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Contents

Editor’s Note  vii

Animal Liberation: Vegetarian Benevolence, Animal Natures, and Speciesism in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein
Katherine Williams  1

Poet to Poet: The Poems of William Wordsworth as Selected by Lawrence Durrell
Paul H. Lorenz  13

The Sea of Ineffable Bliss: Tagore and Wordsworth
Kalyan Chatterjee  27

Lincoln’s Revolutionary Rhetoric in Doris Kearns Goodwin’s Team of Rivals and the Historiographic Elegies of Walt Whitman
Christopher Allan Black  53

Contributors  85
The Philological Review offices have been very productive lately. My staff and I have worked hard to meet expectations and honor the trust placed in us by the Arkansas Philological Association. As we work on the tasks that result in this publication, we bring together divergent points of view. My job as editor is to coordinate those views into a unified vision which produces the tangible results that make us all proud. You now hold in your hands the outcome of our efforts to make the work of us all—writers, reviewers, and editor--visible. As a result of our labor, my staff and I have lately been considering the word view. A view is a perspective, and while no humans share identical views, together we pursue the study of language and literature in order to understand these differences. Ideally, each of us illuminates for others the work of the brightest.

A woman who has illuminated my own development of perspective is Dr. Virginia Levey. When I first met her, she had recently lost her lifemate, her husband of many years. The class she taught me, Modern American Novels, was shadowed by his absence in her life. I never knew him, but through her he taught me a lesson in perspective. I learned that understanding literature requires recognizing
perspective, that understanding one another requires an awareness of differing views. When we do not see literature in the same way, it is because we do not look from the same viewpoint.

Some writers open our vistas, broaden our visions of literature and its context. Other writers clarify our views by strengthening our certainty of our own understandings. Writers whose works ask me to look again at the authors I know and love and teach shed light on my understanding, doing me a valuable service, even if I cannot bring myself to share their views. No time spent with great literature is wasted, and time spent considering other points of view is enriching.

In this issue, we have four articles, each a lesson in perspective. The first is a view of *Frankenstein* as a novel reflective of contemporary concerns with speciesism. The next two offer us varying views of one writer: The first of them considers Lawrence Durrell’s view of William Wordsworth, and the second of them views Rabinishad Tagore in light of Wordsworth’s influence. Both ask us to reconsider, to reread Wordsworth as well as Durrell and Tagore. The final paper converges Walt Whitman’s and Doris Kearns Goodwin’s views of Lincoln. These views of literary study are worthy of our consideration and inspire my staff’s best efforts at producing our publication.

Your responses and the results of your own considerations are, as always, welcome. Our journal excels only insofar as the contributions of our individual talents are shared in common. For sharing her views of Richard Wilbur, for her faithfulness to students even in the midst of personal tragedy, and for her unfailing example of a woman victorious through
trials, this issue is dedicated to Dr. Virginia Levey. For her view of the study of English, and for my chancellor Dr. Jack Lassiter, I am ever grateful.
Animal Liberation: Vegetarian Benevolence, Animal Natures and Speciesism in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

Katherine Williams

Following Mary Wollstonecraft’s publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Thomas Taylor anonymously published the satire *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* in 1792. In it, he applies a *reductio-ad-absurdum* argument that if men give such lesser beings (women) rights, then they would likewise have to give even lesser beings (animals) rights as well, and so on that even the rights of minerals and plants must be considered (Morton 30). Mary Shelley would have been aware of the criticism her mother faced, and she was also a vindicator for women’s rights as well as animal welfare. Like her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley, she was a vegetarian concerned with the well-being of nonhuman animals. Her opus *Frankenstein*, in which a human/animal creature endures cruelty inflicted on him by his scientist creator demonstrates attitudes of the prejudice held by humans against nonhuman animals known today as speciesism.

The term “speciesism” did not exist when Mary
Shelley was alive; it was not until 1975, when Richard D. Ryder used the term in his book *Victims of Science*, to comment on how speciesism was an act of prejudice parallel to racism and sexism. Peter Singer, whose book *Animal Liberation* launched animal rights into a mainstream topic of interest, defines speciesism as “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of the other species” (Singer 6). Frankenstein’s creature represents a double function in the novel as someone needing human rights as well as animal rights.

As a human figure in the novel, Frankenstein’s monster articulately states his observations of the world around him and strongly asserts his ideas of the human race, while Frankenstein battles fevers of excess emotions, faints, and is unable to act in the present; such is the case when he abandons the monster on the night of his creation. Overcome by horror at the ghastliness of his creature’s appearance, Frankenstein flees to his room and tries to sleep, “endeavoring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness” (Shelley 319). Rather than being empirical and observant, the scientist succumbs to an aggravated emotional state that is anything but scientific.

The creature also demonstrates his benevolent human side when he chooses to eat a vegetarian diet. He professes, “my food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns afford me sufficient nourish-
ment” (Shelley 413-14). The creature’s decision to become a vegetarian has several motivations: to stop a cycle of violence, to appear more human than animal, and to gain acceptance within the human sphere. His attempt to join human communion is evident while he stays in hiding among the DeLacey family. Unbeknownst to the family, the creature notices they often go without eating, so he extends his compassion by bringing them food and stops stealing from their reserves, opting to eat from the nearby woods. His one-sided interaction with the family offers him a glimpse into a loving, compassionate human society that he lacks, but desires to join. When he observes the old man and the young girl in the Delacey family, he sees their kindness towards one another, which causes the creature to feel “sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature . . . a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced . . . and I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions” (Shelley 373). Knowing that this bond comes from an accepting social communion, he understands the significance of this loss in his own world. He desires to join their society and believes that although he is different from humans, he is not “unworthy of it” (Shelley 399). He is a vegetarian not only to help nourish the family but also to show how benevolent—and thus human—he can be.

Although the creature tries to demonstrate his kindness to the DeLaceys, with frightful results, he knows that all human beings judge him as another, exclusive of their society: “I have good dispositions; my life has been hitherto harmless and in some degree beneficial; but a fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind
friend, they behold only a detestable monster” (Shelley 401). As vegetarian feminist Carol Adams states, even if he attempts to include himself with humanity, “the human circle is drawn in such a way that both [he] and other animals are excluded from it” (149). Oddly enough, the creature’s vegetarianism is a further derision of himself from humanity; his diet separates him from the omnivorous custom of most humans whose company he desires. His diet emphasizes his consideration of other beings, a kindness that humans did not extend to him. Forced to be supra-human, the creature is still cut off from a society that is constantly aware of his species.

What makes him different from animals is his ability to speak against the injustices he suffers because of human prejudice. As a spokesperson for those who cannot speak for themselves, the creature wonders, “Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle and at another as all that can be conceived as noble and godlike” (Shelley 385). This notion of immortal superiority perpetuates itself when Walton marvels at the dying Frankenstein: “What a glorious creature must he have been in the days of his prosperity, when he is thus noble and godlike in ruin! He seems to feel his own worth and the greatness of his fall” (Shelley 484).

Jeremy Bentham, in response to a series of philosophical papers that claimed that animals were not self-conscious, or sentient, and therefore subject to dominion, states, “The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” (qtd. in Singer 203). The creature challenges Frankenstein’s
moral code, by comparing the injustices done by him as if they were committed on another human being: “You, my creator, would tear me to pieces and triumph. . . . You would not call it murder if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands. Shall I respect man when he condemns me?” (Shelley 412).

Unable to live among humans, the creature finally recognizes that he is different from them. In fact, he is stronger, larger, and more tolerant of extreme climates. In this way, the creature embodies the animal image and a victim of speciesism. The creature embraces his animal nature the most when he is alone and when he pursues Frankenstein’s ruin: “I gave vent to my anguish in fearful howlings. I was like a wild beast that had broken the toils, destroying the objects that obstructed me and raging through the wood with a staglike swiftness” (Shelley 403). When he responds to human cruelty as a vengeful animal, he no longer considers human morals such as forgiveness: “And should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No; from that moment I declared ever-lasting war against the species, and more than all, against him who had formed me and sent me forth to this insupportable misery”
Katherine Williams

(Shelley 403). The creature, since he cannot become part of the human species, has declared war against it, wishing to “spread havoc and destruction around me,” and to enjoy its ruin (Shelley 403).

A speciesist might think of the creature’s rage as proof that he becomes the brute that Frankenstein believes him to be. Rather, his war against humanity—and himself—demonstrates how the monster inevitably internalizes speciesist dialogue against himself. He does not want to annihilate humanity, but the human code of prejudice allows the creature to assume his rights neither as a human nor as a sentient animal worthy of rights.

Another popular topic in science at the time the novel was written was vivisection, which pertains, in general, to experiments on live animals. While contemporaneous science claimed these experiments would prove useful for human health studies, scientists nevertheless tried to assert that animals were not like humans. Descartes’s theory that animals, as mechanical beings, had no soul, was convenient during the 17th century, when live vivisection occurred in Europe. One eyewitness describes several practices that, with Descartes’s theory, gave scientists the liberty to experiment without moral conflict.

They administered beatings to dogs with perfect indifference, and made fun of those who pitied the creatures as if they felt pain. They said the animals were clocks; that the cries they emitted when struck were only the noise of a little spring that had been touched, but that the whole body was without feeling. They
nailed poor animal up on boards by their four paws to vivisect them and see the circulation of the blood which was a great subject of conversation. (Singer 201)

Vivisection occurs in Shelley’s novel, as Frankenstein uses a collection of corpses to bring the creature to life, making Frankenstein’s monster “the product of the slaughterhouse and the operating table” (Jack 1110. The process of acquiring the bodies is emotionally taxing on him: “Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay?” (Shelley 315). Frankenstein uses live animals in order to study electricity through the body, which in his time would be an acceptable form of vivisection. However, in today’s scientific understanding, Frankenstein’s experiment is considered unethical to animal rights codes of conduct. With the proper time to consider the importance of a project, many fruitless and harmful experiments could be avoided if a scientist such as Frankenstein asked himself, “Do I really need to know what I think I want to know?” (Fox 126).

Although Frankenstein does seem to battle his sense of morality, he is irresponsible as a scientist for abandoning his creation. But his creature challenges his desire to avoid responsibility; frequently the crea-
Katherine Williams

ture tells Frankenstein “I am thy creature.” The creature also makes it clear that his creator is the single person he finds responsible for his misery: “On you it rests, whether I quit forever the neighborhood of man and lead a harmless life, or become the scourge of your fellow creatures and the author of your own speedy ruin” (Shelley 366). When Frankenstein does assume responsibility, he decides that he must kill the creature. This course of action is not based on concern for the creature’s well-being, but based on his compassion for the human race: “I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race” (Shelley 436).

