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# Homeward Bound: Wordsworth, Shelley, and the Long Search for Home

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Homeward Bound: Wordsworth, Shelley, and the Long Search for Home  
Samantha Heffner

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Romanticism is, perhaps, one of the movements in literary history most closely identified with itinerancy, and one of the first to bear the mark of a cosmopolitan, trans-national attitude that eschewed the confining nature of borders. Of the Big Six, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron are best known for their travels, but Coleridge and Keats also moved around quite frequently, even if they remained largely within the confines of England. This amount of movement was not confined to the writers and thinkers of the day, however; rather, such movement was a characteristic experience all across the nation, and all across the Continent, as well. The Romantic age was dominated first by the Revolutionary Wars, which were followed by the Napoleonic Wars, which eventually escalated to the dimensions of what could be considered a world war (Curran, "Romanticism" 637). Because of this upheaval, Stuart Curran argues, "displacement as abiding notion" became "the norm rather than the anomaly for this period" (637). Romanticism thus "created an entire literature of displacement," its figures "unconnected, atomized, aim-less: placeless" (638, 644).

In England, almost the entire population was displaced in some way or another. The French wars were "arguably the most extensive and demanding" wars in British history, the loss of life among servicemen "proportionally higher than in the First World War" (Philp 17). This national mobilization was "quite unprecedented in its scale and intensity": At their peak strength, Britain's armed forces numbered over three-quarters of a million, rural workers were enlisted to assist the army, women participated in "committees of clothing" to provide aid for troops, and numerous civilians signed up to patriotic subscriptions, which were organized "down to the parish level" (Cookson 29). This mass mobilization between 1793 and 1815 "was undoubtedly a unique, nation-forming experience in that huge numbers were brought into actual national service, in a situation when the highest possible value was placed on that service" (Cookson 30).

Certainly, compared to continental states, Britain was already “an exceptionally cohesive and nationalistic state,” but the threats of revolution in 1792 and invasion in 1797 worked to galvanize the nation into what its citizens perceived as a more unified whole (Cookson 29, Philp 22-23). Yet the population was also being moved around or enlisted. Between 15 and 20 per cent of all young adult men in Britain were mobilized for the war effort, and those left behind were forced to struggle to continue with their lives as best they could (641). Like the Female Vagrant of Wordsworth’s eponymous poem in *Lyrical Ballads*, many of these people were “From the sweet thoughts of home / And from all hope ... forever hurled” (168-169).

Of course, she was also “forever hurled” from home by the processes of enclosure and industrialization, which were of the more highly contested issues during this period.

Industrialization was another force of change that swept through Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century, and it brought with it monumental change: not only would the population explode, but it would also redistribute itself, as country-dwellers converted into town-dwellers, replacing the rural with an urban civilization (Thomis 7-8). Between 1780 and 1834 “the rural territory of England – fields, estates, commons, wastes, villages – was the arena and the object of a bitter set of rhetorical and practical contests” (Janowitz 152). This was largely due to advances in agricultural production, which necessarily required a transformation in the configuration of farmland. Between 1762 and 1844, there were “more than 2,500 enclosure acts, engrossing over 4 million acres of land fanning out from the centre of England,” and “almost 43 per cent of all parliamentary enclosure acts took place” during the period of the French wars (Janowitz 155). Similarly, the cottage industry buckled as industrialization sparked the formation of many new towns across the nation, forcing people to move to urban areas to work in the factories that took away their normal source of income. All of these changes left many Britons reeling in their

wake, as the Female Vagrant laments in Wordsworth's poem: "All, all was seized, and weeping side by side / We sought a home where we uninjured might abide" (53-54).

In the midst of such a sweeping storm of change, there were many people like the Female Vagrant who lamented the new world that was emerging. Images of "whole villages ... depopulated or reduced to a few miserable hovels," of "farms ... being put together and cottages demolished" were common among contemporary pamphleteers, who emphasized the sense of injustice which many experienced in the face of the industrializing economy (Thomis 39-40). Indeed, the pace of change the British people were experiencing was unprecedented. By 1831, for example, Manchester was six times larger than it had been 60 years before; where one would once have seen only the single chimney of a mill upon approaching, thirty years later that same traveller would be greeted by a "forest of chimneys" (Thomis 10, 41). Because of these rampant changes, there was a palpable feeling of an irrevocably lost past that permeated the period. Indeed, an entirely new medical phenomenon came to the forefront at this time: nostalgia. Although this word was not widely used until the twentieth century, it actually first appeared in England in 1787, in medical reports about a Welsh soldier suffering from homesickness (Austin 75). However, it was not used in the same way it is today; "nostalgia" was a primarily medical term, a "disease of displacement" defined by Erasmus Darwin as "an unconquerable desire of returning to one's native country, frequent in long voyages" (Goodman, "Romantic Poetry" 200; qtd. in Goodman, "Romantic Poetry" 201). Yet nostalgia also came about as a result of the movement caused by industrialization. As cities grew, transportation became easier, and war drew people into foreign areas, the disparity between those new locations and the locality of a small village, "the particularities of the province, the local customs," became difficult to reconcile (Starobinski 101-102). Wordsworth is the poet most closely associated with this kind

of nostalgic homesickness, from the Female Vagrant to his depictions of children in poems such as “We are Seven” and “Lucy Gray” (Austin), to his “closeted clinical nostalgics,” such as the protagonists of “The Brothers” and the narrator of “The Thorn,” developed throughout the *Lyrical Ballads* (Goodman, “Romantic Poetry”). Yet nostalgia quickly developed from a medical condition into a “cultural aesthetic,” a “way of producing and consuming the past” that has become “irrevocably associated with sentimentality” (Goodman, “Uncertain Diseases” 201).<sup>1</sup> This sentimentality is still often associated with ideas of home and homesickness, but issues of home and belonging have heretofore been pushed aside by the scholarship, even though the word “nostalgia” comes from the Greek words *nostos* (homecoming) and *algos* (sorrow or pain).

Certainly, this yearning for something lost, something that lies largely in the past, is characteristic of much of the Romantics’ works. This mire of war, displacement, and clinical nostalgia – of homelessness, one might argue – cannot have existed unless the idea of a “home” from which one might be separated exists, too.<sup>2</sup> Thus, one must wonder how ideas of home may or may not show up in the works of some of the period’s most influential authors. William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley, in particular, invite comparison as key members of each Romantic generation. Indeed, two of their shorter works, “Tintern Abbey” and “Mont Blanc,” are even widely regarded as being in conversation with one another, Shelley responding to

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see Kevis Goodman, “Romantic Poetry and the Science of Nostalgia,” *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, edited by James Chandler and Maureen N. McLane, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 195-216; Goodman, “‘Uncertain Disease’: Nostalgia, Pathologies of Motion, Practices of Reading,” *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2010, pp. 197-227; Linda M. Austin, “Children of Childhood: Nostalgia and the Romantic Legacy,” *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2003, pp. 75-98; and Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Unless noted otherwise, any time I place quotes around the word “home” or a phrase like “come home,” or “coming home,” or any variation of those phrases, I do so in order to emphasize that term in its more abstract meaning, rather than a literal meaning, whether it be a literal home, or a literal homecoming.

Wordsworth.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Wordsworth was a major influence on Shelley, who found inspiration in the competition that resulted from such influence (Blank 12). Of course, Shelley only knew of the Solitary of *The Excursion*, and in his eyes this Wordsworth had reached the limits of his poetry; it was then up to Shelley to continue, or extend, the work Wordsworth had done (Blank 5). Thus, although actual contact between the poets was minimal at best, their works interact with one another, bringing them together alongside their biographical parallels.

Both poets have biographies that are characterized by itinerancy: Wordsworth, whose childhood was one of “deaths, dislocations, and abandonments,” had the “poetic impulse ... to root himself in his native landscape – to come ‘home to rest’” (Roe, “Early Life” 36, 38). Indeed, Wordsworth is “*the* English poet of place” (McCracken 1), so indelibly connected to the Lake District that, today and even during his lifetime, one could not visit that part of England without feeling the way in which it has been imbued with Wordsworth’s presence. This association began during his childhood, but it solidified when, in 1799, he and his sister, Dorothy, moved into Dove Cottage in Grasmere, which many have considered to be their first “real home” (K. Smith 51). His domestic circle grew over the years, and, after moving to Rydal Mount in 1813, the Wordsworth household “was not a world apart but the hub of an almost clan-like network,” with the extended family in regular circulation between various households (K. Smith 60). Of course, this tightly-knit community, which would allow Wordsworth to publish many of his most famous works, did not exist for the first thirty years of his life. In fact, in the 1790s he was quite the wanderer: In 1790, he underwent his first tour of France, returning to England in 1792; the next year, he embarked on a tour of the west of England and the Isle of Wight, during which he visited Tintern Abbey for the first time; he was more settled within England between 1794-1798,

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, Duncan Wu introduces “Mont Blanc” as a response to “Tintern Abbey” (Wu 1104).

yet he still changed residence three times; and in 1798, he and Dorothy departed for Germany, not returning to England until February of 1799 (Simons 99-101). Yet despite the importance of movement, itinerancy, and his idealized image of the wandering poet-philosopher, Wordsworth returned time and time again to Grasmere, both in his life and in his poetry, indicating an importance on that location as a kind of home for himself.

Shelley, on the other hand, never had such a place to consider a home to which he might always return. Indeed, throughout nearly all of his life, Shelley struggled to find any place where he really, truly belonged. Parental conflicts and schoolyard persecutions committed Shelley to trying to improve the world, though doing so further isolated from his immediate family (Bieri and Reiman 16-17). After being expelled from Oxford, a “lonely, depressed, and introspective Shelley” roamed through London, Sussex, and York before eloping to Edinburgh with Harriet Westbrook, with whom he also travelled through Wales, Keswick, Dublin (twice), and Windsor. In 1814, he abandoned Harriet to elope to the Continent with Mary Godwin and her stepsister Claire. The party return to England once more in 1816, constantly moved houses, and left once again (for good, in Shelley’s case) in 1818, when they arrived in Italy, where Shelley would spend the rest of his life (Bieri and Reiman). Yet Shelley was never truly at home in Italy, either, even as he dubbed it a “paradise of exiles.” His unusual circumstances as a travelling family man placed him on the margins among Italians, and among tourists, he stood out as a quasi-resident. Such a “double exclusion” led to “a sense of emptiness,” of being uprooted and separate from those around him (Pite 36). Though, indeed, Shelley was “very fond of travelling,” as his wife Mary once remarked, and though he “played the tourist deftly,” he still remained in search of “an elusive homestead,” or a place that he could truly call his own (Colbert 595-596). His travels were constantly “marked by a tension between ‘restlessness’ and a desire to find a

dwelling place, a place of belonging even in exile” (Colbert 596). A little ironically, though very fittingly, upon hearing his first name, Emilia Viviani, one of his muses found in Italy, asked, “*Persi?* Lost?” presciently illustrating his lifelong struggle to belong (qtd. in Wroe 86).

