passage of time, a "remembrance bump" occurs for memories of late adolescence and young adulthood. This is a life period that most people remember with particular clarity, perhaps because this is the time when we first begin to identify our core, self-defining memories and construct the central narrative of our life stories.<sup>45</sup> For these reasons, we can assume that Wordsworth did not dramatically lose touch with the memories of his youth and young adulthood narrated in *The Prelude*. It is true that, as previously discussed, memories of specific events may over time consolidate with others into more generalized memories. In addition, we tend to experience older memories from an observer rather than a field perspective; that is, we see ourselves as actors in the memory instead of re-experiencing it "from something like the original perspective."<sup>46</sup> These aspects of memory's operation over time

may account for some of the charges critics have made that the 1850 *Prelude* is more abstract and general than the more concrete and immediate 1805 or 1799 versions. Fruman's claim that in the 1850 account of the ascent of Mt. Snowdon "the speaker is no longer inside his materials as a *participant*, but is now the detached observer Coleridge so wanted him to be" directly identifies this shift from a field to an observer perspective on events from the past.<sup>47</sup> This shift may have less to do with Coleridge's insidious teachings, however, than with the customary operation of memory over time.

In his "Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads*," Wordsworth declares that a primary purpose of his poetry is to analyze the mind's operation or "the primary laws of our nature." In the same essay he insists that the poet and the man of science, though differing in style and approach, are fundamentally allied in their interests and goals and can fruitfully explore the same subjects. "The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist," he writes, "will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed." The poet can collaborate with the man of science by giving "a form of flesh and blood" to scientific discoveries and thereby familiarize them for ordinary people.<sup>48</sup> Schacter basically endorses Wordsworth's scheme for the collaborative roles of poets and scientists when he claims that "Scientific research is the most powerful way to find out how memory works," but writers and artists can convey more effectively than science "the personal, experiential aspects of memory" and its impact "in our day-to-day lives."<sup>49</sup> Clearly Wordsworth saw affinities between his own aims and interests and those of scientists or (I believe he would have included in his list of compatible professionals) social scientists. Singer and Salovey declare that "we are indeed in a new age of exploration" in the study of memory, brought about by the willingness of researchers from various fields to learn from each other, and one goal of their work is "to encourage a dialogue between . . . psychology and related disciplines interested in similar" issues.<sup>50</sup> I would urge literary scholars to join in the interdisciplinary dialogue on the workings of memory and apply its important findings to new ways of reading Wordsworth's poetry.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jefferson A. Singer and Peter Salovey, *The Remembered Self: Emotion and Memory in Personality* (New York: Free Press, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), p. 11. Many of my points about the operation of memory derive from this book by noted Harvard psychologist Schacter, who helpfully summarizes recent memory research for a general audience. Schacter's *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001) appeared after my essay was written and accepted for publication, but I was able to incorporate relevant passages from it before my article went to press.

<sup>3</sup>Christopher Salvesen, *The Landscape of Memory: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 173, 101. Herbert Lindenberger also comments on the ways in which Wordsworth's treatment of time and memory in *The Prelude* differs from past literary treatments and helps to inaugurate the modern "time-book" tradition (*On Wordsworth's "Prelude"* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963], chaps. 5, 6).

<sup>4</sup>William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads*," in *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), pp. 445–64, 460.

<sup>5</sup>Singer and Salovey quote and comment on "Tintern Abbey" (pp. 122–3); Dan McAdams cites the "Intimations Ode" in *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: William Morrow, 1993), pp. 277, 279. Schacter in *The Seven Sins of Memory* also quotes from the "Intimations Ode" (p. 40).

<sup>6</sup>Critics who have analyzed memory in Wordsworth's poetry from a Freudian perspective include Richard J. Onorato, *The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in "The Prelude"* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971); Peter J. Manning, "'My former thoughts returned': Wordsworth's *Resolution and Independence*," *WC* 9, 4 (Autumn 1978): 398–404; Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 58–9, 64–7, 74–5; Richard D. McGhee, "Resistance and Revision in Wordsworth's *Prelude*," *L&P* 32, 1 (1986): 37–52; and Eugene L. Stelzig, "Memory, Imagination, and Self-Healing in the Romantic Crisis Lyric: 'Trilogie der Leidenschaft' and 'Resolution and Independence,'" *JEGP* 90, 4 (October 1991): 524–41.

<sup>7</sup>See Gerald M. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), pp. 237–8; Schacter, *Searching for Memory*; and Singer and Salovey, pp. 67, 121. James L. McClelland similarly argues that memories are not like books retrieved from a library ("Constructive Memory and Memory Distortions: A Parallel-Distributed Processing Approach," in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. Schacter [Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995], pp. 69–90, 73).