Frankenstein takes responsibility as a scientist when he breaks his promise to create a mate for the creature. When Frankenstein begins working on the creature’s mate, he stops to consider the moral justifications for creating another being. These ethical considerations are scientific checks that he should have made while creating the first monster. He realizes that the new creature’s dispositions would be unknown to him, and even addresses that he would create a “thinking and reasoning animal”; he considers the consequences of creating a mating pair of creatures that could possibly make “the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?” (Shelley 435).

Although he inflicts more misery on the creature by breaking his promise, Frankenstein has become a more responsible scientist, who considers the moral consequences to his curiosity before acting on it, but
he learns at the expense of the creature’s happiness.

Ultimately, Frankenstein maintains a prejudiced outlook on his creature’s rights and states it openly at his death. With the admiring Walton at his side, the scientist holds on to speciesist ideas—that he knew he was responsible for his creature, but was distracted by his own prospects of happiness: “My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery.” Furthermore, Frankenstein claims that the creature “ought to die,” as punishment for the creature’s violence (Shelley 490). This notion allows Frankenstein to die with some sort of peace and blamelessness for his actions. Admitting that he thought only of himself and his species, Shelley rejects the scientist’s callousness by invoking sympathy for the creature, by giving the creature a voice, and, indirectly, by making the voice an echo for animals beyond the book’s scope.

Alex Jack states in *Vegetarian Bride of Frankenstein* that Shelley’s novel is a prophecy warning against overzealous scientific endeavors, such as vivisection, as a quest for “artificial nourishment and love” (Jack 98). Furthermore, it reflects with uncanny precision the indifference with which scientists today regard their living specimens. According to Robert J. White, an experimenter at the Cleveland Metropolitan General Hospital, “the inclusion of animals in our ethical system is philosophically meaningless and operationally impossible” (qtd in Singer 72). When describing his task of keeping the decapitated heads of monkeys alive to ensure live studies of the brain, a reporter described the experience as “a chilling glimpse into the cold, clinical world of the scientist, where the life
of an animal has no meaning beyond the immediate purpose of experimentation” (qtd in Singer 72).

If humankind is indeed superior to animals, notes Michael W. Fox, then it has a greater responsibility to ensure that animals do not suffer under its care. Writer and film director Shaun Monson asserts a similar prescription for the relationships between humans and animals, in the documentary *Earthlings*:

“The hope for the animals of tomorrow is to be found in a human culture which learns to feel beyond itself. We must learn empathy. We must learn to see into the eyes of an animal and feel that their life has value because they are alive.”

Mary Shelley could not call Frankenstein’s prejudice to his creature speciesism outright, and the notion of animal rights in the text are indirect, possibly because the subject at the time of publication was subversive and frequently mocked. In a 21st-century reading of *Frankenstein*, in which animal rights is a more acceptable topic, the novel raises important questions in human responsibility over animal suffering, in the relevance of animal studies for science, and in the inclusion of animals within our consideration. According to Peter Singer, the solution is not to uphold the lives of animals so much that we cannot kill them out of even necessary means: “What we must do is bring nonhumans within our sphere of moral concern and cease to treat their lives as expendable for whatever trivial purposes we may have” (Singer 20). Without intention, Taylor brings up a progressive issue such as animal rights; although he tries to reduce the notion of animal rights, as well as women’s rights, to ridicule, he nonetheless sheds new light to those who do not find animal rights to be
Animal Liberation

ridiculous. New readers can interpret Mary Shelley’s work as a progressive commentary on the issue of speciesism they witness today, furthering the novel’s relevance as a canonical text for modern readers.
Katherine Williams

Works Cited


Poet to Poet: The Poems of William Wordsworth as Selected by Lawrence Durrell

Paul H. Lorenz

I must confess, at the very beginning of this essay, that for many years I was not very impressed with the poetry of William Wordsworth. The problem itself rests in the selection of Wordsworth’s vast oeuvre chosen by the editors of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* to present to college students as representative of the poet’s work. There is the “must read” “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” with its privileging of the poet as a person who is “pleased with his own passions and volitions,” and “has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul” than the rest of us (269)—a privileged view of the poet rightly satirized by Goethe in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, unfortunately with only partial success for the young in his audience also believed, like Werther, that they too had “more comprehensive souls” than those in authority around them. There is a selection of long narrative poems such as “Michael” and “The Ruined Cottage,” well suited for an evening’s entertainment before the age of television,
and a selection of early poems similar to “I wandered lonely as a cloud” which all seem to feature a young self-absorbed poet needing to escape into nature to rediscover the joy and meaning of life followed by long excerpts from *The Prelude*. It is almost as though the *Norton*’s selection of Wordsworth is designed to make students sympathetic to Byron’s scathing assessment of Wordsworth in canto one of *Don Juan* and to make them appreciate Lewis Carroll’s satirical rendering of “Resolution and Independence” in “The White Knight’s Song.” There is, of course, another, more interesting Wordsworth who shows up occasionally in the *Norton* in poems such as the “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” and in the beautiful and thoughtful “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” as well as in the sonnets which always seemed to me to be more the work of a Shelley than that of a collector of government revenues in Westmoreland. This “other” Wordsworth is the poet that Lawrence Durrell presents to the world in his edition of 1973.

The Anglo-Indian novelist, poet, and travel writer Lawrence Durrell is probably best known for the four novels of *The Alexandria Quartet*, for a second series of novels set during World War II, *The Avignon Quintet*, and for his ever-popular Eastern Mediterranean travel books which have infected generations with a desire to experience Greece on a personal level. Less known, perhaps because he has been left out of most academic anthologies including the *Norton*, is that Durrell was an accomplished poet, publishing several volumes of poetry under the editorship of T. S. Eliot at Faber and Faber, including the 1943 volume *A Private Country*, deemed important enough by Eliot to be printed on severely rationed
wartime paper (MacNiven 277). Thus, it was not surprising in the early 70’s that the poetry editors at Penguin Books asked Lawrence Durrell to join other poets such as C. Day Lewis, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Thom Gunn, I. A. Richards, Ian Hamilton, Robert Creeley, and Kingsley Amis to edit a volume in their new *Poet to Poet* series. The idea which motivated this series of poetry books appears on the back cover of each volume:

The response of one poet to the work of another can be doubly illuminating. In each volume of this new Penguin series a modern poet presents his own edition of the work of a British or American poet of the past. By their choice of poet, by their selection of verses, and by the personal and critical reactions they express in their introductions, the poets of today thus provide an intriguing insight into themselves and their own work whilst reviving interest in the poetry they have particularly admired.

Lawrence Durrell chose William Wordsworth, re-read his entire *oeuvre*, selected just under one hundred of his poems for the 168 page volume (most of them short), and wrote a twelve and a half page introduction. The edition appeared in March of 1973 (Bowker 350).

The fact that Lawrence Durrell chose to edit a volume of Wordsworth comes as a surprise to many Durrell scholars. Neither of the two major biographies of Durrell contains an entry for Wordsworth in
the index. MacNiven’s biography doesn’t even mention Durrell’s Wordsworth edition while in the Bowker biography it merits two sentences: one noting its publication and one mentioning that the introduction talks about Wordsworth’s love of his sister (350). The letters exchanged between Durrell and Henry Miller frequently discuss literary influences, theories, and accomplishments, but again there is no entry in the index of *The Durrell-Miller Letters* for Wordsworth and the letters preceding and immediately following the Wordsworth edition’s publication do not clearly mention the volume. Durrell’s fiction frequently includes comments on prominent literary figures, but even there, overt references to Wordsworth are few and far between. Take, for example, a discussion of literary style which appears in *Clea*, the fourth volume of *The Alexandria Quartet*. Here the fictional novelist Pursewarden, who is Durrell’s “antithetical mask” (Fraser 137), evaluates and rejects as unsuitable for his own use the writing styles of Ruskin, Carlyle, Keats, Byron, Donne, Shakespeare, Pope, Eliot, Blake, Whitman, Longfellow, and D. H. Lawrence (133–4), but Wordsworth, though typical in such literary discussions, gets no mention.

Indeed, most Durrell scholars associate Durrell more with Keats than with Wordsworth. In a volume of transcribed lectures delivered in California entitled *Blue Thirst*, Durrell speaks nostalgically of all of his friends in the British Council who carried “copies of Keats in their pockets” in the early days of World War II (45). Indeed, one of the characters in *The Alexandria Quartet* is named “Johnny Keats,” a journalist who dabbles in poetry. The journalist and poet George. S. Fraser, who met Durrell in Cairo during
the war (MacNiven 238), saw something of himself in Johnny Keats, but the fictional character begins to write great poetry after he enters combat as a tank-captain in Egypt’s Western desert. According to Fraser, Durrell told him that the character of Johnny Keats was modeled on their friend, Keith Douglas, perhaps the best of the British poets of World War II (136). But, in his study of Durrell, Fraser seems to take for granted that Durrell was profoundly influenced by Wordsworth, equating Durrell’s attitude to the modern audience’s “deadened” sensibilities in the novels *Tunc* and *Nunquam* with Wordsworth’s assessment of his audience in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (159) and he also equates Durrell’s conception of the *deus loci* (spirit of place) with Wordsworth’s concept of “spots of time” (41).

Only a few Durrell scholars have followed up on Fraser’s lead. The Irish scholar Richard Pine has argued that Durrell’s “Heraldic Universe” is an attempt to “investigate the emotions” and to “interrogate values” through which Durrell attempted “to see Wordsworth’s life ‘whole’” as “a vision, a map, of something which had since gone out of the world” (13). Earlier, Gordon Thomas, in a much neglected article
Paul H. Lorenz

published in 1984, had argued that “Durrell sees Wordsworth both steady and whole,” a most cerebral poet whose project was to understand the mind of man (187). In Thomas’s view, The Alexandria Quartet was among other things, “a kind of defense of Wordsworth, a lifeboat putting out from the Wordsworthian shore, a defense of both the means and the ends of the earlier poet.” Durrell’s own response when Thomas asked him if this assessment was apropos seems to confirm the acuity of Thomas’s perception. “Every question,” Durrell responded, “contains the answer—it is built in. You would not have asked had you not subconsciously known what the answer was” (194).

Other than that, there is little published discussion of Wordsworth’s influence on Durrell. A few other scholars have followed the Wordsworth trail, but their work has not been published.

There is at least one idea of Wordsworth’s that clearly stuck in Lawrence Durrell’s mind and served him as a guide through his writing career. It first appears in Durrell’s A Key to Modern British Poetry, a collection of lectures Durrell gave in Argentina when he was working for the British Council in 1948. In his opening lecture, entitled “The Limits of Criticism,” Durrell told his audience that:

From a certain point of view it would be true to say that no great work of art finds
Poet to Poet

an appreciative public waiting for it. The work creates its own public, slowly and painfully. A work of art is born as an intellectual foundling. What is interesting to notice is that often the art-specialists themselves are caught napping. It was André Gide, you remember, who first saw Proust’s great novel while he was working as a reader for a firm of publishers. He turned it down without hesitation.