Such ideas of home, belonging, community, and nostalgia, however, have not been central to much of the extensive scholarship surrounding these two poets. Since the rise of poststructural criticism, the political-historical has dominated the field, whether it be the way Wordsworth’s radical years in France influenced the “language, mood, [and] philosophical bias” of “Tintern Abbey,” (Roe, “Politics” 641), or the way Shelley’s own vehement personal politics infuse so much of his works. Of course, both poets have also been popular among formalists, too, with their experimentation with poetic form, as well as their technical mastery of the English language.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Wordsworth himself once remarked that “Shelley is one of the best *artists* of us all: I mean in workmanship of style.” (qtd. in Curran, “Lyrical Drama” 289). Questions of ideology, epistemology, ethical philosophies, and language’s ability to imitate experience, among other matters, has also occupied critics over the last few decades.<sup>5</sup> And, as discussed above, issues like displacement, exile, itinerancy, and nostalgia have also provoked a large amount of scholarship, yet the homes from which all of those concepts stem have not been addressed. Although an issue like home may be less readily associated with poems like “Tintern

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<sup>4</sup> For more on formal criticism, see Ruth Abbot, “Wordsworth’s Prosody,” and Charles Mahoney, “Wordsworth’s Experiments with Form and Genre” in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth* (ed. Stephen Gill, Oxford University Press, 2015), as well as David Duff, “Lyric Development: Esdaile Notebook to Hymns of 1816,” Jack Donovan, “Epic Experiments: Queen Mab and Laon and Cythna,” and Stuart Curran, “Lyrical Drama: *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (ed. Michael O’Neill and Anthony Howe, Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Examples of this type of criticism include Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*, University of Chicago Press, 1983; Marjorie Levinson, “Insight and Oversight: Reading ‘Tintern Abbey,’” *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems: Four Essays*, Cambridge University Press, 1986; Kenneth R. Johnston, “The Politics of ‘Tintern Abbey,’” *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 14, 1983, pp. 6-14; Richard Gravil, “Tintern Abbey and the System of Nature,” *Romanticism*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2000, pp. 35-54; William Keach, *Shelley’s Style*, Methuen, 1984; Frances Ferguson, “Shelley’s *Mont Blanc*: What the Mountain Said.” *Romanticism and Language*, ed. Arden Reed, Cornell University Press, 1984; John B. Pierce, “‘Mont Blanc’ and *Prometheus Unbound*: Shelley’s Use of the Rhetoric of Silence,” *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 38, 1989, pp. 103-126.

Abbey,” “Mont Blanc,” and *Prometheus Unbound* (*The Prelude* arguably being, in large part, an epic of Wordsworth’s journey towards Grasmere and *The Recluse*), the questions of belonging, of homecoming, and of that home from which the poet may wander remain unanswered. Certainly, scholarship in more recent years has taken a turn towards an emphasis on the relationship amongst form, aesthetic, and feeling, rather than how the poem may look under various political lenses; however, this type of scholarship has been more common among studies of Wordsworth, rather than Shelley.<sup>6</sup>

In another vein, the concept of the “egotistical sublime” has consistently framed the way critics have conceptualized not only Wordsworth, but the rest of the Romantic poets, too. Ideas of community gave way to the “myth of the isolated artist” that came about during the Romantic period (Hay xvii). This is largely due to the poets themselves; Wordsworth, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, famously described poetry as “a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings ... recollected in tranquility,” and Shelley, in his “Defence of Poetry,” suggested that “the power” of poetry “arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it develops” (“Preface” 79; “Defence” 531). Such statements, Daisy Hay has argued, “transformed the way we think about creativity and genius. Creativity was repositioned as something internal and personal, and poetry – despite its political significance – as the product of an individual’s communion with his own mind. The artist became an isolated figure, striving alone to create works of genius” (Hay xviii). Recent work such as Hay’s has attempted to widen this spotlight, to treat these poets more like contemporaries, rather than isolated geniuses. Hay focuses her book on constructing a counterargument to this myth, demonstrating mainly through biography

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<sup>6</sup> See Seth Reno, “Wordsworthian Love,” *European Romantic Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2012, pp. 177-201; and Heidi Thomson, “The Importance of Other People and the Transmission of Affect in Wordsworth’s Lyric Poetry,” *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 110, no. 4, 2015, pp. 969-991.

the “tangled lives” her title mentions. Similarly, Seth Reno and Heidi Thomson have begun shifting the spotlight in Wordsworth’s poetry away from the solitary figure of the poet himself to a “theory of love” that reaffirms “the indispensable need for a familiar community,” focusing mainly on the role his sister Dorothy plays in his poetry (Reno 178; Thomson 535). I want to build upon this restructuring of how we look at the Romantic poets, looking closely at “Tintern Abbey,” “Mont Blanc,” *The Prelude*, and *Prometheus Unbound* to see how these issues of home, community, and belonging figure into the poetry, and how Wordsworth and Shelley construct their own conceptions of “home.”

Indeed, both of these poets establish speakers who seek a kind of community to which he might belong, which he might be able to consider a home. By “home,” I mean where one feels a sense of belonging, of familiarity, or community, or where one is meant to be. This can be a physical place, but it can also be a state of being that transcends the physical. The feeling of home can arise amongst the right group of people, or in the right moment, in which one feels a sense of unity with his or her surroundings. By “community,” I mean the sense of a group of people living in the same place, or having a particular characteristic in common, as well as a feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. Both Wordsworth and Shelley sought something to which both of these concepts could be applied. However, neither poet is particularly successful. Wordsworth is successful to a point, in that he establishes a fairly stable community of like-minded peers at Grasmere, but he remains mentally unsettled, never feeling able to bring to fruition his ideal work, *The Recluse*. We see the beginning of his journey in “Tintern Abbey,” where Wordsworth, upon his joyous return to the Wye Valley, establishes a kind of community with his sister, Dorothy, and the “presence” he feels among the fields and trees. This trajectory continues through his masterpiece, *The Prelude*,

in which Wordsworth traces the growth of his mind to the point where he realizes his poetic mission. Even so, although *The Prelude* is meant as the “portico” to *The Recluse*, and although its conclusion is the moment that would lead directly into the beginning of the second poem, it remains an epic of wandering, its circular structure creating a cycle that never truly ends. Thus, although he does, in a way, come home to Grasmere, he never truly “comes home” to the point that he is able to work on a project like *The Recluse*.

And if Wordsworth is somewhat successful, Shelley is hardly successful at all in finding his home. In “Mont Blanc,” his rhetorical situation is much more isolated, with no companion with whom he may form a meaningful connection. Rather, he seeks a connection to some *thing*, an entity other than the self, yet that *thing* remains elusive, just as a homestead to call his own remained elusive in his own life. In his lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound*, there is a measure of the kind of *nostos* Wordsworth finds in Grasmere in the cave to which Prometheus and his companions eventually retire. Communities and connections are made between the characters and the spirits of the landscape in a way not unlike what Shelley sought with the mysterious power at the peak of Mont Blanc. Yet these central characters and the community they build disappear before the beginning of the final act, which is entirely occupied by a universal celebration of the new world that has emerged from the revolution that has just occurred. Thus, the lyrical drama ends with a beginning, and it fails to settle down, its closure actually being a new opening. For both Wordsworth and Shelley, “home,” in its truest sense, is somewhat inaccessible. The movement towards *nostos* is complicated by the *algos*, or *algia*, of nostalgia, and the quest for a home becomes, like many other Romantic quests, a search for an unattainable ideal.

## **I. Beginning the Journey: “Tintern Abbey” and “Mont Blanc”**

Certainly, ideas of community are a central concern to these poets as they continually search for what might feel like “home.” Wordsworth, to begin, continually thrived on “moments of exchange and correspondence with others,” with friendship serving as “a vital aspect of his creative imagination” (James 65). He took friendship very seriously, friends, in some ways, forming a new family after the deaths of his parents during his childhood (James 69). But he also felt a necessary connection with nature, often feeling it wherever he went. Indeed, it does not seem to be the case that Wordsworth necessarily needed to be within the confines of the Lake District in order to feel a sense of belonging, or of being “at home.” In “Tintern Abbey,” for example, Wordsworth finds in nature what William Hazlitt called in *The Spirit of the Age* “a kind of home” (Hazlitt 135):

Mr. Wordsworth has passed his life in solitary musing, or in daily converse with the face of nature. ... He has dwelt among pastoral scenes, till each object has become connected with a thousand feelings, a link in the chain of thought, a fibre of his own heart. (135)

The key word here is “dwelt,” which indicates a kind of residence within nature. Although Hazlitt refers specifically to Wordsworth’s home in the Lake District, thus referring to a particular geographic location, there is still the implication that Wordsworth would feel at home within any natural landscape, so long as he can commune with his surroundings “till each object has become connected with a thousand feelings.”

And, in fact, this is how Wordsworth responds to the landscape of the Wye Valley upon returning after five years. At the poem’s very beginning, there is a sense of *nostos* achieved:

... *Once again*

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,

Which on a wild secluded scene impress  
 Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
 The landscape with the quiet of the sky.  
 The day is come when I *again* repose  
 Here, under this dark sycamore ...

... *Once again* I see

These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines  
 Of sportive wood run wild ... (4-17, emphasis added)

The emphasis Wordsworth places on the fact that he is seeing the valley *once again* is especially important here, as it conveys the impatience Wordsworth appears to have had to return. The language of returning is also infused with joy as he takes in the landscape around him; he is ecstatic to be back after “five summers, with the length of five long winters” (1-2). Just as well, “the landscape” merging “with the quiet of the sky” creates a sense of coming together, of finally fitting a puzzle piece into its proper spot. Wordsworth is one with his environment, and, furthermore, his ability to connect with the landscape indicates that he truly belongs in such a setting, rather than a more urban area.