<sup>8</sup>Thomas De Quincey, "The Palimpsest of the Human Brain," in *Suspiria De Profundis, The Collected Writing of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson, new and enlarged edn., 14 vols. (1890; rpt. New York: AMS, 1968), 13:348. This De Quincey passage is often cited in relation to Wordsworth's treatment of memory. See for example Salvesen, p. 171; Jonathan Wordsworth, "Revision as Making: *The Prelude* and Its Peers," in *Romantic Revisions*, ed. Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 18–42, 35–6; and Annette Cafarelli, "Waiting for the Palfreys: The Great *Prelude* Debate," *WC* 17, 1 (Winter 1986): 28. This issue of *The Wordsworth*

*Circle* is entirely composed of a transcription of the position papers, cross-questioning, and ensuing debate among panelists and audience that took place at the Wordsworth Summer Conference in 1984. All subsequent references to speakers featured in this issue will be documented by name, "Waiting for the Palfreys," and page numbers.

<sup>9</sup> Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> See Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 211; J. Mark G. Williams, "Autobiographical Memory and Emotional Disorders," in *The Handbook of Emotion and Memory: Research and Theory*, ed. Sven-Åke Christianson (Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), pp. 451–77, 470; and Singer and Salovey, pp. 104–14.

<sup>11</sup> See Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, pp. 39–52. Gordon H. Bower also summarizes these points about the encoding process, which he refers to as "commonplace" ideas ("How Might Emotions Affect Learning?" in *The Handbook of Emotion and Memory*, pp. 3–31, 12). McClelland proposes that the mind constructs a "system of knowledge" from "the accumulated effects of prior experience," into which relevant aspects of new memories are stored and synthesized (p. 84).

<sup>12</sup> See Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, pp. 59–64. Endel Tulving first established the encoding specificity principle, or the idea that memory traces or engrams are determined by the particular way in which they are encoded and can only be recalled by cues that match them precisely (see Tulving and Donald M. Thomson, "Encoding Specificity and Retrieval Processes in Episodic Memory," *Psychological Review* 80, 5 [September 1973]: 352–73; and Tulving, *Elements of Episodic Memory* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983], pp. 223–4).

<sup>13</sup> Greg Markus's experiment is reported in Robyn M. Dawes, *Rational Choice in an Uncertain World* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), pp. 107–8. On retrospective bias see also Linda M. Collins et al., "Agreement between Retrospective Accounts of Substance Use and Earlier Reported Substance Use," *Applied Psychological Measurement* 9, 3 (September 1985): 301–9; Michael Ross and Michael Conway, "Remembering One's Own Past: The Construction of Personal Histories," in *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition: Foundations of Social Behavior*, ed. Richard M. Sorrentino and E. Tory Higgins (New York: Guilford Press, 1986), pp. 122–44; Ross, "Relation of Implicit Theories to the Construction of Personal Histories," *Psychological Review* 96, 2 (April 1989): 341–57; Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, pp. 105–6, 212; and Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, pp. 139–44, where this tendency is termed a "consistency bias."

<sup>14</sup> On mood congruent recall see Ross and Conway, pp. 133–4; Bower, pp. 20–2; Singer and Salovey, pp. 13–37; and Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, pp. 211–2. The study of the effect of mood on recollections of parental behavior is reported in Dawes, pp. 110–1. The pain experiment is reported in Eric Eich et al., "Memory for Pain: Relation between Past and Present Pain Intensity," *Pain* 23, 4 (December 1985): 375–9.

<sup>15</sup> Steen F. Larsen, "Potential Flashbulbs: Memories of Ordinary News as Baseline," in *Affect and Accuracy in Recall: Studies of "Flashbulb" Memories*, ed. Eugene Winograd and Ulric Neisser (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 32–64, 32–3. McClelland proposes that all memories combine with other, related memories stored in the brain, so that any act of remembering must be thought of as "a synthesis of contributions from many different sources of information" (p. 88).



<sup>16</sup> See Schacter, *Searching for Memory and Seven Sins of Memory*, pp. 26, 31–6.

<sup>17</sup> Wordsworth, “My Heart Leaps Up,” in *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, p. 160, line 7. All subsequent references from Wordsworth’s shorter poems will be from this edition and will appear parenthetically within the text by title and line number.

<sup>18</sup> See Wordsworth, “Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads*,” p. 449.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn, 16 vols. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), 7.2:7.

<sup>20</sup> Wordsworth, “Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads*,” p. 450; Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> Wordsworth, “*The Prelude of 1805 in Thirteen Books*,” in *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 28–484, bk. 7, lines 392–6. All subsequent references to this work will be from this edition and will appear parenthetically within the text according to book and line number.

<sup>22</sup> Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, comments on the fact that siblings’ memories of shared experiences from the past often vary, as a result of differences in encoding as well as frequency of later rehearsal (p. 94).