Perhaps you remember Leigh Hunt’s verdict on Blake as ‘an unfortunate madman whose mildness alone prevented him from being locked up’. Wordsworth also thought Blake mad, and yet it was he who wrote: ‘Every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be judged.’ (7)

In 1973, a version of this quotation from Wordsworth is repeated in Durrell’s “Introduction” to Wordsworth’s poems in the Poet to Poet series where it appears in this context:

the lifework of a great poet—a Valéry, Rilke, Yeats—should be considered as a long process of triumphantly surmounting his anxieties, his complexes, the wounds which his infantile psyche bears, by the act of exteriorizing them, of giving them form. We, his readers, profit vicariously from the transaction of reading and studying such work, for it helps us to do

19
the same with our own stresses. (Each poem is a cry of relief, of victory over the hippogriff.) In the case of William Wordsworth, his work might well be likened to the long and horrible self-analysis undertaken by Freud at the beginning of his career as a healer, an operation nobody else was capable of performing for him. ‘Each original work of art’, cries Wordsworth, ‘must create the taste by which it is to be judged.’ Read and Mark! (13)

In 1985, Durrell’s last novel, *Quinx*, the final volume of *The Avignon Quintet*, begins with a single epigraph: “. . . must itself create the taste by which it is to be judged . . . / Wordsworth *dixit*” (vii), an epigraph both challenging and triumphant, testifying to Wordsworth’s lifelong influence on Durrell.

Though he admits that, in execution, some of Wordsworth’s poems are less successful than others, Durrell uses his introduction to debunk the perception of two Wordsworths which seems so evident in the selections presented in the *Norton Anthology*, a perception first voiced by Hartley Coleridge and summed up in three lines of verse which Durrell attributes to either Squire or Shanks in the *London Mercury*, but which were actually written by the Victorian satirist J. K. Stephens: “Two voices are there. One is loud and deep, / And one is of an old half-witted sheep, / And Wordsworth, both are thine” (9). Durrell argues that if you read all of Wordsworth’s writing “in one blow” and supplement that reading with a “comprehensive and sympathetic
Poet to Poet

biography of the man,” you will discover a poet whose “political principles were as much a part of him as his poetic ones or his religious attitudes and beliefs, and the poetry (the best and the worst) overshadows all of these activities, by turns lyrical, didactic, elegiac or hortatory.” You will discover the single voice of an autobiographical poet whose life and poems delineate “the growth of a poet’s mind and sensibility” (9-10). Much of Durrell’s introduction fills in the biographical details of Wordsworth’s life in a sympathetic way: his relationship with Marie-Anne Vallon and his support of their daughter, his marriages, his paternal instincts, his love for his sister Dorothy, his psychological state, his relationships with Coleridge and with the Irish mathematician Hamilton, and the time he spent on the continent.

This biographical approach in a short introduction cannot be expected to say much that is new about Wordsworth; the poems themselves must convince us that his work is of one piece. Durrell’s introduction ends with the recommendation that the poems be read out loud just as Wordsworth composed them, and adds:

It will serve no purpose to hint at a certain metrical lack of variety in his work, and perhaps a touch of humorlessness. People of this calibre must be judged by their best qualities, and Wordsworth is no exception as he steers his verse around the rocks and shoals which lay in wait for it—over-meekness, sententiousness, too much austerity, too great rectitude—towards the open sea of English poet-
ry. He knew full well that the reality he sought lay beyond life, and that life was a very fragile and provisional matter.

The poem is an act of affirmation—one dares to make such a statement feeling that Wordsworth would have quietly agreed. (20-21)

The poems which follow this introduction reveal a different, better, Wordsworth than the one found in the Norton. Only sixteen of the ninety-four poems Durrell selected duplicate poems in the Norton. “Lucy Grey,” “Tintern Abbey,” Surprised by Joy,” “London 1802,” “Mutability,” “The Solitary Reaper,” the “Ode to Duty,” and the “Intimations of Immortality” ode are included, but Durrell includes only thirty exquisite lines of “Michael.” He also includes 212 lines from books one and eleven of “The Prelude,” most of which duplicate verses found in the more than sixty pages of “The Prelude” found in the Norton. “Resolution and Independence,” of course, does not appear and Durrell doesn’t even mention the “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” in his introduction.

Most of the poems Durrell selected reveal Wordsworth to be a master of insight and concise statement. There are several poems about children which reveal a very human and paternal side to Wordsworth and Durrell includes several poems that Wordsworth wrote while travelling on the continent. Included is Wordsworth’s “At the Grave of Burns, 1803,” in which he expresses his regret that he never had the opportunity to speak to Robert Burns while he was alive, for “What treasures would have then been placed / Within my reach; of knowledge graced
Poet to Poet

/ By fancy what a rich repast!” (ll. 55-57). The poem is a lovely tribute to Burns and one which clearly establishes the connection between Burns and the narrative poems of the Lyrical Ballads. After reading “Composed in One of the Catholic Cantons,” it is hard to think of Matthew Arnold’s “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse” as anything but an expansion of Wordsworth’s poem which first appeared in Memorials of a Tour on the Continent 1820. There are also poems that sound enough like Keats or Shelley to confuse students taking the GRE’s advanced Literature in English Exam; that is, if the author identification questions are similar to ones I answered so many years ago. The point is, Durrell’s selection of Wordsworth’s poems presents a poet who is worth taking seriously throughout his long working career, rather than a poet who peaked in the first decade of the nineteenth-century.

Durrell saw in Wordsworth a person like himself with a life to be emulated. Both men were dedicated to their art and did what they had to do to support themselves—both of them taking government jobs to feed their families. In Wordsworth’s relationship with Coleridge, Durrell saw a relationship similar to the one he enjoyed with Henry Miller, an artist who understood his work and approved of the basic principles which guided his poetic production (“Introduction” 20). Both produced works that justly deserve criticism, but no one can expect an artist to create a masterpiece every time the pen hits paper. And, when the artist is experimenting with form and language to express things in a new way, it is up to the work of art itself to create the taste by which it is to be enjoyed. Durrell’s edition proves Wordsworth
to be a better poet throughout his career than many of his critics would allow and it reveals the pervasive influence that Wordsworth had on the life and art of a great twentieth-century novelist. In terms of Penguin’s Poet to Poet project, this Durrell edition of Wordsworth was a complete success.
Poet to Poet

Works Cited


---. Wordsworth Selected by Lawrence Durrell.
In the second half of the nineteenth century in Bengal, often described as the Bengal Renaissance, Romantic-Victorian poetry played a role analogous to that played by Greco-Roman classics in the European Renaissance. Proponents of English education in India had actually invoked the analogy of what classics had done for Europe, a manifest sign of the cross cultural transaction inevitable in a colonial situation. Poet Rabindranath Tagore, belonging to the third generation of the illustrious family founded by the merchant prince and social leader Dwarkanath Tagore, was not the first to adopt the contemporaneous Romantic-Victorian idiom in Bengali; but he was one of the foremost. This idiom is where we must look for meaning and significance of some features, or fixtures, of his style and imagery. What he liked most about the English Romantic poets was that they “saw the world in union with their inner being. The world was to them the extension of their own personality” (emphasis added). This remark, an apt definition of
Romanticism by Tagore, defines his artistic aim too.

Tagore’s fondness for Shelley and Keats is well recorded, but that he had an equal, if not greater, appreciation for Wordsworth is a fact not ordinarily recognized. His English biographer, Edward Thompson gathered from his conversation with the poet that he was not as warm to Wordsworth as to Shelley and Keats: “Wordsworth he likes—not enthusiastically, I imagine.” A study of his poetry and prose, however, reveals deep affinities with Wordsworth, and it is surprising that critical attention has been scant in this respect. Early in his youth Tagore was already perceptive enough to see that Shelley and Wordsworth were kindred spirits. A playful essay “Rail garhi” (The Train), published by him in his family’s literary journal, uses rail travel, hardly three decades old in India at that time, as an extended metaphor for poets (passengers), audience (track) and critics (guard) to tell a jocular story: “Wordsworth and Shelley arrived in the station to catch the train in which Byron was passenger and Jeffrey [the infamous reviewer] was guard. They, however, missed the train, for it had already started to move too fast for them; they are able to board only the next train.”

Scattered through his prose writings, there are other tributes paid to Wordsworth, showing Wordsworth as his role model. Tagore put mock-criticism in the mouth of Amit Ray, the par-
adoxical hero of his late career novel *Shesher Kobita* (lit. “The Last Poem”; translated title, *Farewell, My Friend*). Amit says that Tagore, oblivious that the times had changed and “imitating old Wordsworth, insists most perversely on continuing” (*Farewell* 13). It is, however, the same Amit Ray, who, later in the novel, betrays his appreciation of Wordsworth. His snobbish sister Sissy, who has accompanied Amit’s former girlfriend to rescue him from living in a cottage (in order to be near his new girlfriend Labonyo), ridicules him for losing his urban shine and becoming green like a pine tree. Amit gives a gentle retort by referring her “to Wordsworth’s lines that the society of nature imparts to one’s body, mind, and spirit the character of ‘mute insensate things’ ” (87-88). One part of Tagore’s mind remained forever Wordsworthian.

Indeed, in an epistolary essay of much earlier composition, dated 1892, Tagore is explaining to an unnamed correspondent that beauty for Wordsworth is not what is conventionally pretty and appeals to the senses, as in the French poet Gautier’s poetry; it is “something luminous, always finding new expressions in nature—flower and tree, river and spring, mountain and valley. But not only that, he is seeing in all of this as “a spiritual expression by reason of which Beauty becomes a matter of infinite extension and infinite depth.” Tagore then goes on to add that
aesthetically a poet like Wordsworth more than merely describes objects of beauty; he unites outward beauty with the inner beauty of his soul. This too became an artistic credo with Tagore—to see in beauty more than beauty. Let us quickly summarize the steps he took towards this aesthetics.

Tagore’s primary impulse from Wordsworth was, first of all, to turn to nature to write. In the 1880s, when he was in his mid-twenties, he got to live for the first time in rural surroundings in riverine eastern Bengal, sent there by his family to supervise the family’s extensive lands. He moved around in a barge and keenly enjoyed nature. It was, however, a time not merely to see nature at first hand, which of course he did, but to see nature as Wordsworth saw it. For a glimpse of his mind, consider the letters he writes from these sojourns to his appreciative niece Indira Devi, many of which reveal an outlook bordering on Wordsworth’s experience of a spirit’s presence in nature, as much the object of awe as of delight. In a letter dated 23 November 1894 (number 175), Tagore writes: “we should contemplate on our inseparable bonds with Eternity” and “casting away our material concerns with the workaday world, we should devote ourselves to the idea of beauty and the glimpse of the infinite, that dwells in the sound, smell, and touch of the earth” (Rabindra. 11: 194). In another letter (number 167) he writes that “the stir and bustle of popular entertainment, reacts slowly against my nature and in the core of my heart I become a rebel” (187). Such remarks cannot but call to mind Wordsworth’s well-known sonnet: “The world is too much with us; late and soon” (259).