Alongside this sense of homecoming is also a sense of past homesickness. Here, we see a taste of the *algos* that comes before the *nostos*, the feeling that, in those intervening years, Wordsworth yearned to return to this beautiful valley:

Though absent long,  
 These forms of beauty have not been to me,  
 As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:  
 But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din

Of towns and cities I have owed to them,  
 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,  
 And passing even into my purer mind  
 With tranquil restoration ... (23-31)

This passage is often used to illustrate “the nurturing function of nature” (McFarland 62), or the way that, “for Wordsworth, time provides a kind of continuum, a calm medium facilitating easy movement between then and now” (Endo 286). But it also illustrates the longing Wordsworth has felt for the landscape, and the sense that that natural environment is, really, where he belongs. Even so, this passage does not necessarily describe homesickness; Wordsworth isn’t physically *there* at Tintern Abbey, but he has carried those feelings of home within him for moments like those in “lonely rooms,” or among the “sneers of selfish men” (26, 130). “Home” is thus not a physical space demarcated by something like walls; rather, for Wordsworth, it is those “sensations sweet” that are “felt along the heart;” it is emotional, and more contingent on circumstance, rather than place. Wordsworth notes later “how oft, in spirit, I have turned to thee / O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods, / How often has my spirit turned to thee!” (56-58). These memories are also currently being stored as “life and food for future years” (29, 65-66). Memory is thus embodied in a way that illustrates how viscerally Wordsworth carries it, yet it also illustrates how such memories can sustain him in times of separation. Indeed, this emotional attachment is not unlike the “unconquerable desire of returning to one’s native country” posited by Erasmus Darwin.

This theme of nature-as-home continues throughout the poem, becoming manifest even in one of the great pantheistic passages of the poem:

... And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 And the round ocean, and the living air,  
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,  
 A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things. (94-103)

A form of the word “dwell” makes another appearance here, this time from Wordsworth’s own pen. And while this “presence” dwells among everything, its use evokes a sense of home, a sense that it lives everywhere, and in everyone, including Wordsworth. The “presence” also lives “in the mind of man,” blurring the boundaries of where home begins and where it ends, thus creating the sensation of everything feeling “far more deeply interfused” as the presence “rolls through all things.” This experience is not unlike the “aspect more sublime” Wordsworth brings up earlier in the poem, “that blessed mood ... / In which the heavy and weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lighten’d,” thus allowing us to “see into the life of things” (38-50). Even as these passages carry a remarkably religious reverence for the experience of communing with nature, there is also a feeling of nature as a spiritual safe harbor, which comes up when Wordsworth calls nature “the anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being” (110-112). Through this language of connection on the level of the heart and the soul, Wordsworth thus forms a community with

nature. This community is one formed on a basis of love, and such a connection, or feeling of kinship, leads to the address to Dorothy, who ultimately becomes the true audience of these expressions of love and belonging.

The address to Dorothy has bemused critics since the poem's initial publication. Some consider it a power move on Wordsworth's part, a desire to silence the female voice in favor of male authority; others read it as an instance of Wordsworth's egotism, turning Dorothy's first visit to the valley into a story that focuses on himself; still others see it as a consolatory attempt to reconstruct his initial experiences in the Wye valley, which are irrevocably lost (Reno 193). Heidi Thomson, however, has suggested that Dorothy's part in the poem "is not to serve as the speaker's nursery training wheels *en route* to individual selfhood," but rather to serve as an assertion for "the necessity of a shared experience with a beloved person," and "the indispensable need for a familiar community" (533; 535). Seth Reno has further argued that "it is not so much that Dorothy represents the younger Wordsworth than that Wordsworth expresses a newfound connection between himself and his sister. As he moves from earthly affection to cosmic love earlier in the poem, so he moves from cosmic love to an intimate human relationship at the end" (194). Both of these arguments privilege the human over the natural, suggesting that Wordsworth turns away from nature to the humanity of his sister; however, what Wordsworth actually does is somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, he pulls Dorothy into the community he has already created with nature, initiating her into his natural society; on the other, he turns Dorothy into another home for himself, forming a community of human connection and affection that, while not completely unrelated, is certainly distinct from his community with nature.

Dorothy is both included and appropriated by Wordsworth, who introduces her "here, upon the banks / Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend, / My dear, dear Friend" (115-117).

She is his companion, and together they share a close bond that remains all but unbreakable throughout their lives, yet, as he moves through the address to her, he establishes her both as a member of his family with nature, and as another anchor, or home, for his own soul:

... And this prayer I make,  
 Knowing that Nature never did betray  
 The heart that loved her...  
 ... let the moon  
 Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;  
 And let the misty mountain winds be free  
 To blow against thee: and in after years,  
 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured  
 Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind  
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,  
 Thy memory be as a dwelling place  
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies... (122-124; 135-143)

The imagery here presents nature interacting with Dorothy in a rather affectionate way, almost caressing her as she moves through it. Wordsworth prays that nature will treat Dorothy as a friend, and that she, too, will be able to experience the “sensations sweet / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart” when she is also away from the natural landscape (27-28). With this prayer, Dorothy is thus initiated into Wordsworth’s community with nature, and there is a feeling of elation on Wordsworth’s part that his “dear, dear Sister” is also able, now, to become “deeply interfused” with the natural world. Yet he also turns her mind into “a mansion for all lovely forms,” her memory into “a dwelling place / For all sweet sounds and harmonies.” Just as

Wordsworth stores his own memories of this valley as “life and food / For future years,” so too does he expect Dorothy to interact with the landscape in a similar way (65-66). However, the use of “dwell” again here recalls the imagery of the pantheistic passage, thus turning Dorothy into a “dwelling” for his own spirit, and his own memory. This address is “is invested with a degree of proximity ... and an intimacy which turns us as readers almost into voyeurs,” but it also turns Wordsworth and Dorothy into inhabitants of the same spiritual space, and the same spiritual way of being (Thomson 539). “Home” thus becomes a concept that is less physical, and certainly not geographical; rather, for Wordsworth, it has become a notion of contingency: wherever Dorothy is, with her stores of memories of their shared experience in the Wye Valley, or whenever Wordsworth can be in the embrace of the natural environment, is where he locates his “home.”

Whereas “Tintern Abbey” “settles down to a broad and deep current of Wordsworthian certainty,” Shelley, in “Mont Blanc,” “deprives his setting of Wordsworth’s consoling ‘sense sublime’ ... undermin[ing] the secure relationship between subject and nature so crucial to Wordsworth’s poem” (McFarland 62; Endo 286). Even so, there are still hints in “Mont Blanc” of a search for that same sense of community through communion with nature, although Shelley also seems to expand Wordsworth’s desire to connect with nature to a new desire to connect with a more abstract, neo-Platonic entity. This altered view of “home” that Shelley develops is in line with G. Kim Blank’s assertion that, throughout his poetry, Shelley is in “competition with those very writers who would have influenced him,” and that this competition becomes a source of inspiration (Blank 12). “Tintern Abbey” is thus an “antecedent” of “Mont Blanc,” and, as Paul Endo, Blank, and others have argued, Shelley works to correct Wordsworth in his poem, “attempting to delineate how in fact *he* sees” and making a point about “limitations and origins:

we really cannot tell where the outside world ends and where the inside world begins” (Blank 175). “Tintern Abbey,” then, is a model for Shelley’s poem, though, Blank qualifies, it acts “as both model and anti-model” (172). “Mont Blanc” thus becomes an “anti-Wordsworthian” poem, in which the poet “contemplates a mountain, now the archetypal Wordsworthian subject, but finds there deist or atheistic truths” rather than “the evidence of a benign Deity mindful of human affairs” (Butler 141). “Mont Blanc” is “a revision of Wordsworth’s ‘gleams of half-extinguished thought’” (Brinkley 56); Shelley takes Wordsworth’s nostalgic reverence for his home in nature and turns it into longing for a home in another world. Wordsworth’s home is material, present and accessible in our own world, but Shelley’s is abstract, and even potentially unattainable. Shelley thus emphasizes the *algos* over the *nostos*, overturning, in his own way, the idea of home established in “Tintern Abbey.”

Though Shelley’s “natural state” may have been exile, his wandering “largely instinctive,” he also “very quickly, quicker than he wanted ... became attached to places” (Wroe 52-53). Indeed, he had “dreams of a ‘fixed, settled, eternal home’, somewhere in the Thames Valley,” an “idyllic picture of his own nest, a family fireside” (Wroe 54). These competing impulses to move and to settle figure into some of the complications of a poem like “Mont Blanc,” as Shelley hesitates to reach the kind of security Wordsworth possesses in “Tintern Abbey.” Yet his search for a place to call home was not strictly limited to the physical or to the personal. Upon visiting Mont Blanc, Shelley experienced a “madness” that “stemmed not from his sense of dislocation with the world, but with the realization that his existence and the mountain’s were one in his mind,” making him long “to be united ... with the vast mind of which he was a part” (Wroe 155-156). Thus, in Shelley’s reaction to his visit to Mont Blanc, we can see a gesture towards the unity with the natural and spiritual worlds that we previously saw

in “Tintern Abbey.”

And, indeed, just as Wordsworth’s presence “rolls through all things,” Shelley describes a similar experience in the first lines of his poem:

The everlasting universe of things  
 Flows *through the mind*, and *rolls* its rapid waves,  
 Now dark – now glittering – now reflecting gloom –  
 Now lending splendor, where from secret springs  
 The source of human thought its tribute brings  
 Of waters ... (1-6, emphasis added)

Shelley, like Wordsworth, experiences a communion with nature that takes him beyond his present location, a kind of spiritual unity that is essentially transcendental. However, unlike Wordsworth, nature does not become the safe harbor, or “anchor” that it is in “Tintern Abbey”; rather, Shelley’s nature is a little wilder, a little murkier with uncertainty: “now dark – now glittering – now reflecting gloom – / Now lending splendor.” These lines are distracted, breaking off from one another with a heavy use of dashes, as if the speaker cannot make sense of that which he is experiencing. Such doubt is characteristic of Shelley, and it undermines the “Wordsworthian certainty” that is so closely associated with “Tintern Abbey” (McFarland 62).