<sup>23</sup> Stuart M. Sperry Jr., “From ‘Tintern Abbey’ to the ‘Intimations Ode’: Wordsworth and the Function of Memory,” *WC* 1, 2 (Spring 1970): 40–9, 41.

<sup>24</sup> Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 95. Ross and Conway also assert that “Personal recall is malleable, but we have little evidence that people are totally out of touch with reality” (p. 139).

<sup>26</sup> This point is made by John R. Anderson and Lael J. Schooler, “Reflections of the Environment in Memory,” *Psychological Science* 2, 6 (November 1991): 396–408, 396; Singer and Salovey, p. 121; Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, pp. 3–4, 81; and Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, pp. 187–90.

<sup>27</sup> See McClelland, p. 84; Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, pp. 80–1, 91; and Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, pp. 190–4. Singer and Salovey note that obsessive-compulsives often have “an excellent memory for facts but seldom [integrate] this information meaningfully” (p. 105).

<sup>28</sup> On people’s tendency to perceive, elicit, and remember experiences that confirm their self-concepts, see Ross and Conway; Ross; and William B. Swann Jr. and Stephen J. Read, “Self-Verification Processes: How We Sustain Our Self-Conceptions,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 17, 4 (July 1981): 351–70. The argument that a coherent life story and sense of self are essential to psychological well-being is made by Singer and Salovey (*passim*, but in relation to points made in this paragraph see especially chap. 6) and McAdams.

<sup>29</sup> Shelley E. Taylor, *Positive Illusions: Creative Self-Deception and the Healthy Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p. xi. See also Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, pp. 149–53, 194.

<sup>30</sup> Singer and Salovey write that, “Although [important] memories may contain but a kernel of their original truth and be filled with embellishments, false recollections, descriptions provided by others, and multiple events blended into seemingly singular occurrences, these characteristics in no way diminish their power in organizing who we are” (p. 13).

<sup>31</sup> Many critics, beginning perhaps with David Perkins, have remarked Wordsworth's attraction to stability, continuity, and permanence and his concomitant horror of instability, separation, and change (*The Quest for Permanence: The Symbolism of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats* [Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959]). Those who specifically comment on the ways in which Wordsworth's poetry emphasizes a continuous and stable sense of self over time include Salvesen (see esp. chap. 2 and p. 177, where Salvesen says that "the goal of Wordsworth's poetry" was "unity of self in time"); Gill, "Affinities Preserved': Poetic Self-Reference in Wordsworth," *SIR* 24, 4 (Winter 1985): 531–49; and Zachary Leader, "Wordsworth, Revision, and Personal Identity," *ELH* 60, 3 (Fall 1993): 651–83. As I remark below, Gill regards Wordsworth's preoccupation with maintaining "affinities . . . Between all the stages of the life of man" reflected in his revisions and recycling of poetry, as abnormal and neurotic (lines written toward *Michael*; quoted in Gill, p. 531).

<sup>32</sup> Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Sperry, pp. 43–4.

<sup>34</sup> Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, p. 255, n. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Lindenberger, "Waiting for the Palfreys," p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Fruman, "Waiting for the Palfreys," pp. 13, 11, 29. Fruman also quotes Helen Darbishire's declaration that later revisions to the 1805 poem "generally mar the poetry; they always disguise the truth" (p. 13).

<sup>37</sup> Gill, pp. 537, 540.

<sup>38</sup> Salvesen, p. 96.

<sup>39</sup> Singer and Salovey, p. 200.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Barth in "Waiting for the Palfreys" defends the 1850 version on the grounds that the poem is about the "growth of a poet's mind," and it is logical to assume that the process of growth would continue and be recorded after 1805. "To deny the validity of" Wordsworth's later perspective on his past, Barth writes, would be "to deny the process of growth . . . the very principle of Wordsworth's poem" (p. 18; see also pp. 30, 34).

<sup>41</sup> Barth, "Waiting for the Palfreys," pp. 17–20.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Roe, "Revising the Revolution: History and Imagination in *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*," in *Romantic Revisions*, pp. 87–102, 92.

<sup>43</sup> Lindenberger, "Waiting for the Palfreys," p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> See McClelland, pp. 84–8; Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, pp. 86, 299, and chap. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 298; Singer and Salovey, pp. 77–8.

<sup>46</sup> Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 21. On the tendency for older people's memories to become more general and blurred with subsequent experiences, see also Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, pp. 15–6, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Fruman, "Waiting for the Palfreys," p. 7; see also p. 8. Other critics who note passages in 1850 where Wordsworth is more general or abstract than in 1805 include Lindenberger ("Waiting for the Palfreys," p. 3), Barth ("Waiting for the Palfreys," p. 17), and Leader (pp. 672–5).

<sup>48</sup> Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads*," pp. 447, 456.

<sup>49</sup> Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Singer and Salovey, pp. 201, 4.