The beauteous forms of nature, even common
objects like a winding rural path of red clay, captivated Tagore. For example, he celebrates so common a thing as a rural pathway in a song: “O this red clay path out of the village / How it puts my soul into a rapture.” This beautiful song too is Wordsworthian in essence. *The Prelude*, Book 13 has a similar rural vignette: “Who doth not love to follow with his eye / The windings of a public way?” (lines 142-43). The path winds its way up a hill and gets lost in the sky, beckoning the poet to meet it there. This idea lies hidden in Tagore’s song too: “O, it [this beckoning path] carries me away to who knows what unknown place.” Tagore could not have missed, too, such lines in *The Prelude* as the following: “Therefore did I turn / To you, ye pathways, and ye lonely roads” (13: 16-17). Addresses to pathways and lonely roads do in fact occur in many Tagore poems and songs, reinforcing the image of the Romantic nomad in his poetry.

Additionally, Wordsworth’s love of the simple folk and common objects of nature, common flowers like the daisy and daffodil, even a sprig of thorn, and many homely village sights, have counterparts in Tagore’s nature poetry. Classical Sanskrit poetry, such as that of Kalidasa, is replete with flowers of all kinds. Flowers are a necessary part of all rituals, and in some parts of India of a woman’s hair-do too, but Tagore celebrated common flowers and plants, shrubs and creepers, sheaves of corn, mango
flowers, *keya* and *kash* flowers, and *sal, teak*, and *piyal* trees as well.

Numerous are these songs of nature and their charming tunes contribute to popular taste. A white, slender stemmed, miniature lily, mildly aromatic at night, named literally so (*rajani-gandha*) by the poet, is now commercially produced, so popular has it been since Tagore celebrated the flower in his songs. A flowering shrub named by the poet as *madhabi-lata* in his Nature songs is a frequent sight over gates and fences of Bengali households. He becomes one with Wordsworth here in a quatrain about the irony of running after the grand spectacles of nature, while the beauty of a dew drop sparkling on a blade of grass close to home remains unwatched.7

Wordsworth’s revolt against the city has many affinities in Tagorean poetry. In *Bodhu* (Bride), a newly married village girl, now moved to a city, dreams, as in Wordsworth’s “Reverie of Poor Susan” about her companions in the village and about its greeneries (*Rabindra*. 1: 265-68). Such adaptations of a whole poem by Wordsworth are rare in Tagore, but Wordsworth’s poor and simple girls, Susan, Lucy, Alice Fell, and many other named and unnamed girls, are apt to play in one’s mind while reading of the poor and simple girls in Tagore’s poems and also in his short stories.8

Marjorie Sykes, talking about Tagore’s early poetry, remarks that “the vision and wonder of ordinary things is in all his poems and stories” (36). It is truly said. The villages
and their ordinary sights, viewed from his contemplative solitude in his houseboat on the great Bengal river Padma, such as winding dirt roads, stray cattle chewing the cud under a shady tree, the wind among the trees, wild flowers, rustic women folk fetching water from the river, all these and more roused in him, as he says in one of the letters, “a sense of wonder and a deeply loving attitude.” He calls this mental state his “daily religion,” and “daily worship,” and speaks of all this as “the joy and love that resides deep inside the universe” (Rabindra. 11: 204).

Being a liberal follower of the reformist Brahmo sect, and having thereby cut loose of the traditional Hindu liturgy, Tagore found in Wordsworth a religion that could be reconciled to Indian transcendentalism and yet be good for poetic expression. The pantheist in him is speaking when he describes Wordsworth thus in “Modern Poetry”: “Wordsworth expressed in his own characteristic style the principle of joy latent in the very heart of universal nature” (342). Of joy or perhaps mystical wonder, Tagore could find plenty in Wordsworth’s poetry. The Prelude, Book 1, would convey to him the following lines: “Wisdom and Spirit of the universe. Thou soul that art the eternity of thought” (401-02) and “Ye Presences of Nature in the sky / And on the earth” (464-65). “Elegiac Stanzas” (commonly known as “Nature and the Poet”) offers an even more famous Wordsworthian inspiration: “The light that never was on sea or land/ The consecration and the Poet’s dream” (lines 15-16).

Tagore was perceptive enough to see that Wordsworth’s transcendent joy in nature could not be separated from his revolt against the threat posed by this rising tide of materialism to the “ancient English
dower / Of inward happiness” (“London 1802,” lines 5-6). In another sonnet he lamented that “The wealthiest man among us is the best” and “Plain living and high thinking are no more” (“London September 1802” lines 7 & 11). Tagore was appreciative of this aspect of Wordsworthian idealism too. Tagore’s *Naibedya* (“Altar Offering”) is a collection of sonnet-like poems set to a high moral tone, and he translated many of them for the English *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener* collections. Several of these sonnets (no. 92-96 *Rabindra.1*: 903-07), not translated by Tagore are in this vein, admonishing the nation against the greed of mercantilism and “the humiliating loss of the tradition of simplicity, where had lain the nation’s real glory and treasure of soul.”

This reproof of materialism and celebration of the endless wealth that nature has spread all over the earth and sky are evident in the *Naibedya* sonnets, particularly in those four mentioned above (numbers 92-95). Wordsworth’s vindication of nature as the greater teacher (than books), such as in “Expostulation and Reply” and “The Tables Turned,” chimed in with a deeply held belief on which Tagore had founded his school in Santiniketan (1901), where mental freedom and closeness to nature replaced institutional routine.

Among the most notable imageries of cosmic wonder with which Tagore’s poetry is replete, there is a particular emphasis on stars. This imagery may be given the general name of *the seeing eye among*
The Sea of Ineffable Bliss

*the stars.* It has a binary structure: the gazers (the stars above) and the gazed at (the earth below). A letter from his Padma river days (181) contains a clear example: “suddenly I saw that everlasting universe gazing at me from the evening sky” (11: 199). In one of Tagore’s early poetic ventures, the Alastor-like poetic autobiography *Kobi-Kahini (A Poet’s Story, 1878)*, the imaginary poet in it would sit by a river bank and watch the sky, bathed in moonlight and *gazing at* the poet (1. 62: lines 11-12) from high above. Shelleyan imageries of light and the sky always fascinated Tagore, but this image has a Wordsworthian origin.

There is a close parallel for this in the fourteenth and final book of *The Prelude*. One night, the poet and two companions set out on a mountain trail on the Welsh coast to watch the sunrise. After a long journey and climbing up a hill a little apart from the team, he noticed that the ground at his feet was brightening up. Suddenly,

A light upon the turf
Fell like a flash, and lo! I looked up
The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
Restted a silent sea. (740: 38-4)

The moon, as the poet went on, “gazed” (line 54) at
the mist on the sea, and through a rift in the mist, the sea waves could be seen and faintly heard: “innumerable, roaring with one voice.” The “three chance human wanderers” are quite diminished in the awesome presence of “a majestic intellect.” There the poet “beheld the emblem of a mind / That feeds upon infinity” (53-71).

It cannot be established if Tagore had actually read this 14th and final book of The Prelude and taken note of this sublime vision or epiphany, but the imagery of a silent or roaring ocean, gazed at, as it were, by the stars overhead, occurs even in unexpected poems, such as Dus-Somoy (Evil Hour):

In the sky above, the stars in ardent gaze
Are beckoning, pointing their fingers at you
While below on the sea, death is foaming
In the waves rushing toward you.
(Rabindra 1: 695).  

Another example is song number 97 of the English Gitanjali: “What is this sudden sight that is come upon me? The world with eyes bent upon thy feet stands in awe with all its silent stars.” There are, in fact, numerous other songs in which this imagery occurs, often in a direct address to the immanent spirit of the universe. The examples below are note-
The Sea of Ineffable Bliss

worthy:

Tumi je cheye accho akash bhore
Nishidin animeshe dekchho more
(You, who are gazing at me from the
entire sky,
Day and night, looking at me with
unblinking eyes).
Puja (Worship) 77 13

Akash Juriya chahibe kahar ankhi
Ghorer bahire nirobe loibe daki
(His eyes will gaze at me from the
entire sky
Silently calling me out of my house).
Puja 247

Animesh ankhi sei ke dekhechhe
Je ankhi jagatpane cheye royechhe
(who has not seen those unblinking
eyes
Those eyes that keep gazing at the
earth?)
Puja 506

Wordsworth’s “universal power” and “essences
of thing” are forces outside him and not so theistic
as in Tagore (The Prelude 2: 304-07), but the idea is
the same—a mystical or transcendent presence out
there in the universe making itself felt on earth and
in the mind of man. Throughout Tagore’s poetry and
song, the cosmic theatre of the sky is almost a con-
stant presence—the sunrise and sunset, the stars at
night beckoning to earthlings. The language in which
Tagore celebrates the formless or incorporeal spirit, which many think to be derived from the *Upanishad* actually originated with the imageries and emblems that he found in Romantic poetry—particularly in Wordsworth.

As we see this connection, it dawns on us that Romantic poets had awakened the young Tagore to the art and expression of pantheistic worship in poetry and song. Wordsworth’s images of the vast, endless, and everlasting presence behind natural phenomena had a strong appeal for Tagore, as attributes of the all-pervasive spirit of the universe—*Brahman*, which the Brahmos worshipped.

Tagore wrote continuously; there never was an idle moment with him. He woke up at dawn, meditated, and by sunrise, was ready to start writing. As he wrote, turning out poem after poem, song after song, his reading of Romantic poetry, lodged deep in his mind, would sometimes percolate into his words. But the laws of association cannot fully explain these traces. He found in Wordsworth’s poetry nothing less than a secular scripture, which was his prime necessity as a participant in the Brahmo doctrine of Vedantic monism. He gave Wordsworth’s ideas and images a new emotional content in a non-European language, an unparalleled act of creation in cross-cultural transaction.

Tagore had derived from his father Debendranath ("Maharsi Debendranath") the intense theism that is so noticeable in the poems of the *Gitanjali*. He often sang these as songs to his father, something he had been doing from an early age, to the latter’s intense joy. It is, however, difficult to say to which influence Tagore owed more: poetry or religion.
Singh says that he had redefined his religious faith in humanistic terms, as in his *Religion of an Artist* (Singh 91-92). Ghose says that he may even have reconstituted a religious faith for his poetic use. In any case, the Romantic veneration for the ideal world manifesting itself in life and nature, and the individual’s relation to it, which he noticed in Shelley and Wordsworth, was his poetic credo and provided him with the ideas that he worked into many of his songs and poems. In poems invoking the Universal Spirit, *Visva* as he called it, Tagore found his poetic niche. His poetry, like that of the Romantics, took the form of an intensely personal approach to the cosmos, while it liberated him from the constraints of any institutionalized religion.