Indeed, in his sonnet “To Wordsworth,” Shelley compares his predecessor to “a lone star, whose light did shine / On some frail bark in winter’s midnight roar,” as well as “a rock-built refuge” (7-9). Yet as Wordsworth deserts those values he once advocated, he brings grief to Shelley, who mourns the loss of the young, radical poet and who, through the absence of this guiding force towards some kind of refuge, remains lost, adrift, and displaced (13-14). Thus, it is up to Shelley to rework and redefine the principles that, in his eyes, had been lost to

Wordsworth's growing political and religious conservatism. He must work to "correct"

Wordsworth's philosophy, to use the language of *clinamen* and *tessera* adopted from Harold

Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*:

Shelley swerves towards and away from Wordsworth, attempting to delineate how in fact *he* sees, what part of his perception originates from the subject, and what part from the manifold objects, the universe. ... So although the poem is 'corrective' of Wordsworth ... *Mont Blanc*'s relationship to its precursor poem *Tintern Abbey* also seems to correspond with Bloom's second revisionary ratio of *tessera*, where completion and antithesis are the dominating characteristics ...

Both Shelley and Wordsworth were inspired by Nature, but whereas for Wordsworth Nature mitigates, comforts and consoles, for Shelley it agitates, challenges and intimidates. (Blank 175; 180-181)

Just as Shelley "corrects" Wordsworth's conception of nature, so too does he shift away from Wordsworth's emphasis on the *nostos* of his return towards the *algos* of separation, of looking for his home without the certainty of knowing whether or not he will find such a home. Whereas Wordsworth reaches a grand moment of sublime understanding in "Tintern Abbey," Shelley approaches Mont Blanc with more hesitancy, although the desire to make a similar connection with nature is still present. He later notes how "my own, my human mind" holds "an unremitting interchange / With the clear universe of things around," revisiting the idea that he is engaging with the greater whole of the universe (37-39). Furthermore, the "source of human thought" that flows "from secret springs" evokes the idea of a place of origin – indeed, something like a home. However, it only reveals itself to Shelley as "gleams of a remoter world" that "visit the soul in sleep" (49-50). It is more ephemeral, and harder to grasp than the Nature that anchors

Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey.”

This search continues throughout the poem, as Shelley attempts to understand the workings of the mind in relation to the larger, material world around him. He describes his mind as a “legion of wild thoughts,”

... whose wandering wings

Now float above thy darkness, and now rest

Where that or thou art no unbidden guest

In the still cave of the witch Poesy,

Seeking among the shadows that pass by

Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,

Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast

From which they fled recalls them, thou art there! (35-48)

The pronouns in this passage may refer to the Ravine of Arve, to which Shelley appears to address the poem’s second verse paragraph. However, what is key in this passage is the “wandering wings” of his thoughts, which settle down as “no unbidden guest” in Poesy’s cave, which indicates a kind of residence, rudimentary as it may be. These lines flirt with the *nostos* Wordsworth experiences at the beginning of “Tintern Abbey,” yet it fails to achieve the same level of intimacy, or of innate understanding between poet and nature. Even so, there is a gesture towards this kind of intimacy in the recognition of “the breast / From which they fled,” which “recalls them.” A settling takes place here, albeit one among ghosts, shades, phantoms, and faint images. Even so, there is a “resemblance between the human and the natural worlds” here, and Shelley seems to indicate a desire to suggest that reconciliation between the two may be possible (Ferguson 212). However, he cannot go as far as Wordsworth and argue that the two *can* be

reconciled. The doubt seen in the poem's opening lines still remains in this second verse paragraph, though that does not mitigate the speaker's desire for a *nostos* like Wordsworth's.

This desire for a kind of home also manifests in the domestic imagery that Shelley inserts into the natural landscape. The Arve, which is, initially, "Power" that "comes down / From the ice gulphs," has its "giant brood of pines around thee clinging," those "children of elder time" (16-17, 20-21). He attempts to imagine Mont Blanc as a barren desert, yet it is "peopled by the storms," and he even begins to build a domestic scene, asking, "Is this the scene / Where the old Earthquake-dæmon taught her young / Ruin? Were these [rocks] their toys?" (67, 71-73).

Frances Ferguson has argued that this is one aspect of "the poet's effort to convert epistemological language into love language. For although *Mont Blanc* is a sublime poem upon a sublime subject, it projects an air of sociability" (Ferguson 208). This language of love and companionship thus "begins to treat the mountain landscape as *someone* to be understood ... through an understanding that operates to complete and magnify its object through an aggrandizement Shelley calls love" (211). But this love is not the same "cosmic, ideal conception of love [that] remains rooted in earthly affection and personal relationships" that functions in "Tintern Abbey" (Reno 184). While it is, indeed, a kind of "all-pervading spirit that links all things in the universe," it is not "anchored in subjective and material experiences" (179). Shelley argues in "Mont Blanc" for a kind of love that is antithetical to the material; it is "unearthly," mysterious "voices" that are revealed only as "gleams" that "visit the soul in sleep," "secret chasms" "like smoke before the tempest's stream" ("Mont Blanc" 62, 28, 49-50, 122, 119). Yet even as Shelley describes the peak of Mont Blanc as "rude, bare, and high, / Ghastly, and scarred, and riven," the moments of domesticity discussed above do tame the wild mountain, and they evoke a kind of hominess, as if Shelley – unconsciously or not – wants to establish a

place on the unreachable peak that he may inhabit someday (70-71). There is a desire for *nostos*, but the *algos* seems to interfere much more than it does in “Tintern Abbey.”

Even so, there *are* moments where the *nostos* seems closer than Shelley may want to admit. Throughout the poem, he continues to construct a kind of habitation, indicating a desire to belong among the ranks of the natural world. In the fourth verse paragraph, he speaks of “the fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams, / Ocean, and all living things that dwell / Within the dædal earth,” using that word, “dwell,” that is also used by Hazlitt and Wordsworth to describe the poet’s relationship to nature (84-86). There is a universality of things that recalls the great pantheism of Wordsworth’s poem, a unity of life and nature that includes the poet as a full-time resident. Even as Shelley establishes Mont Blanc as a distant entity that “gleams on high,” he still insists that “the power is there,” and “its home / The voiceless lightning in these solitudes keeps innocently” (127, 136-138). John B. Pierce has argued that Shelley reacts “against the nihilist implications of the absolute materialism affirmed” by the silences of the poem, asserting that Shelley actually “implies hope for a greater significance in the natural world than is objectively perceived” (Pierce 107; 113). This hope appears in these instances in which Shelley uses the language of home. The “secret strength of things / Which governs thought ... / ... inhabits” the mountain, and even as Shelley ends the poem with a question about “vacancy,” there remains a suggestion that something *is* there, whether it be accessible or not (“Mont Blanc” 139-141, 144).

Thus, “home” has yet to be found for either of these poets. Both will continue to be infected by this “disease of displacement,” in life and in their works. Wordsworth will never be able to compose his ideal philosophical epic, *The Recluse*, and Shelley will never be able to find neither his ideal intellectual community nor that power residing at the peak of Mont Blanc.

Wordsworth and Shelley both share a deep desire to find a place to call their home, and they also share the pain of homesickness, which will become manifest in the longer forms I will discuss. Indeed, this quest for a place to call home only continues in the longer, later works, as each poet attempts to grapple with his inability to find the home for which he is forever bound.

## II. Continuing the Search: Wordsworth and *The Prelude*

If “Tintern Abbey” stands as a notable moment in Wordsworth’s journey from his homeless, itinerant youth to his more settled life as an adult, *The Prelude* is both an elaboration and a continuation of those themes of home, dwelling, and the importance of community. The poem was meant as the “portico,” or “part of the same building” as Wordsworth’s great, never-realized epic *The Recluse* (Wordsworth, “To Sir George Beaumont” 497). Thus, by its very premise, *The Prelude* is an epic of wandering as the poetic speaker tries to find his way towards a recognizable goal. The act of composition itself was, for Wordsworth, “a perilous quest through the uncharted regions of his own mind” (Abrams 216): “Forthwith shall be brought down / Through later years the story of my life. / The road lies plain before me” (*The Prelude*, 1850, l.638-640).<sup>7</sup> It is the story of his life, his growth both as a man and a poet, but it is also a story of finding a place of belonging – in short, a home. Although *The Prelude* was not intended to stand alone, the fact that it does, and that it does so in the epic form, thus drawing on the long tradition of a form which so often tells stories of wanderings and homecomings, speaks to the importance of home in Wordsworth’s mind. This is the work that Wordsworth spent the majority of his life working and reworking, one that describes a “spiritual journey” which, as M.H. Abrams has argued,

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<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all references to *The Prelude* will refer to the published 1850 version, as it is the most complete, Wordsworth having revisited the poem again and again throughout his life.

... circles back at its conclusion to the literal journey with which it had originated; but this beginning at once turns over into the opening book of Wordsworth's 'work of glory,' *The Recluse* proper, which describes his way of life in the chosen vale. Only now does he identify the aspect of the vale which had all along made it the goal of his tortuous literal, spiritual, and poetic journey. That goal, as in all the ancient genre of the circuitous pilgrimage of life, is home – *Home at Grasmere*.

(219)

Yet it is not so simple. Even as *The Prelude*'s circular structure and goal of Grasmere brings Wordsworth from youth to adulthood, it does not, I would argue, achieve the *nostos* Abrams argues for. Indeed, it remains a poem with an open ending, one which does not leave the reader feeling particularly settled. It is a poem whose ending is actually a beginning, thus opening the poem up so as to continue with the next epic; it is a poem that describes a long, arduous journey not only through England and France, but also through time; it is a poem that Wordsworth continued to work on until his death; and, in many ways, it is a poem that remained unfinished. Yet it is also a poem with a goal in mind – that of *The Recluse* and the way of life it aims to describe, as well as the place in which that way of life might take form. Thus, *The Prelude* simultaneously possesses and lacks the kind of closure that might bring the reader "home" to an ending with resolution.

