

no conclusion, whether in agreement or disagreement with mine. He does, indeed, summarize Wordsworth's ideas, in the paragraph beginning "Wordsworth, however, does not . . ." (p. 915), and in terms so closely in accord with my own (pp. 7–10) that I can find no basis for disagreement with him; he even adopts my gloss ("associated," p. 10, n. 12) on Wordsworth's unclear "incorporated." But he is so unconcerned with the validity or credibility of the ideas as to lead one to suppose, from his silence, that he assumes their credibility to be outside the province of the critic. It is hard to understand this neglect; for if it should happen that Wordsworth's account of the characteristics of rustic life is false, or only partially true, or hazy, or merely unproved, his thesis fails, or at least requires amplification, which, as Bialostosky insists, the Preface does not provide. On the contrary, Wordsworth assumes that the primitivistic presuppositions of the passage under discussion are self-evident; my criticism of the Preface arises from my unwillingness to accept this assumption, especially when Wordsworth himself significantly qualified one of the more important presuppositions in a letter of 1802 (*Wordsworth*, pp. 8–13).

It is true, of course, that in the passage under discussion Wordsworth does not, in so many words, "praise low and rustic life for its own sake or try to explain the characteristics he finds there; he explains why what he finds there is useful for his poetic purposes" (p. 915). The point of my criticism is precisely here: "what he finds there" is not demonstrated to be there and is therefore not a demonstrated reason for its usefulness, though praise of rustic life or explanation of its characteristics might have persuaded the reader. In addition to failing to test for validity or credibility, Bialostosky ignores evidence outside the Preface for Wordsworth's attitude toward rustics. It is indeed difficult to read the passage under discussion without inferring Wordsworth's praise of rustic life; for failure to make this inference leaves us free to surmise that Wordsworth drew for his poetry on a social class that he hated, or despised, or regarded with indifference, merely because its mores offered such exemplifications of "the primary laws of our nature" as suited his "principal object." It is, then, misleading to allege that "Wordsworth . . . does not consider rustic life desirable in itself so much as he finds it desirable for the purpose of presenting human passions in unimpeded and unconcealed operation" (p. 915). That he does find rustic life desirable is implied, though not stated, in the passage under discussion; but if evidence is needed, it can be found scattered throughout *The Prelude*, *Home at Grasmere*, and *The Excursion* (to name only major

poems) and the early correspondence. I cite some of this evidence (*Wordsworth*, pp. 9, 10, 11–12, 35, 62–63, 101, 110); Bialostosky does not.

In sum, Bialostosky disagrees with me because of the limitations that he has imposed on his own discussion, that is, because he does not test (or confirm) Wordsworth's unproved presuppositions about the nature of the rustic and because he does not draw on Wordsworthian material outside the Preface in order to discover Wordsworth's attitude toward rustic life. Where our ground is common, I can find no disagreement. I need hardly add that Bialostosky could have found some of his other arguments anticipated elsewhere in my discussions of the Preface: for instance, the refutation of Marjorie Barstow Greenbie's interpretation of "language" as figures of speech, or the interpretations of the phrases "in a state of vivid sensation" and "the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement" (pp. 916, 918; my edition of the Preface [Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1957], pp. 157–58).

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To the Editor:

Don H. Bialostosky concludes his reassessment of "Coleridge's Interpretation of Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" with the worthy proposal that we should "approach Wordsworth's Preface afresh" and establish the fundamental differences between the critical principles of the two poets. But I find Bialostosky reaching this conclusion not only by leaving out historical information bearing on Coleridge's purposes in writing *Biographia Literaria* but also by distorting Coleridge's intentions and arguments in the passages on Wordsworth. Although Bialostosky's arguments are rigorously logical, they appear vitiated at some points by the tone and method of his essay.

In building a case to show that "Coleridge's refutative interpretation of the Preface has obscured" points of real agreement and disagreement between the writers (p. 923), Bialostosky adopts the tone of prosecuting attorney to refute, in turn, what he alleges to be "Coleridge's inaccurate interpretations" of Wordsworth (p. 921). This tone, reminiscent of that adopted by many of the romantic reviewers against whom Wordsworth and Coleridge protested, in effect attenuates the tone of Coleridge's discourse by making it seem that Coleridge was constructing arguments against Wordsworth alone, and only in the adversarial manner that Bialostosky has adopted.