The semblances and parallels that we speak of here are not by any means an exhaustive list; their purpose is only to suggest how Wordsworth’s poetry had planted some seeds deep in Tagore’s mind. He who tried to read nature’s language gained a new perception bordering on a mystical bliss. Nature to him became alive with a transcending presence, whose dwelling was in the universe itself, the infinite and everlasting. Wordsworth speaks of it while reminiscing about his childhood communions with nature in Books 1 and 2 of *The Prelude*:

I, at this time, saw blessings spread around me like a sea.  
Thus while the days flew by and years passed on  
From nature and her overflowing soul,  
I had received so much. [ . . . ] (647-48: II, 394-98)
Writing about his childhood in his prose autobiography *My Reminiscenses* (*Jibon-smriti* 1912), he says: “I still remember how at times, in the mornings specially, my mind would be filled with a strange joy. It looked to me as if the universe was wrapped in some deep mystery” (qtd. in Ghose 12).

Wordsworth is unique in attributing to his bygone childhood this mystical experience, but even without this peculiar approach to childhood impressions, Tagore would have carried from this passage and many like it in the first two books, the note of the transcendent joy, especially as it agreed with his concept of *ananda* (bliss ineffable) from the *Upanishads*. There is a sequence of songs in the *Puja* collection based on this note of spiritual joy pervading the universe and the soul of man (numbers 326-30). There are, besides, poems like *Ananta Jibon* (Eternal Life) in the same collection as “The Fountain Awakes,” bearing an analog to Wordsworth’s sea of ineffable bliss:

There is an ocean in this world of ours  
Silent are her waters  
From all four corners there flows in ceaselessly  
The stream of life.  
From the sun flows a stream, and from the moon,  
And from the thousand stars.  
All the laughter, music and life that the world has  
Come borne on that stream  
And mingle with that deep ocean of joy.  
(1: 52-53)
Another common ground between the two poets is poetic awakening in a watery place, so well remarked by Harold Bloom—“Poets tend to incarnate by the sea or river.” This image manifests itself in Tagore’s poetry in numerous forms: fountains, rivers, confluences, and seashores. The imagery is reminiscent of Wordsworth and also other Romantic poets. One of the most memorable poems ever written on poetic awakening is Tagore’s poem “The Fountain Awakes.” It is a wonderfully rhythmic poem which gives voice to the fountain speaking, exultant at its sudden waking in an auspicious dawn:

I wonder how at dawn today the young sun
Spread its rays on my soul,
How the morning bird’s song pierced suddenly
The dark silence of my cave.
(1: 46, lines 12-15: my translation).

As Tagore’s fountain becomes a turbulent waterfall, and the fall becomes a river cascading down the hills, its gargoyle and dance, its swirls and eddies, and its mighty currents seem to be saying: ”I don’t know how or why my soul today has woken up / And heard the music of the ocean afar” (48: lines14-15).
The allegory cannot be missed. It is an allegory of the poet’s awakening into the world’s great poetry.

The image of a spring emerging from a dark cave as a symbol of poetic awakening occurs again in a much later poem by Tagore called *Hasir Patheyo* (Provision for Laughter) (*Rab. 2*: 863-64). The emerging spring is surprised by daylight falling over it, as Valmiki (the legendary author of the Sanskrit epic poem *Ramayana*) himself was surprised by his first spontaneous utterance in verse. An autobiographical note, recollecting that as a boy visiting the Dalhousie hills he had actually seen such a spring emerging with great gurgling noise from a cave, prefaces the poem. This childhood recollection, however, could have been activated in his mind by the reading of such famous Wordsworthian lines as “The sounding cataracts / Haunted me like a passion” (“Tintern Abbey,” 75-6), and “The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep [. . .] / I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng” (“Intimations of Immortality,” 25-27).

Tagore drew upon this great Romantic ode to compose another of his best and most unforgettable poems in the *Sishu* (The Child) collection whose first stanza goes like this:

On the shore of the world-ocean  
Children meet as in a fair.  
Limitless and without a motion over them  
Rests the tranquil sky.  
And in the offing, the blue waters crested by foam  
Roll evermore.  
A great roar comes from the ocean  
As the children play on its shore.
The Sea of Ineffable Bliss

This splendid poem, so much like a vision, is thoroughly Wordsworthian and transacts on a level playing field with the latter’s following lines:

And see the children sport upon the shore
And hear the mighty waters rolling ever-more. (590: 170-71)

The “shore” is “of that immortal sea / which brought us hither”, and therefore a symbol of the world beyond (590: 167-68). Tagore’s phrase “the shore of the world-ocean” has this symbolical suggestion of the great universe out there in the firmament. There comes here also the echo of the distant roar of the waves heard by Wordsworth during his night excursion to the mountainous Welsh coast.

Wordsworth’s ode captured Tagore’s attention at a critical time of his life, when his wife died prematurely in 1902, leaving him with the care of his children, some very young. The poems of Sishu18 were ostensibly composed to divert the children by their mother-child talk. A mother’s overflowing love for her child and attention to his million queries is a commonplace of the child-centric culture of India. But in the child-focused talk of the parent, there falls a shadow or a beam from the transcendent world, lighting up the edges. Here are some lines from the poem...
Khoka (kiddo), which Tagore himself translated under a different title—“The Source” and in prose:

The smile that flickers on baby’s lips when he sleeps—does anybody know where it was born? Yes, there is a rumour that a young pale beam of a crescent moon touched the edge of a vanishing autumn cloud, and there the smile was first born.19

What Tagore tells us about the baby’s smile seems to be lyricizing what is often lovingly said by parents in Bengal, when their baby appears to be smiling in his sleep: “Look, he is talking with God!” However, “The Source” (notice the changed title in the English version) could also mean that Wordsworth’s Platonizing ode is working in his mind too:

But trailing clouds of glory do we come From God, who is our home: Heaven lies about us in our infancy. (588: 64-66)

Reading the poems in Sishu—there are fifty of them—one could very well say, “Here’s God’s plenty.” The poet weaves together delicate fancy with heart-warming child-talk. But Ariadne’s thread is not
lost; the children, who came trailing clouds of glory in Wordsworth’s reverie,\textsuperscript{20} return in the last poem \textit{Ashirvad}, which in Tagore’s own translation becomes the prose poem “Benediction,” (\textit{The Crescent Moon}, 83-84). I attempt below a more accurate translation of its short opening stanza:

There have blossomed on this earth these white souls,
They have brought news from Paradise.
Bless them, O bless these pure hearts.
These little beaming faces, what do they know of sorrow?
They come smiling to your door.
\textit{(Rab. 2:70)}

Wordsworth’s ode “Intimations of Immortality” too turns at the end to adoration and benediction. Tagore’s poetry contains many deep echoes of this ode. It is a wonder in world poetry that a single poem could stir another poet’s imagination so deeply. Tagore’s philosophical child and the momentary glimpses of heavenly joy on the child’s face is anticipated in the Ode, “That nature yet remembers / What was so fugitive” (135-6). The magnificence of Wordsworth’s line “our Souls have sight of that immortal sea” (167) was not lost on Tagore. It is a symbol of death or of the life beyond; it pervades Romantic-Victorian poetry; and it lies at the root of the sea imagery in countless poems and songs by Tagore.

Why is the sea, ceaselessly crashing on
the shore, an emblem of peace? It is so because Romantic poets saw it that way, because Wordsworth saw it that way, imaging a mighty force, quiet and silent under a full moon seen from a lone mountain. The sea is restless, endlessly foaming at the mouth, and yet it is also at peace with itself, its dualism symbolizing the eternal cycle of life and death. Tagore too speaks of this dual aspect of the sea in his *Somudrer Proti* (“Ode to the Sea” April 1893) “Tell me who can understand her profound peace and her endless plaint?” (1: 379). The image of the child on seashore is anticipated: “I am a child of the earth, sitting on your shore, / And listening to your voice [. . .] the memory of that life before [. . .] like a faint glimpse stir in my blood” (lines 19-32). Through a number of poems over a long period of his poetic career, Tagore was writing an unfinished poem, which could be construed as Intimations of Wordsworth’s Ode to Immortality.
The Sea of Ineffable Bliss

Endnotes


2Edward Thompson, Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1926) 305. Translations from Tagore’s essays, poems, etc., unless otherwise indicated, are by the author.

3Bharati (November 1882), rpt in Rabindra-Rachanabali (Collected Works of Tagore), vol. 17 (Visva-Bharati: Kolkata 2001) 552. Except for these early essays, all references to Tagore’s poetry and prose, as translated by myself, are to Rabindra (1961), with the volume number followed by page number.

4Rabindra, 13: 843-44.

5These letters, written between September 1887 and December 1895, were published in a collection called Chhinnapatra (Torn Letters) in 1912, numbered from 1 to 252. Rabindra. 11: 1-322.

6This is how one would try to capture in translation the ineffable beauty of Tagore’s song Gramchhara oi ranga matir poth, amar mon bhulay re (Bichitro, Miscellaneous Songs, no. 14 (Rabindra 4: 421).

7Sfulingo (Sparks) Rabindra 4: 909.

8Tagore’s short stories have found many translators since Rajani Ranjan Sen published Glimpses of Bengal Life (Madras: G.A. Natesan, 1913), the title reflecting the tales of common life.

9These sonnets bear the general title Poems of National Independence and Liberty (Works 303-32).
10 Tagore translated quite a few of these sonnets in his English *Gitanjali*, but the collection as a whole has been translated into English: Kaleda Akhtar, *Altar Offerings* (Dhaka, 1984).

11 Identified by Kalisadhan Mukherjee, *Rabindrakabye Paschimalok* (Western Light on Tagore’s Poetry) (Kolkata: Lekhok Somabesh, n.d.), 171-72. This is a valuable book, identifying the sources of numerous poems by Tagore.

12 I have tried to translate the poem close to the original, while in Tagore’s own translation, no. 67 in *The Gardener (Poems and Plays, 133-34)*, the meaning is considerably changed.

13 The references to the songs are to their complete collection (*Gitabitan*), in *Rabindra* (1961) volume 4. In this collection, the songs are identified by their number within the section (*Puja, Prem, Prakrity etc.*), as in all other editions since then.

14 Sisirkumar Ghose quotes Tagore from *Religion of Man* (Tagore’s lectures delivered at Oxford): “My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life”—*Rabindranath Tagore* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1986) 84.