Certainly, the poem's beginning – which, as has been stated before, is also its ending – describes a kind of *nostos*-like homecoming not unlike that which we saw in "Tintern Abbey." It describes a return to a specific location that is loaded with meaning and memory, as well as the inspiration the speaker is able to draw from such an important place:

O there is blessing in this gentle breeze,

A visitant that while it fans my cheek  
 Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings  
 From the green fields, and from yon azure sky.  
 Whate'er its mission, the soft breeze can come  
 To none more grateful than to me; escaped  
 From the vast city, where I long had pined  
 A discontented sojourner. (I, 1-8)

Much like the joy with which Wordsworth greets the landscape of the Wye Valley again after five years, the Wordsworth of this poem greets the “gentle breeze” with the joy of a longtime friend seeing his companion after an extended absence. The breeze itself is imbued with feeling, as if the gladness is mutual, and Wordsworth himself is starved for the contact after having inhabited the city for too long. The fact that he is “a discontented sojourner” implies that he is dissatisfied with his travels thus far, that he is happy to finally be on familiar ground, with a familiar breeze breathing inspiration into his mind. He is “now free,”

Free as a bird to settle where I will.  
 What dwelling shall receive me? in what vale  
 Shall be my harbour? underneath what grove  
 Shall I take up my home? and what clear stream  
 Shall with its murmur lull me into rest?  
 The earth is all before me. (I, 1-14)

Though Wordsworth quickly adds that “should the chosen guide / Be nothing better than a wandering cloud, / I cannot miss my way,” the language of homes, dwellings, and harbors that prevails in this passage creates a sense of settling down, of finally finding a resting place after

years of wandering. Of course, when Wordsworth and his sister moved into Dove Cottage in December 1799, they were fulfilling a dream from Wordsworth's boyhood; it was "a place to be made their own, to be restored to an ideal vision" not only of rustic self-sufficiency, but also of community, which they created with the denizens of the Grasmere area (K. Smith 51, 53). By the time Wordsworth published the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800, a year after moving into Dove Cottage, he had finally settled on his chosen vocation as a poet, and the publication marked the fulfilment of the fusion of poetry and the Lake District that had for so long been a cherished ideal (Trott 11-12). *The Prelude* begins with Wordsworth's desire to finally compose the philosophical epic he feels he is destined to create, yet it also begins with Wordsworth finally arriving in the place he will call home for the rest of his life. It is also the place he called home throughout his youth, thus furthering the connection between poetry and place that so permeated his life. And, indeed, the Lake District is where he grew up, and it is those memories of growing up in the Lake District that Wordsworth turns to in the absence of another viable theme. In fact, it has been his home from the very beginning of his life; he has been connected to the land since his birth, as we see in *The Prelude*'s cousin-poem, *Home at Grasmere*.

Wordsworth began *Home at Grasmere* in 1800, and it was a close contemporary of *The Prelude*; until the 1840s Wordsworth treated the two poems fairly similarly, revising both carefully until, finally, Wordsworth put the second poem aside, never publishing it within his lifetime (Darlington ix). The initial passage of the poem shows a young Wordsworth as "a roving school-boy" seeing the vale of Grasmere and wishfully thinking, "What happy fortune were it here to live!" (2; 11).<sup>8</sup> "And now," Wordsworth writes just a little later on, "'tis mine, perchance

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<sup>8</sup> All references to *Home at Grasmere* will refer to the MS. D. version, which is the poem in its final surviving state. Further, it was this manuscript which was sewn into the account book containing the MS RV of *The Prelude*, though

for life, dear Vale, / Beloved Grasmere ... / One of thy lowly Dwellings is my Home” (MS. D, 56-57; 59). According to M.H. Abrams, this opening passage “makes it clear that the place to which the poet has returned is not his literal home but one which ... he had recognized to be his spiritual home” (219). Yet I would argue that Wordsworth is arguing for both readings of Grasmere as both a literal and a spiritual home. In *The Prelude*, we see Wordsworth on summer vacation from Cambridge, approaching with “quickenings steps” a rise that allows him to overlook “the bed of Windermere ... / With exultation,” seeing “A universe of Nature’s fairest forms / Proudly revealed with instantaneous burst, / Magnificent, and beautiful, and gay” (1850, IV, 1; 7; 9-11). This passage comes after Wordsworth confesses how, at Cambridge, “from the first crude days / Of settling time in this untried abode” he felt “A feeling that I was not for that hour, / Nor for that place” (1850, III, 75-76; 81-82). This sentiment is not unlike that which Wordsworth felt in those “lonely rooms ... mid the din / Of towns and cities” of “Tintern Abbey,” that feeling of not belonging, of that isolation that comes from “the sneers of selfish men” or “greetings where no kindness is” that prevail in city life (26-27; 130-131). Though his experience at Cambridge is not entirely so negative – indeed, he admits that it “was a gladsome time,” with “so many happy youths, so wide and fair / A congregation in its budding-time” (1850, III, 217; 221-222) – the exuberance with which Wordsworth returns to Grasmere for the summer indicates the strength of emotion he associates with the place itself.

Certainly, while at Cambridge, Wordsworth would leave the crowd of “buildings and groves, / And as I paced alone the level fields ... / With which I had been conversant, the mind / Drooped not” (III, 92-96). We saw this, too, in “Tintern Abbey,” where Wordsworth connected so effortlessly with the landscape of the Wye Valley. Even so, his return to the Wye, as well as

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it is now detached from that.

his sojourns into the areas surrounding Cambridge do not match the enthusiasm with which Wordsworth “bounded down the hill shouting amain / For the old Ferryman,” and

... Thence with speed

Up the familiar hill I took my way

Towards that sweet Valley where I had been reared ...

With eager footsteps I advance and reach

The cottage threshold where my journey closed.

Glad welcome had I, with some tears, perhaps,

From my old Dame, so kind and motherly,

While she perused me with a parent’s pride. (1850, IV, 12-13; 17-29)

This passage points toward an impatience on the young Wordsworth’s part to reach his destination; it seems that he simply cannot wait to get there, and it is the fact that there is a destination at all that indicates a sense of homecoming, or of *nostos*. In this “landscape of affection” (James 65), the “eager footsteps” with which the young Wordsworth moves, as well as the “glad welcome” of his “old Dame,” serve to infuse this particular moment with the kind of sentimentality that often accompanies a homecoming after a long period of time away. The tears of his old Dame, “so kind and motherly,” also imbue the passage with the warmth of a parent’s love.

Of course, by this point, Wordsworth has been an orphan for several years, and that early bereavement, as well as his separation from his siblings, led him to cherish his closest relationships. We see this in his addresses to Coleridge which punctuate the poem, as well as the moment in which he is reunited with his beloved sister, Dorothy, when he

... was blest

Between these sundry wanderings with a joy  
 Above all joys, that seemed another morn  
 Risen on mid noon; blest with the presence, Friend!  
 Of that sole Sister, her who hath been long  
 Dear to thee also, thy true friend and mine,  
 Now, after separation desolate,  
 Restored to me – such an absence that she seemed  
 A gift then first bestowed. (1850, VI, 195-203)

To have Dorothy with him again is a blessing for Wordsworth, “a joy above all joys,” thus reinforcing the importance of Dorothy as a home-like center for him, which we saw previously in “Tintern Abbey.” Because Dorothy functions as kind of home, this passage, like the passage that came before, is filled with a similar sense of *nostos*. Though *The Prelude* is a poem dominated by travel and itinerancy, it is these instances of return and homecoming that suggest that one of the main subjects of *The Prelude*, in addition to “the growth of a poet’s mind” and the development of Wordsworth’s poetic philosophy, is actually the desire to find that place of belonging. Whether it is a singular location, like Grasmere, or a group of people, like Dorothy and Coleridge, *The Prelude* seems to return repeatedly to these moments of connection and intimacy. Indeed, we must remember that *The Prelude*, for all of its wandering, was meant to continue into *The Recluse*, with which Wordsworth intended to describe his way of life “in his *chosen vale*,” thus indicating his intention to settle, and the importance of Grasmere as both a literal and spiritual home (Abrams 219, emphasis added).

And we see both, to return to *Home at Grasmere*, within that poem’s first hundred lines. Grasmere has become Wordsworth’s own “calmest fairest spot on earth,” yet it is

... not mine only, for with me  
 Entrenched – say rather peacefully embowered –  
 Under yon Orchard, in yon humble Cot,  
 A younger Orphan of a home extinct,  
 The only Daughter of my Parents dwells. (MS. D, 75-79)

Here, Dorothy is embraced by the landscape of the vale itself, formerly, too, “of a home extinct.” She also dwells among the vale, thus living there in a more or less settled manner. Further, the space itself is “not mine only”; rather, the two of them share it. Thus, Wordsworth’s “home” is not only a slice of nature where he may meditate in solitary conditions; instead, it is a communal space, a space of affection and love that allows Wordsworth and, ostensibly, those around him to reach their full intellectual potential. “Home” for Wordsworth is, ideally, a fecund place of community which will provide the inspiration he needs to compose his best poetry.

Unfortunately, that does not seem to have been the case, as far as Wordsworth’s biography is concerned. Of course, he never composed *The Recluse*, and he continued to travel away from Grasmere throughout the entirety of his life. Although Grasmere was, ostensibly, his true home, Wordsworth continued to be inspired by “change, stimulus, and sensation” (Stephen Gill, qtd. in Simons 113). And I believe that we see this in *The Prelude*, as Wordsworth moves from the initial moment of settling, of asking himself, “What dwelling shall receive me?” (I, 10), to closing with an account of his ascent of Mount Snowdon, which occurs before the events of the beginning take place. The final lines of *The Prelude* act as a setup for the beginning of *The Recluse*, as Wordsworth resolves to “instruct” his readers “how the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth / On which he dwells” (XIV, 448-450). One of the key aspects of poetic closure, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith wrote in 1968, is that, by the poem’s

end, the reader feels a sense of stability has been reached. Stability “is an ultimate state – that is, a final one,” one which we desire at the end of any work of art (34-35). *The Prelude* does not, I would argue, reach that state of stability that can be so satisfying a way of closing a poem. Indeed, we do not see this kind of stability achieved *because* Wordsworth meant to continue his thoughts in *The Recluse*, as well as in *The Excursion*, which he first published in 1814. Thus, the thematic elements of *The Prelude*, while tied up neatly enough to allow the poem to constitute its own distinction as a work in and of itself, are only resolved so much that the reader might wait for the speaker to continue in the next part of the epic project.

