

'Of Henry's (Remains)', Southey wrote to White, 'I foresaw the success as much as such a thing could be foreseen. But Roberts has left nothing so good as Henry's best pieces.'⁸ In the case of Roberts's *Remains* the probability of a reasonably good general sale was less good, so that Southey, although not personally involved in their publication, thought it necessary to enlist the help of some of his more influential friends in order to raise as many subscriptions as possible.⁹

In addition to the biographical data mentioned in the letters to Sharp and White, the main source of information about Roberts is the Memoir which opens with the posthumous volume of his *Poems and Letters*.¹⁰ Here we are informed that Roberts was born in Bristol on 5 May 1786. During his childhood no striking indications of extraordinary talent were observed, but when he attended the academy his superiority over most of his school-fellows soon became conspicuous. From 1797 onwards Roberts frequently exercised himself in practical composition: 'versions of some of the psalms, and of some episodes from Ossian, as well as few original pieces of inconsiderable length, were successively produced prior to the year 1802, when the incitements held out by the editors of the "Monthly Perceptor", stimulated our young poet to a more strenuous exertion of that talent which his occasional practice had been gradually improving'.¹¹ Prizes were awarded to him by this magazine for a translation from Horace and for an *Ode to Science*. On leaving school he became a clerk in a Bristol bank. Soon after he developed consumption and died on 26 December 1806.

During the last months of his short life Roberts made a selection of his poems, sorted his papers, and bequeathed them to his sister, of whom he was very fond, and to whom he had nothing else to leave. In his last will he states his purpose as follows:

To me, indeed, appertains but little of this world's benefit – a few sparks struck from

⁸ C. C. Southey, op.cit., 280.

⁹ The list of subscribers added to the Memoir includes the name of White but not that of Sharp.

¹⁰ W. I. Roberts, *Poems and Letters by the Late William Isaac Roberts, of Bristol, deceased. With some account of his Life* (London, 1811), LV + 247 pp.

¹¹ idem, vii–viii.

the flint of Sorrow (I have called them Poems) is all I have that may be productive. The poems, with all profit, &c. which may accrue from them, I bequeath to my dear sister Eliza . . .

Would that I could die with the idea that their publication would produce some little of that independence it has been my heart's first and fondest wish to bestow her! She must not take it as a gift, but as the disposition of duty¹².

This is a touching document and one cannot but sympathize with the subsequent publication of his *Remains* in execution of the young poet's last will. Yet, as Southey puts it in his letter to Sharp, it was done 'for the love of charity rather than of literature'. Indeed, when one reads Roberts's poetry today, he appears very small beer indeed. He was unquestionably not a Chatterton in the bud, not even a Kirke White. Yet it is possible to catch an occasional glimpse in him of a vein of genuine, if minor, poetry.

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¹² idem, xxiii–xxiv.

TWO UNPUBLISHED LETTERS FROM WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

FURTHER correspondence from canonical Romantic poets has emerged from the Brooks Collection, owned by the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, and held at Northumberland County Record Office.¹ The following two brief letters from William Wordsworth were written towards the end of the poet's life, at Rydal Mount.

The first, to an unknown addressee, is dated 21 July 1844, and reads:

My dear Sir,

The old alder tree upon Rydal Bank whose size attracted your notice, measures in girth fifteen feet 4 inches four feet from the ground.

I remain

Dear Sir

Faithfully yours

Wm Wordsworth

¹ Christopher Goulding, 'An Unpublished Southey Letter', *N&Q*, cxxlvi (2001), 127–8.

Wordsworth's poetry famously provides us with evidence of a long-standing propensity to the measurement of trees, as the following lines from *The Thorn* (1798) illustrate:

I've measured it from side to side: (32)
'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide.

However, in this case, existing correspondence suggests both a likely reason for the poet's interest in the alder's girth, as well as a likely correspondent. Wordsworth had written to Henry Crabb Robinson a week earlier on 14 July, referring to the forthcoming visit of a Mr Salvin, an architect who was to draw up plans for:

. . . a Cottage which we mean to build . . .
The Site of the Intended Building will be some part of the field, near our garden, at the top of which runs the green terrace.²

We might presume that in the new letter Wordsworth is answering a practical query raised by Salvin, following his visit.

The second letter is dated 28 July, with no year indicated, though '1845' has been superimposed in pencil, possibly by the collector. This letter reads:

Mr Wordsworth begs Mr Mackay to accept his thanks for the volume which he has recd this morning; he hopes that he may have the pleasure of seeing Mr M. at Rydal Mount at his own convenience.

The letter is accompanied by what appears to be a cutting from an auction sale catalogue, which reads:

WORDSWORTH (William), poet laureate;
b. 1770, d. 1850.
a.l.s. (3rd p.), to Charles Mackay. 1 page 16
mo . . . 0 6 0

The volume referred to may possibly be an advance copy of Mackay's *The Scenery and Poetry of the English Lakes: A Summer Ramble*, which was published in London in 1846 by Longman, Brown & Green.³

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² *Letters of William Wordsworth: A New Selection*, ed. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 312–13.

³ *The Cornell Wordsworth Collection: A Catalogue of Books and Manuscripts Presented to the University by Mr Victor Emanuel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 310.

WORDSWORTH'S READING OF THOMAS WEST'S *ANTIQUITIES OF FURNESS IN 1808*

THERE are two paragraphs of quotation from, and several references to, Thomas West's *Antiquities of Furness* (1774) in W. Wordsworth's *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire* (1810), which is the first version of his *Guide through the District of the Lakes in the North of England*. This use of West in *Select Views* has been taken as the first evidence of Wordsworth's reading of West's *Antiquities of Furness*.¹ But there is an unrecognized instance that clearly shows that Wordsworth read this book in 1808.

In Book VII of *The Excursion*, the Pastor, after he has told a story of a knight who selected Grasmere as his last dwelling place in the Elizabethan times, mentions that there now remains little trace of him. The Wanderer is affected by this story to think that 'All that this world is proud of' (line 978) fast fades away and disappears. He continues:

From their spheres
The stars of human glory are cast down;
Perish the roses and flowers of kings,
Princes, and emperors, and the crowns and palms
Of all the mighty, withered and consumed!

(lines 978–82)

In the note to lines 980–2 Wordsworth explains where he got the words and ideas of these lines:

The 'Transit gloria mundi' is finely expressed in the Introduction to the Foundation-charters of some of the ancient Abbeys. Some expressions here used are taken from that of the Abbey of St. Mary's Furness, the translation of which is as follows:

'Considering every day the uncertainty of life, that the roses and flowers of Kings, Emperors, and Dukes, and the crowns and palms of all the great, wither and decay; and that all things, with an uninterrupted course, tend to dissolution and death: I therefore,'
*etc.*²

It is evident that lines 980–2 are the versification of this passage quoted from a foundation

¹ On Wordsworth's reading of West, see D. Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1800–1815* (Cambridge, 1995), 237.

² *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire (Oxford, 1949), V, 468.