20 “Intimations,” lines 58-70.
The Sea of Ineffable Bliss

Works Cited


---. *Kobi-kahini* (The Poet’s Story) in *Rabindra* 5: 59-89.
---.“Maharshi Debendranath Thakur,” *Rabindra*, 11: 375. This and the other biographical tributes to Buddhadev, Gandhi, and Rammohun are collections of essays.
---.“Sahityaroop” (Literary Beauty), *Rabindra* 14: 395-403.


---. “It is a beauteous evening, calm and free” (*Miscellaneous Sonnets* number 30). *Works*. 258.
----. “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” *Works* 205-07.
“What do you think will become of us?—of our Republic, I mean. For my part, I am ready for anything that may happen, knowing that, if the worst comes to the worst, New England will still have her rocks and ice.”

Nathaniel Hawthorne Letter to Francis Bennoch
December 17, 1860

Doris Kearns Goodwin’s narrative biography *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (2005) and Walt Whitman’s *Memories of President Lincoln* (1865) paint a heroic picture of the sixteenth president as the political savior of antebellum American society. Goodwin’s biography and the literary elegies of Whitman analyze Lincoln’s rise to power in the antebellum era and his ability to maintain the integrity of the union amid social, political, and sectional turmoil. Goodwin and Whitman view Lincoln as a martyr who was sacrificed to heal the wounds of a divided country. Goodwin’s historical narrative and the imaginative literature of the time portray Lincoln as a unifying figure who had the ability to bring individuals of different political backgrounds together to
reconcile their differences on pressing ideological and social issues of the day. Goodwin’s narrative biography and the historiographic elegies of Whitman both recognize Lincoln’s ability to use the political rhetoric of the antebellum period to bring people of different political persuasions together. Goodwin argues in *Team of Rivals* that Lincoln’s ability to maintain integrity and uphold Republican principles came from his deliberate construction of a cabinet of individuals from diverse political, social class, and economic backgrounds; whereas Whitman’s elegies portray Lincoln as an absolute demagogue who saved the Union on his own accord and sacrificed himself for the cause of Republican liberty.

The ideological analysis of Lincoln in Goodwin and Whitman’s narratives draws upon the rhetorical traditions of the mid nineteenth century. However, the political rhetoric of the antebellum period had its origins in the romantic ideology of the American Revolution of the eighteenth century. Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, and the major political figures of the early nineteenth century were members of the last generation that remembered the American Revolution and worshipped the Founding Fathers. Describing the ideological background of Lincoln and his political rivals, Goodwin observes, “Bates the oldest, was born when George Washington was still president; Seward and Chase during Jefferson’s administration; Lincoln shortly before James Madison took over”
Lincoln’s Revolutionary Rhetoric

(28). As a result of their ideological background, the Republican philosophy of Lincoln, Whitman, and their contemporaries was influenced by the revolutionary rhetoric of the Founding Fathers. Lincoln and Whitman believed that it was their civic duty to uphold the principles upon which American Society had been founded. As revolutionary figures, the epic poet and the sixteenth president saw themselves as leaders of a new generation eager to heal the sectional and cultural divisions within antebellum American society and to eliminate the racial and class injustices that had not been resolved by the Founding Fathers.

Lincoln and Whitman sought to preserve the constitutional framework that had been put in place by the founders, yet they also saw a need for fundamental social change. William Pannapacker argues that Whitman and Lincoln “grew up when living memory of the [American] Revolution was rapidly fading, to be replaced by a tension between a romantic longing to renew the violent egalitarian struggle for liberty and a conservative desire to support and defend the political status quo” (23). Whitman’s father, an acquaintance of Thomas Paine, taught his children to worship the Founding Fathers and Jacksonian Democracy. Lincoln’s early speeches compare the sacrifices of Washington, Jefferson, and Adams during the Revolution to the political struggles of his own time. Early in their political careers,
Whitman and Lincoln admired Jefferson, Washington, and Adams, especially their ability to inspire individuals to action during a time of political uncertainty. Whitman and Lincoln subscribed to the belief that every citizen of the new republic had a civic duty to sacrifice individual well-being for the good of the nation. Pannapacker asserts that as young men, Lincoln and Whitman longed to defend the union that they feared would be threatened by growing sectional and partisan conflict. These two men saw themselves as neo Founding Fathers who would usher in the second American Revolution and unite the new republic by reminding the people of the unifying Republican principles established by the nation’s founders.

Whitman’s elegy *O’ Captain! My Captain!* analogically describes Lincoln in heroic Republican terms as a revolutionary savior destined to preserve the American republic. The poet views Abraham Lincoln as the metaphorical captain of the ship of American state who has charted the nation through troubled waters. Whitman writes:

O’ Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done The ship has weather’d every rack, the prize we sought is won. (359. 1-3)
The heroic rhymed couplet of the first stanza implies that the mythic Lincoln has maintained the integrity of the ship of state by demanding the strict allegiance of his crew to unifying Republican principles. In the same manner as Lincoln’s call to unity in his House Divided speech (1858) during his initial campaign for Senate, Whitman claims that all an individual has to do is to have faith in the captain of the ship of American state and the integrity of the new republic will be maintained. The ship of American state will be able to withstand rack and ruin if the Captain’s crew has faith in his ability to lead them to safety. Just as the house of state with weak timbers cannot stand, according to Whitman, a ship with a disloyal crew will not be able to finish its journey.

In his elegy, Whitman attributes the ability of the ship to reach its destination solely to the actions of the Captain. The master of the vessel is the subject of the poem and while his crew must have faith in him, ultimately it is the captain of the vessel that guides the ship safely to port. Describing the heroic sacrifice of the captain for his crew, Whitman writes:

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells; Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills, For you bouquets and ribbon’d wreaths—for you the shores a crowding, For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning. (360. 9-14)

Whitman calls upon the dead captain to resurrect himself so he may hear the bells that chime only for
him. As the ship approaches shore, the public places ribbons and wreaths on the dock in honor of the fallen hero. The citizens of the new republic cry out and mourn the loss of their beloved leader. Lincoln, the metaphoric captain, is religiously worshipped as the sole savior of the ship of state.

In her chapter entitled, “The Coming Storm,” Goodwin demonstrates how Lincoln’s faith in Republican principles and the romantic rhetoric of the American Revolution affected his personal philosophy and political ideology. Lincoln’s unwavering belief in the revolutionary rhetoric of the eighteenth century to foster social change is apparent in his opposition to the expansion of slavery. In his nomination speech for Senate in 1858, Lincoln employed the analogy of the divided house to portray what he believed was a deliberate attempt by the Pro Slavery supporters of the Kansas Nebraska Act to overthrow the constitution. Goodwin writes, “Supporters and opponents alike believed that with his image of a house that could not endure permanently half slave and half free, Lincoln had abandoned the moderate approach of his Peoria speech four years earlier in favor of more militant action” (198). Lincoln’s use of the divided house metaphor resembles the analogical political rhetoric of the eighteenth century and this image would have been very recognizable to a generation that worshipped Paine, Jefferson, Franklin, and Republican forms of government. Lincoln argued that if the house of Republican government was to remain strong the
country could not remain divided. He maintained that the new republic could not remain half slave and half free. The young candidate for Senate did not believe that the government would fall, but he believed that the union would remain either all slave or all free. According to Lincoln, it was the duty of the Republican cause to unseat the Democrats who had attempted to subvert the constitution and undermined the intentions of the Founding Fathers by promoting the spread of slavery on a national scale.

In his early speeches, Abraham Lincoln incorporated the logical and analogical rhetorical techniques he had learned from his study of Jefferson and Washington to remind the public of their civic duty to Republican principles. Lincoln evokes the revolutionary rhetoric of the eighteenth century in his nomination speech for Senate in 1858. While Lincoln’s divided house metaphor seems irrelevant in modern times, this analogical image made perfect sense to the audience of Lincoln’s day which understood the inherent danger of sectional conflict within the country. Lincoln successfully used this metaphor to persuade the public that Stephen Douglass, Franklin Pierce, and Chief Justice Roger Taney were subversive elements threatening the integrity of the constitution. Goodwin asserts:

The image of America as an unfinished house in danger of collapse worked brilliantly because it provided a ringing challenge to the Republican audience, a call for action to throw out the conspiring carpenters, unseat the Democratic party, and recapture control of the nation’s building
blocks—the laws that had wisely prevented the spread of slavery (199).

Lincoln’s nomination speech reminded the public how important it was to maintain the integrity of the government that had been established during the revolution. If the citizens of the republic believe that slavery should not be expanded into the new territories they should rally behind Lincoln and the Republican cause and reject the cultural and sectional divisions proposed by the Democrats who Lincoln saw as disloyal to the union.

During the 1850s, Whitman and Lincoln were deeply concerned with the sectional and ideological divisions within the country. In the years prior to the Civil War, Whitman argued that the leaders of the new republic had lost their connection to the common man. According to Whitman, the value of “democratic art—lies in the president’s taking his hat off to the people” (qtd in Blake 182). In order for the president to unify the public and gain support for his policies it was necessary for the chief executive to exert the authority of a demagogue and demand loyalty to Republican principles. David Haven Blake argues that Whitman believed that the President’s credibility came from his ability to engage actively with the common man. Whitman and Lincoln both consciously remembered Andrew Jackson and the Founding Fathers and they believed that the president should ultimately be concerned with the integri-
ty of the union and public opinion rather than partisan politics. According to Blake, Whitman viewed the president as “the paragon of democratic fame” (181). In *The Death of Abraham Lincoln*, Whitman describes a Lincoln speech that he witnessed in New York in 1861. Whitman recalls attending the speech “almost in the same neighborhood I distinctly remember’d seeing Lafayette on his visit to America in 1825” (275). Whitman recalls his father’s taking him to this neighborhood as a child to hear Lafayette, the hero of the French Revolution, and he compares Lincoln’s ability to persuade to his eighteenth-century revolutionary predecessor.

In the same manner as Goodwin, Whitman portrays Lincoln as possessing an almost mystical command of rhetoric that caused individuals of different political backgrounds to reconcile their differences. Whitman claims that when Lincoln made speeches or public appearances the crowd usually stood silent. All disagreements stopped and people respectfully listened. Describing a Lincoln speech, Whitman writes:

> I had, I say, a capital view of it all, and especially of Mr. Lincoln, his look and gait—his perfect composure and coolness—his unusual and uncouth height, his dress of complete black, stovepipe hat push’d back on the head, dark-brown complexion, seam’s and wrinkled yet canny looking face, black, bushy head of hair, disproportionately long neck and his hands held behind as he stood observing the people. (qtd in Hirschberg 276)
Standing in the crowd, Whitman had to perch himself on top of an omnibus to get a glimpse of Lincoln in all his glory. To understand truly the greatness of this man, it was necessary for the poet to experience him on a higher level. In many cases, people looked up to the president as if he were a god. The public perceived Lincoln as an honest man who spoke with sincere authority. He had the ability to bring people together in a way that no politician during his time had been able to do.