We see hints of this in a poem like *Home at Grasmere*, which is subtitled “*The Recluse: Part First, Book First*,” indicating that Wordsworth had plans to continue beyond this initial fragment. The poem ends with Wordsworth hoping

... that my Song  
 With star-like virtue in its place may shine,  
 Shedding benignant influence ...  
 ... And if with this  
 I mix more lowly matter – with the thing  
 Contemplated describe the Mind and Man  
 Contemplating, and who and what he was,  
 The transitory Being that beheld  
 This Vision, when and where, and how he lived –  
 Be not this labor useless. (841-843; 846-852)

We can still see the worry Wordsworth struggles with at the beginning of *The Prelude*, that he might not be able to successfully complete the task he has set before himself. It is this worry that

prompts the famous “Was it for this?” passage that constituted the first permutation of the poem, and it is this worry that plagued Wordsworth throughout the latter half of his life, haunting his writing and fundamentally shaping his career (Trott 9). Further, a complication arises in the understanding of home that we have developed so far. Wordsworth repeatedly establishes Grasmere as his home, both literally and spiritually, yet he is also a “transitory Being,” someone whose sensibilities allow him to connect to a “transcendent power” (XIV, 75), that “presence” which he also felt in “Tintern Abbey.”

While this “presence” facilitates connection and communion, as it does in “Tintern Abbey,” it also implies a kind of placelessness that is somewhat incongruent with ideas of home, or belonging. Certainly, the transcendent powers Wordsworth feels himself connect to in the various “spots of time” that punctuate *The Prelude* allow him to feel “at home” nearly anywhere, as I argued in the previous section. However, the fact that he might remain “at home” both nowhere, as he wanders, and everywhere, as he continually connects with the landscape, is simultaneously complementary and contradictory. Indeed, if there is no “home” to which he can return, Wordsworth cannot achieve *nostos* in *The Prelude* in the sense that he reaches his destined poetic theme, or in the sense that he returns to Grasmere. In fact, *The Prelude* does not end with a return to any particular location. The final, climactic moment of the poem occurs on Mount Snowdon in Wales, several years before the events of the poem’s opening take place. Upon reaching the mountain’s summit, Wordsworth

... beheld the emblem of a mind

That feeds upon infinity, that broods

Over the dark abyss, intent to hear

Its voices issuing forth to silent light

In one continuous stream; a mind sustained  
 By recognitions of transcendent power,  
 In sense conducting to ideal form,  
 In soul of more than mortal privilege. (XIV, 70-77)

The language of infinity – the abyss, the continuous stream, the transcendent power, all of this being “more than mortal privilege” – allows Wordsworth to expand beyond the mere landscape he experiences in this episode. It allows him to expand beyond the landscape of rural England as well, recalling the way which, in “Tintern Abbey,” that “blessed mood” he feels in the landscape allows him to “see into the life of things,” thus identifying “home” as a circumstantial phenomenon based on feeling, rather than location (42; 50). However, in the later *Prelude*, the “presence” has turned into a “mind,” one that transcends human activity and is only accessible in sublime experiences. Further, Wordsworth does not connect with his travelling companions in this episode as he does with Dorothy in “Tintern Abbey.” He does not express the way that this experience will allow them to travel through that world of “evil tongues, / Rash judgments, [and] the sneers of selfish men” without being harmed (129-130). Nor is there any suggestion that this experience has forged a closer bond between those present. Instead, Wordsworth is “the foremost of the band,” leading rather than accompanying (XIV, 34).

Yet there remains some language of connection, only a kind of connection that is more universal, rather than personal. At the summit of Mount Snowdon, Wordsworth is ready “to hold fit converse with the spiritual world / And with the generations of mankind / Spread over time, past, present, and to come (XIV, 108-110). It seems that, as Wordsworth has moved through the epic from the initial movement “to settle where I will” in Grasmere to the final setup for *The Recluse*, he has also moved “from earth to heaven, from human to divine,” expanding what

“home” might be even as the work with which he intends to continue this project explicitly deals with his literal home and his way of life there (I, 9; XIV, 118). Even so, there are moments of botched, or false, homecomings, or *nostos* gone wrong. The first instance occurs in the sixth book, during Wordsworth’s trek across the Alps. Lagging behind their party, Wordsworth and his friend believe they must be lost, because they never overtake their companions. They meet a peasant, who assures them “that our future course, all plain to sight, / Was downwards, with the current of that stream” (VI, 584-585). This confuses Wordsworth and his friend, who are

Loth to believe what we so grieved to hear,  
 For still we had hopes that pointed to the clouds,  
 We questioned him again, and yet again;  
 But every word that from the peasant’s lips  
 Came in reply, translated by our feelings,  
 Ended in this, – *that we had crossed the Alps.* (VI, 586-591)

Here, Wordsworth experiences confusion and disappointment as he realizes that the grand, formidable moment of crossing the Alps had already occurred with minimal fanfare. Although the other side of the Alps is not a place where Wordsworth wishes to settle, and although the Alps are not even within his home country, there is a feeling that he has missed his intended destination. Indeed, it is almost as if, in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, thinking he has landed on Ithaca, realizes that he is, in fact, on a different island in another part of the Mediterranean. Thus, Wordsworth’s hopes of experiencing something akin to *nostos*, insofar as it is an enlightening and rewarding experience in which he has “come home” to some kind of truth, are not met at all.

This dashing of hopes happens again in the final episode at Mount Snowdon.

Wordsworth’s ascent of the mountain is complicated by the fact that he and his group intended to

crest the summit in time to see the sun rise, but when they reached the peak, what they saw, instead, was the moon:

When at my feet the ground appeared to brighten,  
 And with a step or two seemed brighter still;  
 Nor was time given to ask or learn the cause,  
 For instantly a light upon the turf  
 Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up,  
 The Moon hung naked in a firmament  
 Of azure without cloud, and at my feet  
 Rested a silent sea of hoary mist. (XIV, 35-42)

This climactic moment, many have argued, can be seen as a metaphor for *The Prelude* itself, in that Wordsworth began the project with *The Recluse* in mind, and, in the end, *The Prelude* is what came out of his pen. But it is also a metaphor for how Grasmere, with all of its associations with ideas of home that were fostered during Wordsworth's childhood, was not the promised vale wherein he would compose his great masterpiece. Of course, we now recognize *The Prelude* as the masterpiece he stumbled upon, but Wordsworth himself did not see it that way: upon finishing the poem, he admitted that "it was not a happy day for me; I was dejected on many accounts; when I looked back upon the performance it seemed to have a dead weight about it, the reality so far short of the expectation" (Wordsworth, "To Sir George Beaumont 497). Somewhat similarly, in the passage quoted above, Wordsworth expects to crest the mountain's peak and find the sun in all of its bright, rational glory, and he expects to experience something like *nostos*, insofar that he is enlightened of his poetic mission. In other words, he expects to "come home" to the topic of his idealized project. Instead, of course, he finds the moon, and, as many

see it, the realization that *The Prelude* has suddenly become that very project.

Thus, Wordsworth simultaneously does and does not come home by the end of *The Prelude*, and I think that it is this contradiction within the poem that causes a project like *The Recluse* to cave in on itself. Wordsworth intended *The Recluse* to be a philosophic epic describing his particular way of life in the vale he chooses to call home, but how can such a work be written if, at the end of its “portico,” his home has become the entirety of nature, even of the universe? Of course, within the context of a movement like Romanticism, such an idiosyncratic understanding of “home” as wherever one might connect with the landscape is fitting, yet, also fitting for Romanticism, there remains a paradoxical impetus to find that perfect place to call home. It is yet another perpetual quest for an unattainable ideal, that home which provides all of the comforts of community as well as the inspiration to produce one’s greatest work. Although Grasmere did prove to be a place that Wordsworth returned to again and again, it certainly seems to have fallen short as that “chosen vale” which would provide the inspiration for his chimerical masterpiece.

### **III. Continuing the Search: Shelley and *Prometheus Unbound***

Shelley’s own masterpiece, *Prometheus Unbound*, participates in a similar struggle to find a perfect home, but, much like “Mont Blanc” revises some of the workings between the *nostos* and *algos* of nostalgia that appear in “Tintern Abbey,” Shelley’s own search for home is complicated by a parallel movement towards infinity and a transcendent understanding of the world. The hero, Prometheus, moves from relative isolation in the mountains to a new community, which he forms with his wife and her sisters, simulating a trajectory not unlike Wordsworth’s own journey towards his home in Grasmere. Yet at the same time, a revolution

takes place that dethrones the tyrannical Jupiter, and the drama ends with a universal celebration of the new world that may now take form. Thus, like Wordsworth, Shelley presents two competing quests for a new home; however, unlike Wordsworth, the new world celebrated in the final act does not function in the same way the world of Wordsworth's "presence" does. Rather, it seems to function as more of an escapist fantasy, an idealized world in which the exiled Shelley might finally find a place to belong.

Indeed, *Prometheus Unbound* is, in many ways, a fantasy in its own right as a closet drama. Intended to be read rather than performed, the lyrical drama is part of a Romantic trend away from the theatre and towards "mental drama," which includes Shelley's other closet drama, *The Cenci*, and Byron's *Manfred*. Despite this trend among the great poets of the time, however, the theatre as a form of entertainment was blossoming at the turn of the nineteenth century with a resurgence of Shakespeare's popularity, as well as the emergence of charismatic actors like Edmund Keane (O'Neill, "Romantic Forms" 279). But unlike the popular dramas that were performed at the time, "the major poets saw drama as a means of registering the repercussions of revolutionary ideas and events in the world of the mind and feelings" (O'Neill, "Romantic Forms" 280). *Prometheus Unbound* and *Manfred*, in particular, "represent efforts to borrow on the emotional power of dramatic characterization while keeping a safe distance from the staged frivolity of socialite playwrights and royal mistresses" (Pascoe 410). While solitude for Shelley (or Wordsworth, for that matter) "wasn't completely natural to him," the company of a select few close companions being "'almost' a necessity of life" (Wroe 87-88), this shrinking away from the popular crowd is not unusual for the more introverted Romantics. Certainly, the contents of a work such as *Prometheus Unbound* would have been censured by the government and the public for its radical ideas, and, certainly, Shelley was resigned to the fact that "no more

than 5 or 6 persons” might understand it as he intended it to be (qtd. in Wroe 333). Thus, by virtue of its form alone, *Prometheus Unbound* is, in a sense, virtually homeless, as it never “comes home” to the stage, nor did it seem to “come home” to private readers, at least during Shelley’s lifetime.