Among Coleridge's aims in *Biographia Literaria* were to reach "a settlement" of the debate over poetic diction, to assess Wordsworth's poetry with "impartiality" (see Ch. i), and to rebuke and correct the hostile reviewers who perpetuated the abuse of the Lake School (see Ch. xxi). In my analysis of these issues ("Coleridge's *Biographia* and the Contemporary Controversy about Style," *Wordsworth Circle*, 3 [1972], 61–70), I found relevant materials from personal correspondence and literary history to be easily available. While I am not insisting that Bialostosky write a different kind of essay, I am lamenting that he has produced a particular example of a general tendency to avoid references to information outside a set of texts. This tendency, once justified by the old New Criticism, is supported now by the diffusion of structuralist methodology. The concept of intertextuality, for example, becomes unnecessarily restrictive if it leads critics to ignore or suppress external contexts.

The fact that Coleridge produced his text for purposes other than those referring only to Wordsworth's text should serve as a starting point for clarifying the complications in Coleridge's analysis of what he believed Wordsworth said, should have said, and was taken to mean by contemporary reviewers. But this is not the place to debate point by point whether the circumstances of Coleridge's arguments can be cited to mitigate or disprove Bialostosky's charges of inaccuracy. It seems sufficient to note here that, while Bialostosky expands our understanding of Wordsworth's rhetorical concern for the relation of language to objects, he restricts our view of Coleridge on language and style to that of vocabulary and syntax. Moreover, the controversy surrounding what Wordsworth meant by language and diction began shortly after 1802, following relatively favorable initial reviews of *Lyrical Ballads*. Bialostosky misapplies his reference to Meyer H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp* ([New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953], p. 110) by asserting that "the endless disputes . . . began with Coleridge's interpretation" (p. 915).

Coleridge, to set the public record straight, addressed his interpretations of Wordsworth's Preface and high estimates of his poetry to the periodical critics and to the readers whose secondhand opinions of Wordsworth were influenced by the reviews. In addition, Coleridge sought to differentiate his critical principles from Wordsworth's theory and practice and to justify the separation. In usual Coleridgean fashion, he attempts to reconcile opposites, mediate differences, and synthesize conventional standards and values with the cultivation of new tastes for Wordsworth's poetry. As a result, Coleridge reformulates established principles of decorum and uni-

versality as they relate to language and style but keeps essentially within established tradition and values. Coleridgean criticism retains connections with the Aristotelian and empirical traditions, as both René Wellek and John O. Hayden have stressed (Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955], II, 187, and Hayden, "Coleridge, the Reviewers, and Wordsworth," *Studies in Philology*, 68 [1971], 105–19).

Bialostosky's essay is valuable in analyzing Wordsworth's views of language and suggesting further explorations. This achievement, however, comes at the expense of the integrity of Coleridge's intent, tone, and text.

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Mr. Bialostosky replies:

Having reexamined Owen's notes, I find that his criticism of Greenbie anticipates mine, though the definition of language at which he arrives does not. He does not distinguish between a rhetorical view of language concerned with literal and figurative usage and a grammatical one concerned with vocabulary and syntax but includes the latter in the former. His brief glosses of "state of vivid sensation" and "state of excitement" do not mention the relation of these states to the objects arousing them and so do not anticipate my argument. I regret, however, that I did not cite Owen's notes, especially since I call attention elsewhere to my disagreements with his interpretations in *Wordsworth as Critic*.

Those disagreements are real, for they touch on each of the four reasons Wordsworth gives for his choice of low and rustic subjects. Wordsworth's first reason is that "in that situation [low and rustic life] the essential passions find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language." I see the maturity, the lack of restraint, and the emphatic and plain expression of these passions as qualities that make it easier for Wordsworth to attain his object of representing "the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement." Owen, who has transported Wordsworth's account of the object of his choice to a footnote one hundred pages away, satirizes the criteria of maturity and lack of restraint by reviving the Coleridgean illustration of Betty Foy in *The Idiot Boy*: "Betty Foy's 'maternal passion' is obviously 'mature,' if not over-ripe, and negligibly 'under restraint'" (p. 8).

Wordsworth's second reason is that "in that situa-