Whitman’s portrayal of Lincoln resembles his description of Andrew Jackson as an influential public figure. In a newspaper editorial, the poet and journalist remembered President Jackson’s charismatic ability to inspire individuals and enlist them into public service. Whitman writes:

The whole city—the ladies first of all—poured itself forth to welcome the hero and the sage. Every house, every window, was filled with women, and children, and men—though the most of the latter were in the open streets. The president had a big brimmed white beaver hat, and his arm must have ached some, from the constant and courteous responses he made to the incessant salutations which greeted him everywhere—the wavering of the handkerchiefs from the females and shouts of the men. (qtd in Blake 181)

In Whitman’s editorial, Andrew Jackson is portrayed as a man of the people who actively engaged with the
Lincoln’s Revolutionary Rhetoric

public. “Old Hickory” wears a common white beaver pelt hat and he is not afraid to shake the hands of his adoring public. Women waved their handkerchiefs. Children watched the spectacle in patriotic awe, and men shouted loudly in support of Jackson and the union. Just as with Lincoln’s speech, Whitman and the New York audience rallied around the President, and they had absolute faith in his ability to make their lives better. Jackson believed in uniting the people around the cause of Republican liberty and freedom and, like Abraham Lincoln, he believed that the preservation of the union was of utmost importance.

However, during the 1850s Whitman increasingly saw the country being torn apart by sectional and political divisions. In his preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman argued that “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem” (qtd in Sweet 12). The poet believed that the purpose of his poetry was to clarify and reflect upon the current state of the American political system. The political and sectional divide in the country during the antebellum period threatened to destroy the Republican values and ideological unity that Whitman promoted in his poetry. Timothy Sweet asserts, “The Civil War threatened to devalue the greatest poem by deconstructing the political and Republican poetic phrase *United States* and fragmenting its ideological geography” (13). Prior to the Civil War, the political rhetoric of sectional and geographical division threatened to destroy the social unity of the new republic. Whitman believed that antebellum society had lost its connection to the unifying rhetoric of democratic liberty and freedom from the revolution that had inspired a sense of patriotism and national pride in the pub-
lic. In the 1850s, the country increasingly needed a strong leader who would employ the Republican rhetoric of the Founding Fathers and reunite the political factions. If the country could not resolve its sectional and partisan turmoil, the house of government would fall and Civil War would be inevitable.

In an unpublished 1856 political tract, entitled *The Eighteenth Presidency!*, Whitman harshly criticizes the current ideological state of the nation’s political leaders during his time. In his tract, Whitman argues that the country will continue to fall into sectional and cultural turmoil if the public supports the disunionist policies of James Buchanan and Millard Fillmore. According to Whitman, the nominees for president in 1856 were corrupt individuals only interested in promoting their own divisive agendas and not concerned with the well-being of their constituents. Whitman asserts:

Now the term of the seventeenth Presidency passing hooted and spurned to its close, the delegates of the politicians have nominated for the eighteenth term, Buchanan of Pennsylvania, and Fillmore of New York, separate tickets, but men both patterned to follow and match the seventeenth term, both disunionists, both old politicians, both sworn down to the theories of special parties, and of all others the theories that balk and reverse the main purposes of the founders of these states. (1336)

Whitman believed that the politicians of his era were
Lincoln’s Revolutionary Rhetoric

completely sold out to the special interest groups. They promoted the issues of the political machines over the ideological concerns of their constituents. Antebellum American politicians spent their time in “lawyers’ offices, secret lodges, backyards, bed-houses, and bar rooms; from out of the custom-houses, marshals’ offices, post-offices, and gambling hells” (Whitman 1337).¹ The country’s leaders deliberately distanced themselves from the people who had voted them into office. Whitman criticized these men as opportunistic office seekers, robbers, pimps, and malignants who do not represent the common man.

The inherent problem with the nominees for president in 1856 was that they did not come from the ranks of the workingman. The political figures of the antebellum era are “not from thrifty farms; not from the ranks of fresh bodied young men; not from among teachers, poets, savans, learned persons, temperate persons; not from among ship-builders, engineers, agriculturalists, scythe-swinging corn hoers” (Whitman 1337). Whitman believed that the only way to eliminate the sectional, economic, and social class divisions within the country was to elect a leader who represented the working class and was not corrupted by wealth, power, and privilege. In his pamphlet, the poet emphasizes the need for a president who understands the pressing concerns of the common man. Americans during the 1850s had lost faith in the ability of their leaders to address their individual concerns. Whitman argued that special interest groups and not individuals increasingly controlled the political process. According to Whitman, the public had become so disillusioned with the political process that they desperately needed a redeemer president who
would remind the country of the Republican values of self-determination and individual liberty preached by the Founding Fathers.

While Goodwin does not elevate Lincoln to the status of a demagogue in her narrative, she does agree with Whitman that the president’s ability to unite the country came from his status as a member of the lower class. As a result of his working class background, Lincoln epitomized the type of leader that Whitman believed the country needed. Goodwin writes, “In contrast to the comfortable lifestyle the Seward family enjoyed, and the secure early childhoods of Chase and Bates before their fathers died, Lincoln’s road to success was longer more tortuous and far less likely” (46). The future president grew up in log cabins and moved with his family from one dirt farm to another in Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky. His father never made enough money from farming to allow the family to improve their standing in life and hardship, death, and loss were a part of their everyday lives. In his early years, Lincoln did not live a privileged life, and as a result he could empathize with the suffering of the common man. Unlike Bates, Chase, and Seward, Lincoln was not corrupted by the influence of money and the political machine because
he had spent the majority of his life working for a living.

Goodwin and Whitman both maintain that, prior to Lincoln’s first term, members of special interest groups and the American Aristocracy increasingly influenced government policy during the mid nineteenth century. According to Goodwin, Seward, Chase, and Bates all came from wealthy political families. “The Team of Rivals” were members of the landed gentry and had access to money, education, and opportunity that were simply not available to Lincoln as a member of the working class. Whitman argues in *The Eighteenth President* that because power brokers increasingly influenced government policy, the common man had no say in the affairs of state. David Reynolds observes that the patriotic poet became increasingly disenchanted with the partisan political system:

> Whitman once a faithful party politician, who had respected the presidential office, regarded the three presidencies before Lincoln as our topmost warning and shame. The 1850s was also a decade of unprecedented political corruption, a time of vote buying, wire pulling, graft, and patronage on all levels of state and national government. (67)

Lincoln shared Whitman’s disillusionment with the ability of the government to represent the common man in the 1850s. This loss of faith in the political system is evidenced by the fact that the poet and the future President abandoned the Whig and Democratic
parties that they felt were subverting the rule of constitutional law and not supporting the rights of the working class. Even though there was active participation by the public in the political process during the mid nineteenth century, according to Whitman what was needed was an advocate for the rights of the oppressed working class. Reflecting upon the politicians of his time, Whitman claimed that the real America “does not appear in the government” (Altschuler 225). During the 1850s, Whitman complained that the middle and working classes were not adequately represented in the government. For Whitman, Lincoln epitomized the myth of the Republican hero because he sought to bring people of all economic, social, and ideological backgrounds into the political process.

According to Whitman and Lincoln, antebellum Americans were actively participating in politics, yet politicians were not adequately addressing their concerns. The wealthy elite who controlled the government were not exhibiting the type of ethical and social behavior that the public expected of them. Whitman’s commentary on the politicians of his time suggests a lack of any type of ethics or morality. Prior to the early nineteenth century, Americans viewed their leaders as moral paragons who had a spiritual duty to serve the best interests of the country. Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin argue that antebellum Americans sought to remind their leaders of their duty to God and country, and as a result, there was a parallel development between Evangelical Christianity and the rise of Republican political reform movements.
during the 1850s. Altschuler comments, “Political historians have recognized this parallel development and have probed in great detail not only the ethnoreligious foundations of partisan affiliation, but also the religious roots of reform movements such as temperance and abolition” (Altschuler 226). During the 1840s, evangelicals railed against the corrupt and immoral behavior of politicians and they became increasingly disenchanted with the corruption of the political process. However, these moral crusades against politicians soon faded when Evangelical Christian reformers realized that they could not crusade against alcohol, slavery, and Catholicism by refusing to participate in American political culture.

Blumin and Altschuler argue that the lack of morality in politics during the mid nineteenth century came from the desire of individuals to gain middle class respectability. Americans were not overly interested in the morality of their leaders if their behavior did not directly affect their ability to become successful wealthy individuals. Altschuler asserts:

Blatant office seeking and behind the scenes maneuvering, the cultivation of political loyalty among newly enfranchised workers and recently arrived immigrants, the inclusion in political organizations of saloon keepers, street toughs, and other forms of crude humbuggery, imparted an
unseemliness to politics that considerably complicated the simultaneous pursuit of an active political life. (228)

All of this unseemly political maneuvering was the antithesis of the social conscience of Abraham Lincoln. Unlike his rivals for the Republican nomination, Lincoln did not come from a privileged background, and therefore he was not influenced by the corrupt political system. According to Whitman, social reform movements could only come about with a leader like Lincoln who came from a working class background not tainted by the culture of Washington. Whitman believed that the country desperately needed a demagogue from outside the political establishment who would reform the ethically corrupt system and remind the public of their civic duty to unify the country for the common good and reject the greed, corruption, and sectionalism of the special interests.

Lincoln’s populist rhetoric and Whitman’s democratic poetry emphasize the sixteenth President’s allegiance to the union and his desire to uphold the Republican principles of equality, liberty, and freedom. As a type of neo founding father, Lincoln sought to remind the people of the importance of maintaining the integrity of the constitution and the intended principles established by the Founding Fathers. During the Lincoln Douglass debates of 1860, Lincoln carried in his coat pocket, “the opening lines of his house divided speech and the paragraph of the Declaration of Independence proclaiming that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life,
liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (Goodwin 203). For the poet and the future President, defending the intended meaning of the founders in the Declaration of Independence was the main focus of the campaign. Lincoln employed the revolutionary rhetoric of his early speeches and the constitution to persuade the public that the union needed to be maintained if the country was to remain intact. In contrast, the ideology of state’s rights and sectionalism proposed by Lincoln’s opponents sought to damage the country’s national identity. As a politician, Lincoln was successful at using populist revolutionary rhetoric to convince the country that he was the man to ensure the integrity of American society. Lincoln sold himself as the epitome of Whitman’s demagogue, yet his faith in the rhetoric of the founders could not withstand the sectional and cultural divisions within antebellum society.