Nor did Shelley himself ever really “come home” to any one place throughout his life. Even as he initially regarded Italy as a kind of Eden and later dubbed it a “paradise of exiles,” he never truly became a part of Italian society, as Lord Byron did so successfully. He also remained deeply nostalgic for England, acknowledging, in fact, that England was “my country dear to me forever,” and that he felt “a regret almost like remorse” for leaving (qtd. in Wroe 54). Indeed, Shelley wrote to his friend, Thomas Love Peacock, about his complicated feelings regarding the England he left behind:

I often revisit Marlow in thought. The curse of this life is that whatever is once known can never be unknown. You inhabit a spot which before you inhabit it is as indifferent to you as any other spot upon the earth, & when, persuaded by some necessity you think to leave it, you leave it not, – it clings to you & with memories of things which in your experience of them gave no such promise, revenges your desertion. (*Letters: PBS II*, 6, qtd. in Pite 33)

Though Shelley is certainly not the “poet of place” Wordsworth was in his association with the Lake District and the English countryside, his relationship with his home country, even as it does not appear so often in his poetry, remains an issue that preoccupies him for the entirety of his career. Even when he resided in Italy, he was largely ignored by the Italians, and “it was the response of the English reader which always concerned him” (Weinberg 16). Even as Shelley fled to Italy due to “the sort of persecution with which in those days all men of liberal opinions

were visited,” as well as “the injustice he had lately endured in the Court of Chancery” (M. Shelley 1511), losing custody of his children from his first marriage, he still experienced the sharp pangs of homesickness. We see these in the passage quoted above from his letters, “often revisit[ing]” his final home in England “in thought,” much like Wordsworth claims to have done in his “lonely rooms” with memories of the Wye Valley in “Tintern Abbey.” Yet these revisitations are not quite so positive for Shelley as they are for Wordsworth. Rather, they are painful, even a “curse,” clinging to him as a way of “reveng[ing]” his “desertion” – they are, in a sense, *algos* felt almost viscerally. This violent imagery suggests a connection with the arguably violent way he moved from place to place throughout his life; indeed, the death of his daughter Clara in 1819 is often thought to have resulted from a rash household move. But what also comes through this selection is the unwillingness on Shelley’s part to allow these memories of place to inhabit his mind, and the fact that despite that unwillingness, he finds himself preoccupied regardless. Shelley has infused his previous home in England with such sharp emotion, it seems negligent to fail to focus on his own hyperawareness of his failure to successfully find a home.

Thus, if he could never cease to struggle to find a literal home in England and Italy, then Shelley would have to construct his own, ideal home in the world of literature, as Mary wrote in her note on *Prometheus Unbound* in the 1839 publication of Shelley’s works:

An exile, and strongly impressed with the feeling that the majority of his countrymen regarded him with sentiments of aversion such as his own heart could experience towards none, he sheltered himself from such disgusting and painful thoughts in the calm retreats of poetry, and built up a world of his own – with the more pleasure, since he hoped to induce some one or two to believe that the earth might become such, did mankind themselves consent. (M. Shelley 1511)

Indeed, if every place he inhabits inevitably causes pain upon leaving, a world that only exists in the imagination can, in a way, never be left, and thus eliminates the threat of experiencing the painful pangs of nostalgia. And, certainly, we see this attempt to build up “a world of his own” in the final act of *Prometheus Unbound*, when “choruses of hours and spirits divide and combine in metres that are swift and elated to ... affirm the intoxicating joy proffered by ‘the new world of man’” (O’Neill, “Prometheus Unbound” 267). Voices call out, “Unite!” and the spirits celebrate how “Our spoil is won, / Our task is done, / We are free to dive, or soar, or run” (IV, 80; 135-137). This is a world that not only takes the place of that “elusive homestead” that evaded Shelley all through his life (Colbert 596), but it also imagines or enacts the free, democratic world that so much of his poetry hoped to inspire. It is because of his inability to find a home, or to be accepted anywhere he tried to settle, as well as the *algos* he experiences as a result of deserting the places he has lived, that Shelley must retreat into poetry to build the world he wants to live in.

In fact, the hero and titular namesake of the lyrical drama is, like Shelley, isolated and trapped by the forces of a tyrannical world that chooses to dismiss his vision for a better future. Prometheus is “[n]ailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain, / Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb, / Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life,” and he laments, “Ah me, alas! Pain, pain ever, forever! / No change, no pause, no hope; yet I endure (I, 20-22; 2324). Even though Panthea and Ione are technically present in this opening scene, neither speak in any of the first 220 lines, and, when they do finally speak, it is to announce the arrival of the phantasm of Jupiter, rather than to reply to anything Prometheus says. Prometheus himself seems to forget their presence in the midst of his invective against Jupiter, causing him to appear, initially, as isolated as the speaker of “Mont Blanc,” who ostensibly stands alone in the shadow

of the powerful mountain. Indeed, we can see some of Shelley's homeless *algos* surface when Prometheus says, "All else who live and suffer take from thee [the Earth] / Some comfort; flowers, and fruits, and happy sounds, / And love, though fleeting; these may not be mine" (I, 187-189). In a way that is not unlike Wordsworth describing his homesickness in *The Prelude*, here, Shelley's own homesickness infuses the poetry, though he is not necessarily homesick for any specific location. Of course, he is homesick for England, as we saw in his letter to Peacock, and as we see in his preoccupation with English politics. But he is also homesick for a world that does not exist, a world that is full of possibility, a world where he is not considered a mad outcast whose ravings deserve scorn, rather than consideration.

And, indeed, it is pity, or "vigilant empathy," that forges the bonds of community in this lyrical drama, primarily in its first act (O'Neill, "Prometheus Unbound" 265). The opening lines, with Prometheus' "seemingly endless and hopeless defiance," work in such a way that "the suffering of the hero ... aggrandize[s] our sympathy" as readers (Isomaki 655). Further, after the phantasm of Jupiter repeats the curse Prometheus made against Jupiter, Prometheus repents, admitting that "Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine. / I wish no living thing to suffer pain" (I, 304-305). It is, ultimately, this turn away from hatred and animosity and towards love and sympathy that frees Prometheus and causes Jupiter's downfall. It is these series of connections that are made, between the reader and Prometheus, between Prometheus and the Earth, and between Prometheus and his tormentor that lead to the utopian celebration in the final act. Indeed, after the Furies have tortured Prometheus, the Earth commiserates: "I felt thy torture, son; with such mixed joy / As pain and virtue give" (I, 656-657). By the end of the first act, Prometheus "recognizes that any other motive but love is vain," and it is after this epiphany that the drama begins to move towards resolution (Isomaki 658). Like Wordsworth's community

with Dorothy and Coleridge, and like Shelley himself in “Mont Blanc,” describing “the fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams, / Ocean, and all living things that dwell / Within the dædal earth,” love is the key to forging connections that, in turn, forge communities. *Prometheus Unbound* was inspired, in part, by his friendships with Leigh Hunt and Thomas Love Peacock, as well as his relationship with Mary, who was one of his true intellectual equals (Hay 164; 222). Further, in his essay “On Love,” Shelley suggests “that love is the full expression of sympathy; it seeks to awake in all things a community with something inside ourselves, an ideal self purified of dross” (Isomaki 661). Love is one of the building blocks of that “world of his own” which he aims to construct in *Prometheus Unbound*, and, Shelley hopes, something that might alleviate some of the *algos* that has infected his state of mind in Italy.

Such a community is formed between Prometheus, his wife Asia, and her sisters. At the beginning of the second act, we learn that Asia, though wandering through “a lovely vale,” is, as the scene description states with stark punctuation, “alone” (II, i). Yet she senses the approaching presence of her sister Panthea, who has come to deliver the news of Prometheus’s change of heart regarding Jupiter. Asia seems to come alive at the sight of her sister, remarking how

Unwonted tears throng to the horny eyes,  
 And beatings haunt the desolated heart ...  
 ... Like genius, or like joy which riseth up  
 As from the earth, clothing with golden clouds  
 The desert of our life.” (II, i, 3-4, 10-13)

This is, in many ways, quite similar to the way Wordsworth describes himself as “blest / Between these sundry wanderings with a joy / Above all joys” when he is reunited with his own sister, Dorothy. Indeed, this small moment on Asia’s part intimates the importance the

Romantics placed on having that close-knit circle of friends who, as I have argued previously, can function as a version of “home.” Thus, it is not only Prometheus whom Shelley moves from isolation to companionship; Asia, too, has a “desolated heart,” and Panthea brings life to “the desert of [her] life.” Certainly, such descriptors do not paint a lovely picture of a life lived in solitude, and their visceral imagery recalls the way Shelley described memories of places he had previously inhabited revenging his desertion of them. There is a certain pain of separation in this passage that also parallels Prometheus’s isolation “without herb, / Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life” (I, 21-22). Thus, the joy between the sisters is almost overwhelming upon the end of their separation, and as Panthea exclaims, “I feel, I see / Those eyes which burn through smiles that fade in tears, / Like stars half quenched in mists of silver dew” (II, i, 27-29). Even though the sisters are only at the beginning of their journey in this lyrical drama, there is a sense of at least partial *nostos* achieved between them as they are reunited. Surely, some of the *algos* of Asia’s “desolated heart” has been alleviated, and, as the lyrical drama continues, the sisters come closer and closer to fully achieving that *nostos* of which they have just had a taste.

And, in fact, that journey will, indeed, take them to a final destination. After Jupiter falls and Prometheus is freed and reunited with his companions, he tells them of

... a cave,

All overgrown with trailing odorous plants,

Which curtain out the day with leaves and flowers ...

And there is heard the ever-moving air,

Whispering without from tree to tree, and birds,

And bees; and all around are mossy seats,

And the rough walls are clothed with long soft grass;

A simple dwelling, which shall be our own;  
 Where we will sit and talk of time and change,  
 As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged. (III, iii, 10-12; 18-24)

The portrait Prometheus paints of this cave is reminiscent of the home Mary once dreamed up for herself and Shelley: “A house with a lawn a river or lake – noble trees & divine mountains that should be our little mousehole to retire to” (qtd. in Hay 103). It is, in many ways, the home that Shelley wishes he could find in Italy – one within which he can hide from the disparagement of English critics and his exclusion from Italian society, and one that can house that idealized coterie of like-minded intellectuals he spent his whole life trying to form. Shelley was “ever in search of sympathetic friends,” and the creation of this “destined cave” stems, I would argue, from that desire to forge long-lasting and meaningful relationships with other minds (Hay 80; *Prometheus* III, iii, 175). It is a virtual *nostos* created to mitigate the *algos* felt in reality. Indeed, just as Wordsworth sought his own slice of Grasmere to share with family and friends, so too does Shelley seek his own slice of the earth to carve out a place to which he might finally belong, though in the case of his lyrical drama, such a place may only exist in people’s minds. Thus, it will be isolated, remaining the same even “as the world ebbs and flows,” but it will also be populated, too, by those sympathetic friends such as Mary, Byron, Peacock, and Hunt.

Yet it does not happen outside of *Prometheus Unbound*, and even within the lyrical drama, there are indications that such a home is actually rather inaccessible. Even in celebratory moments, like that between Asia and Panthea at the end of Act II, in which the two sisters rejoice in the power of love, the metaphor Asia uses to describe her soul is one which does not have any destination in mind:

My soul is an enchanted boat,

Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float  
 Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing ...  
 ... It seems to float ever, for ever,  
 Upon that many-winding river,  
 Between mountains, woods, abysses ...  
 ... And we sail on, away, afar,  
 Without a course, without a star,  
 But, by the instinct of sweet music driven;  
 Till through Elysian garden islets  
 By thee most beautiful of pilots,  
 Where never mortal pinnace glided,  
 The boat of my desire is guided (II, v, 72-74; 78-80; 88-94)

Throughout his life, Shelley was enamored with boats and waterborne vessels. When he lived in Marlow, his last English residence, he would drift in his boat “for whole days, sometimes for a night ... The locals thought he lived for nothing else: ‘always boating, boating – never easy but when he was in that boat.’ When one of them, with a piece of chalk, turned *Vaga* to *Vagabond*, Shelley laughed as delightedly as if it were his own invention. He and the boat were made the same” (Wroe 192). Drawings of boats are to be found everywhere in his notebooks, as if he were constantly daydreaming of escape from this particular world towards “the very edge of materiality” (Wroe 203). Thus this “spirit-boat” (Wroe 201) as described by Asia spreads its sails like wings to wander through the far reaches of the world, and it never quite finishes its journey, its motions perpetuated “Without a course, without a star.” Yet, even as her destination is never specified, there still seems to be a feeling that, in some way, her “enchanted boat” will,

eventually, find that perfect place to moor itself. Thus, once again, we are confronted with a paradoxical search for a perfect place, in which, sometimes, the process of searching can feel just as much of an “at home” state as settling in the final destination. This perpetual spiritual journey also recalls the timelessness with which “Mont Blanc yet gleams on high: – the power is there, / The still and solemn power of many sights, / And many sounds, and much of life and death” (“Mont Blanc” 127-129). Just as the power of “Mont Blanc” is something that defies identification, and yet is something with which Shelley hopes to connect, the journey this “enchanted boat” of Asia’s takes is simultaneously undefined and explicit in its parameters and implications. Even as they “sail on, away, afar,” their movement still takes them – *is* taking them – along a path towards a more perfect mode of being.

This movement towards a better world continues into the final act of the lyrical drama, which opens up the narrative to infinite possibility. Much like Wordsworth at the end of *The Prelude* both concludes the poem and provides a point of departure for the next installment of his epic project, Shelley simultaneously concludes his lyrical drama and establishes a new beginning for a utopian world to be constructed. Indeed, Act III contains the bulk of what would conventionally be considered “a truly articulated dramatic action” in Jupiter’s fall and its various consequences on Earth, as well as the resolution of Prometheus’s painful punishment, and his return to Asia’s loving company (Curran, “Lyrical Drama” 295). And, in fact, that was where the drama ended for a little more than a year; Shelley composed the majority of the first three acts in late 1818, and it was not until December 1819 that he appended the visionary fourth act to the rest of it. This could imply that Shelley actually had difficulty concluding his masterpiece, or, at least, that it took about a year for him to think of the conclusion he thought would fit best. Yet it hardly concludes, as far as Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s stipulation on stability is concerned.

Certainly, by the end of the final act of *Prometheus Unbound*, the conflict has resolved itself, the hero has retired to a nice, quiet home, and the world has been born anew, and is ready to launch itself into a new, utopian era. However, the fact is that the ending is left so open, so full of possibility, and it is, in reality, a beginning, rather than an end. This is also similar to *The Prelude*, though *Prometheus Unbound* lacks the circular structure of the previous poem.

The Chorus of Spirits, which plays a prominent part in Act IV, announces, “our singing shall build / In the void’s loose field / A world for the Spirit of Wisdom to wield” (IV, 153-155). Yet we do not see this construction of a new world; rather, we see Panthea and Ione describe their visions of the transformed world, we see the Earth and the Moon in a “lyrical duet” that is “at once electromagnetic and erotic,” and we see Demogorgon arrive to preside over the celebration, providing “admonitions on how to cope with any change for the worse,” which “movingly spell out a credo at the heart of which are the virtues ... of hope, defiance of tyranny, and endurance” (O’Neill, “Prometheus Unbound” 267). The final lines of the drama come from Demogorgon, itself a mysterious figure that defies any kind of identification, and they are almost battle cry-like, as Demogorgon announces that “This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory!” (IV, 578). While the structure of the drama does feel complete, and is “experienced as integral: coherent, complete, and stable” (B. Smith 2), its parts adding up to a whole that might stand on its own, the fact that its ending is also a beginning does not necessarily bring the text “home” in a way that the ending of Act III might, if it were left as the drama’s ending.

#### **IV. A Never-Ending Search**

In a way, both Wordsworth and Shelley end their major works by opening them back up to new possibilities. Wordsworth does so in the hopes of continuing with *The Recluse*, and

Shelley does so in order to envision a new world built on principles of love, sympathy, and equality. Though both poets do spend a lot of time searching for that perfect home, as we saw in each of the poems discussed, there remained a reluctance, almost, to truly settle down, or an inability, especially in Shelley's case, to even find a suitable place to call "home." It is yet another paradox that defines the Romantic poets, and Romanticism as a movement – indeed, one might call it a movement *of* movement, one that can never quite stop for very long. Certainly, these poets *want* to find a place they can call home; they want to belong somewhere, and they are continually searching for it, both literally, in their biographical lives, and figuratively, in their poetry. However, there is a danger in that – "To settle was to be 'tamed,' 'benumbed' or 'tranquilized,' a word [Shelley] used often of a quiet domestic state which, like a deep drug, induced a deadness of thought" (Wroe 55). A large part of what gave these poets creative momentum comes from the fact that they were constantly moving, constantly changing, and, really, constantly unsettled. Romanticism is also a movement of idiosyncratic experience, of ephemeral moments of epiphany, and, despite the urge, or the desire to find that place where one might truly belong, and despite the homesickness and nostalgia that afflicted these poets, they simply could *not* settle. If they did, as Wordsworth did in Grasmere, they run the risk of no longer being able to produce the works they might wish so desperately to publish.

Indeed, these poets seem to be in quite the dilemma, as far as the pain of nostalgia is concerned. As Jean Starobinski has pointed out, "For the Romantics, nostalgia was a disease which could neither be cured nor assuaged" (94). It is "an emotional upheaval which is related to the workings of memory," an issue not of "straining toward something which he can repossess," but of straining "toward an age [or, for the sake of this argument, a *place*] which is forever beyond his reach" (89-90, 94). Between the massive changes brought on by political revolutions,

war, and the Industrial Revolution, it is no wonder that contemporaries began to sense an uneasiness about the past: “Fondly we wished and wished away, nor knew / Mid that long sickness, and those hopes deferred, / That happier days we never more must view” (Wordsworth, “The Female Vagrant” 105-107). Though there are gestures towards achieving *nostos* in all of the works discussed, whether it be reuniting with the “presence” of “Tintern Abbey,” catching “gleams” of that “power” at the peak of “Mont Blanc,” arriving in that “chosen vale” in *The Prelude*, or finding that “destined cave” in *Prometheus Unbound*, it is never so simple a return. In all of the works discussed, there is that complicating presence of the *algos* that prevents the poet from ever genuinely feeling at peace, or as if he belongs. It seems that, even when the poet *does* find that perfect “little mousehole” Mary once described, the homesickness will still never be fully relieved, because there will always be some *algos* that comes from his separation from that perfect world of ideas that no earthly being can access, like that distant power of “Mont Blanc.”

Even though Romanticism may remain a movement defined largely by itinerancy and displacement, I hope that I have demonstrated the importance of looking at the other side of the coin, so to speak, at how, in such an itinerant or displaced state, “home” as a place or a feeling is understood. Indeed, it seems particularly poignant that it is during this very historical moment that “nostalgia” really comes into its own as a concept, as homesickness becomes a popular preoccupation. This is the moment when nationalism and ideas of national identity really begin to take root, and it is in this moment when industrialization really begins to transform the landscape that so many have for so long called “home.” Thus, the “home” Wordsworth and Shelley dream of, that “haunt / Of pure affections,” a “termination, and a last retreat,” a place of “good wood fires, or window frames intertwined with creeping plants,” can never truly exist; at

least, not for these men (Wordsworth, "Home at Grasmere" 50-51, 147; Shelley, qtd. in Wroe 54). Nor is that "home" in "the everlasting universe of things" or within "the one great Mind" accessible, either (P. Shelley, "Mont Blanc" 1; Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, II, 257). Thus, the search for "home" never seems to end, as the *algos* can never be fully exorcised from the *nostos*. The Romantics were never about absolute binaries, preferring to live within the gray areas of life that, in this case, leave them perpetually homeward bound.

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