While Goodwin acknowledges Lincoln’s identity as a neo Founding Father, she disagrees with Whitman’s historiographic portrayal of the President as the sole agent of change in Civil War America. Goodwin argues that once Lincoln was elected, he realized that he could not rebuild the country on his own. From his very first day in office, Lincoln realized
that the crisis the country faced was too big for one man to solve. Goodwin comments, “The immediacy of this crisis posed great difficulties for Lincoln. His revised inaugural had no longer contained a promise to reclaim fallen properties, but Lincoln had most definitely pledged to hold, occupy and possess all properties still in Federal hands” (334). The reality of the status of the nation was worse than the President had believed and the reality that the union might fracture hit the President hard in the first days of his term. After meeting with his cabinet, Lincoln began to realize that his promise of holding onto all federal properties was becoming impossible. The surrender of Fort Sumter became a necessity. Lincoln began to waver on his campaign promise. Thurlow Weed claimed that Lincoln said that if he could hold onto Virginia, he would be willing to surrender Sumter to the Confederacy. Goodwin argues that the President had regrets about the campaign promises he had made. The Republican hero that Whitman and the people hoped would keep the union together had initially failed to do so.

While Whitman’s political tracts and historiographic poetry emphasize the people’s need for a redeemer president to heal the wounds of a divided country, Goodwin’s narrative biography suggests that what the country needed was a leader who could work across sectional and party lines. Lincoln’s cabinet was composed of the members of factions that Whitman explicitly criticized in his political tracts. According to Whitman, the “Team of Rivals” that Goodwin idealizes had contributed to the country’s sectional divisions. Betsy Erkkila asserts:
Lincoln’s Revolutionary Rhetoric

In the mottled year of 1860, Lincoln appeared to offer a release from the failure of leadership and the series of compromises that had characterized the administrations of Fillmore, Pierce, and Buchanan. To Whitman, Lincoln represented a return to revolutionary principles set forth not in the compromised constitution but in the Declaration of Independence. (191)

While Whitman elevates the president to the status of a Republican hero who single handedly saved the union, Goodwin humanizes Lincoln arguing that due to the fractured nature of the country, he could not hold the union together on his own. Goodwin’s historiographic narrative acknowledges the celebrated romantic image of Lincoln that remains with the American people, however, she reinvents that image by portraying the sixteenth president as a complicated, flawed human being. According to Goodwin, Lincoln was “keenly aware of both the fractious nature of the youthful Republican party and the ominous threats from the South, he understood that his country was entering a most perilous time” (281). Lincoln specifically constructed his cabinet from his rivals for the nomination because he felt that he needed the support of individuals with differing ideologies to help him share the burden. “I began to feel at once that I needed support,” Lincoln noted later, “others to share with me the burden” (Goodwin 280). In contrast to Whitman’s strong and determined image of the mythic hero, Goodwin offers her audience a picture of a moral leader consciously aware of the need to work with those of different political persuasions to
maintain the union.

Goodwin and Whitman offer their readers two distinctive portrayals of Abraham Lincoln. However, historiographic poetry communicates cultural values differently from narrative biography. Goodwin’s *Team of Rivals* and Whitman’s *Memories of President Lincoln* both argue that the revolutionary rhetoric of Whitman and Lincoln remind the public of the shared values of patriotism and national identity that had been lost during the antebellum period. Yet, Goodwin’s narrative recounts the factual account of how Lincoln worked with the warring political factions to maintain the union whereas Whitman’s elegies reflect the cultural attitudes of his time.

In contrast to Goodwin’s narrative history, the mythic poetry of the antebellum period preserves the cultural attitudes and beliefs of the common man. Whitman’s political tracts and poetry provide a cultural reflection of the public’s attitude toward Lincoln during the mid nineteenth century. Helen Vendler observes:

> Whitman’s memorials of Lincoln are patriotic ones, devoted to the image of Lincoln, voiced in solidarity with the Union army, sharing the nation’s grief at Lincoln’s death and the carnage of the Civil War; and (Lilacs) proud of the much celebrated beauty of the American landscape. (4)

It is primarily from the Republican rhetoric of Whitman’s elegies that we have formed our modern collective image of Lincoln as a heroic redeemer president. In his poetry, Whitman deliberately portrays
Lincoln’s Revolutionary Rhetoric

Lincoln in mythic terms, however, the poet is a medium through which the attitudes of the public towards the president during his day were communicated. Whitman’s verse often reads like a political pamphlet from the eighteenth century promoting the ideology of Republican liberty and freedom. Michael Drexler argues that Walt Whitman, like his eighteenth-century revolutionary counterparts Phillip Freneau, Thomas Paine, and Benjamin Franklin, strategically utilized early Republican print culture to influence the public’s perception of their leaders and foster social change. Drexler claims that Whitman participated in the same political culture of the revolutionary pamphlet writers of the eighteenth century. He asserts that the historiographic poet employs Republican rhetoric not to overtly critique the political state of antebellum American society, but to promote the hagiographic image of Lincoln in the minds of the common man. Drexler asserts, that “though Whitman’s democrat-
ic idealism would lead him to celebrate the common man in ways foreign to Franklin’s elitist federalism, both Whitman and Franklin depend upon the screen that print offers, allowing them to operate unseen behind the paper veil” (63). According to Drexler, the print culture in the form of political pamphlets and historiographic elegies served as propaganda to affect the writing of history and promote social change and reform. In both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these publications promoted distinct political ideologies and shaped public perceptions of civic officials. In the same manner as the pamphlets of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine, Whitman’s poetry echoes the cultural beliefs and attitudes of his time period.

In his first memorial, *Hush’d Be the Camps To-Day*, Whitman composes a eulogy from the perspective of the union troops in the field. The troops are the subject of the poem and they ask the poet to mourn for Lincoln in their names. Whitman writes “But sing poet in our name, Sing of the love we bore him—because you, dweller in camps, know it truly” (361 7-9). In the first stanza of the poem, the troops collectively ask the poet to sing in their names and express their feelings of sorrow at Lincoln’s death. The soldiers in the poem lay down their “war-worn weapons” to celebrate their “dear commanders death”
Lincoln’s Revolutionary Rhetoric

(5). The troops in the field looked up to Lincoln as a defender of liberty and they were willing to die for the cause. Lincoln was sacrificed so that they could live. From the perspective of the mourners, Lincoln was a larger than life hero and that is how they want to remember him. Vendler claims, “What the soldiers want is not a eulogy of Lincoln’s personal life and actions, of the sort pronounced from the pulpit in Washington, but rather an articulation of their mourning” (5). Whitman portrays Lincoln as a demagogue because that is how the men in the field viewed him. Through the sixteenth-president’s persona as a supporter of the union and a proponent of Republican liberty, the troops were inspired to enlist in the army and die for their country.

An individual’s recollection of a historical time period is always invested in personal images and experiences. The way we collectively remember the past depends upon our social and cultural reaction to the major figures of the era. In contrast to Goodwin’s narrative portrayal of Lincoln, Whitman’s elegies are highly invested in preserving Lincoln as a mythic Republican hero; however more modern accounts seek to detach Lincoln from his mythic status. According to Barry Schwartz:

On the 1909 centennial of Abraham Lincoln’s birth, for example, Henry Cabot Lodge expressed the desire to detach Lincoln from the myth, which has possession of us all that his wisdom, his purity and his greatness were as obvious and acknowledged. . . in his lifetime as they are today. (301)
Abraham Lincoln did not fully become a national celebrity until the decades of the early twentieth century. Barry Schwartz argues that World War One and the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Warren G Harding sparked a renewed interest in the nation’s cultural icons. The expanding international power of the United States and the redistribution of domestic power restricted the type of man that Americans could make of Lincoln. Schwartz observes, “Common weak men cannot represent great and powerful nations; elitist strong men cannot represent democracies” (301).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Americans were deeply divided about how to memorialize the sixteenth president. In terms of collective historical memory, the decision as to how to remember a leader depends upon the cultural values of the time period. The debate over how to preserve Lincoln’s image in the early twentieth century reminds us of the stark differences between Goodwin’s realistic portrayal of Lincoln and Whitman’s heroic and romantic portrayal. In 1917 the sculptors Augustus Saint Gaudens and George Gray Barnard were commissioned to produce two distinct commemorative statues of Lincoln. According to Schwartz, Saint Gaudens statue emphasized the President’s Republican stature while Baranrd’s focused on Lincoln’s working class status. Americans had to decide whether they wanted to remember Lincoln as Republican hero of the common prairie lawyer President. Saint Gaudens took a balanced approach preserving the heroic nature of the President, yet depicting him as accessible to the common man. In contrast, “Barnard chose to portray the president in the worst possible way, exaggerating his every defect in body and dress. The savior of the
Lincoln’s Revolutionary Rhetoric

Union was revealed as a common clodhopper, a lanky, stooped-over man ridiculously dressed” (Schwartz 305). The iconic representations of Lincoln in these two statues resemble the stark difference in the narrative portrayals of the President in the poetry of Whitman and Goodwin’s historical narrative. While Goodwin does not go as far as Barnard in her making Lincoln into a common man, she does nevertheless emphasize Lincoln’s status as a man of the people. Goodwin acknowledges the cultural importance of the mythic Republican hero, yet she deconstructs the accepted image of the sixteenth president by portraying him as a complex human being. Goodwin’s Lincoln embodies the heroic qualities of a demagogue, yet the Republican hero must enlist the support of his rivals to work for the common good of the nation.

As a historian, Goodwin records and preserves the events and policies of Lincoln’s presidency while the poet preserves the romantic narrative of the President etched in the public’s mind. In contrast to Goodwin’s historical narrative, Whitman’s poetry addresses cultural values differently than prose. Historical accounts report the facts surrounding a political figure’s life whereas
as art and poetry record the heroic imagined image that has been continually perpetuated by the common man. Unlike the historian, Whitman’s role as national elegist was to reflect the sentiment of the American public towards the President during his time. In contrast, Goodwin’s narrative deconstructs the accepted image of Lincoln by offering the public a picture of Lincoln as a principled moral leader deeply conflicted over the pressing political issues of his day. As forms of cultural production, Walt Whitman’s historiographic elegies and Doris Kearns Goodwin’s narrative biography offer two distinct portrayals of Lincoln that reflect the cultural values of the antebellum period.
Lincoln’s Revolutionary Rhetoric

Works Cited


Endnotes

1 It seems ironic that in *The Eighteenth President!* Whitman harshly criticizes politicians who spend their time in Lawyer’s offices. While Lincoln represents the epitome of the poet’s moral Republican hero, the sixteenth President gained his political experience in the Illinois bar. As a historian, Goodwin argues that Lincoln’s ability to work with the warring political factions came from his experience in the politically corrupt legal community in Illinois. Whitman’s hagiographic demagogue came from the one group in antebellum society that Whitman detested.
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