

Introduction

Born in the first year of the century, Thomas Larcom typified the confluence of science, technology, statistics, and politics that was so characteristic of the British governing bureaucracy in the nineteenth century. Following a brilliant career at the Royal Military Academy, Larcom was assigned to the corps of Royal Engineers and in 1824 was selected by Colonel Thomas Colby, then head of the Ordnance Survey, for work on the survey of England and Wales. In 1828 Colby appointed Larcom as his chief assistant for the Irish survey, a position that, because of Colby's commitments in London, effectively left Larcom in charge of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland. Given a free hand in the conduct of the Irish survey, Larcom transformed the survey's headquarters at Mountjoy into a center of scientific research and education, introducing into the production of maps such innovations as the electrotype printing process and the use of contour lines to depict relief.

But Larcom's ideas for the survey went far beyond the technical and mechanical. As Colby noted, Larcom "conceived the idea that with such opportunities a small additional cost would enable him, without retarding the execution of the maps, to draw together a work embracing every description of local information relating to Ireland."¹ Larcom employed ethnologists, linguists, and antiquarians to collect local history and folklore, delve into the origin of place-names and local customs, and collect, classify and preserve local artifacts, archaeological materials and monuments. The result was inevitable. Within a few years the materials collected by Larcom's "surveyors" threatened to overwhelm the staff at Mountjoy and progress on the mapping of Ireland slowed noticeably. Larcom was ordered to terminate the ethnological "survey" and focus exclusively on the cartographic survey. Only one account of local information was published—that of Templemore, a parish in Londonderry, in 1837—yet despite orders to the contrary Larcom's agents continued to collect local information. The result was a rich store of historical, linguistic, cultural, and antiquarian information on Ireland, for which he was praised by the President of the Royal Irish Academy.

Larcom put the information to more immediate use, though, in his work with the then undersecretary for Ireland, Thomas Drummond. He prepared plans for carrying out the changes required by the Irish Reform Bill and later prepared the topographical portion of the "Report on Irish Municipal Reform." This work led to his appointment as the census commissioner for Ireland in 1841, where he initiated the first systematic classification of occupations and general conditions of the Irish population and formed a permanent branch of the registrar-general's office for the collection of agricultural statistics. His work on the Irish census was so successful that the general plan of the Irish census was subsequently adopted for use in England,

1 Quoted in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, 64 vols, edited by Leslie Stephen (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885), 32:144.

and Larcom was offered a series of increasingly important government posts, culminating in 1853 with his appointment as undersecretary for Ireland, a position that made him effectively the bureaucratic viceroy of Ireland. Like in most colonial governments, power depended as much upon the possession of knowledge as upon the ability to use force. The bureaucracy of governance required data. The population was counted and classified by the census. The land was surveyed and constructed by the map. The culture was collected and preserved by the museum. That such work was a service to the nation is clear by Larcom's honors: He was knighted in 1860 and made a baronet and Irish Privy Councilor upon his retirement in 1868.

Bluff empirical men like Thomas Larcom fanned out across Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century to construct empirical representations of the nation. Counting, classifying, surveying, mapping, collecting, and preserving—funded for the first time by the government—was carried out on a national scale, and the national institutions of the census, the map, and the museum helped to consolidate the available representations of the nation and reduce the nation and its people to abstract empirical constructs. It probably requires no justification to talk of nations as representations, constructs, or, as E.J. Hobsbawm calls them, “inventions” that shift and change over time (11). As Ernest Gellner argues, “Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men ... are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: *that* is a reality” (48–9). If national identity is a kind of representation or self-representation, what is the source of our tropes, the figures of speech we use to describe ourselves? Benedict Anderson, in an appendix to the second edition of *Imagined Communities*, identifies the census, the map, and the museum as three “institutions of power” that provided a colonial government with the mechanisms to define the people, territory, and culture that it ruled, mechanisms that ironically, or dialectically and necessarily, “engendered the grammar of the nationalisms that eventually arose to combat [colonial power]” (xiv). For Anderson, the census provided a classificatory grid of the colonial state's “feverish imagining” of the colonized people, a counting and classifying that both contained the dangerous multiplicity of the population and created identities through which that population could imagine itself. The map demarcated regions (often arbitrarily) into colonized nation-states and thus created the geographical and political entities it supposedly recorded, putting “space under the same surveillance which the census-makers were trying to impose on persons” (173). The museum provided a legitimacy, first for the presence of the colonizers and later for the claim to rule of nationalists and separatists, through historical narratives constructed out of monuments and artifacts that performed a “profane genealogizing” of power (xiv). Anderson concludes that:

the census, the map and the museum illuminate the late colonial state's style of thinking about its domain. The ‘warp’ of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state's real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth. The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determinate, and therefore—in principle—countable ... The ‘weft’ was what one could call serialization: the assumption that the

world was made up of replicable plurals. The particular always stood as a provisional representative of a series. (184)

Without diminishing the power of this Foucauldian classificatory grid, the history of colonizers and colonized has never quite matched this picture of disciplinary mechanisms and docile bodies. What it does provide, though, as in the seemingly endless series of memoranda supplied to lords-lieutenant and ministers, is the discursive control of “official returns,” those neatly arranged tables of data demonstrating in the rhetoric of bureaucracy increased agricultural yields, higher manufacturing production rates, decreased crime, improved conditions of life, greater numbers of people—the whole ceaseless narrative of colonial beneficence and capitalistic progress. The grid made identity visible through the categories of its imagining and substituted for the particular and local bodies the abstract particular indexed by a series of coordinates in a multidimensional matrix. If the “particular always stood as a provisional representative of a series,” it was a “particular” created by the grid itself, a new kind of abstraction made particular by the increasing number of dimensions in the matrix. The particular was representative of the series because the series brought the particular into existence.

Marc Redfield subjects the universalizing potency of nationalism to a powerful de Manian reading. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Redfield links Anderson’s “imagined community,” which relies on a “homogeneous empty time ... [that] corrodes the identities it enables” to Derrida’s notion of writing, which relies on *différance*, itself a corrosive. The result:

The nation is a hallucinated limit to iterability. Made possible by difference, deferral, and technological shock, the nation homogenizes time and space, draws and polices borders, historicizes itself as the continuous arc of an unfolding identity ... Originating in an anonymity ‘prior’ to any identity—an anonymity constitutive of the possibility of imagining an identity—the nation imagines anonymity *as* identity, as an essentialized formal abstraction. (53–4)

Redfield’s analysis helps us unravel two important and related facts about nationalism: the very high personal psychic stakes involved in the construction of national identity, and how such constructions are inevitable in any imagined community.

So while Anderson is primarily concerned with how the colonial state imagines the “other,” the institutions of power he identifies were first used not on the peripheries of empire but at its center. As Redfield’s argument predicts, the first object of the census, the map, and the museum was not an imagined “them,” but an imagined “us,” the citizens, land, culture, and history of the British “nation.” Before exporting this machinery to the colonies, it was tested at home—the British census originating in 1801, the Ordnance Survey in 1791, and the state-sponsored British Museum in 1757. To generate the abstract British nation, the local particulars first had to be collected, sifted, classified, and reconstructed into a narrative descriptive of the British character, the sceptered isle and the legitimacy of its “history.” Anderson’s model, however, does not simply record the existence of colonial hegemony; it is a dialectic model that locates in the attempts by colonial power to write their own legitimacy the spark that ignites competing nationalist discourses. This dialectic is

key to Katie Trumpener's argument in *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire*. For Trumpener, the attempts emanating from London to coerce the British Isles into a nation generate a counterdiscourse of local legends, customs, discourses, and language. Trumpener's work in some ways parallels my project. She also begins with the bureaucratic efforts to control the discourse of the nation, efforts related to the political fortunes of Britain's "others": Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. She also identifies counterdiscourses that circulate in opposition to the dominant discourse of the nation emanating from London. She even relates the anecdote about the failure of the Irish survey, though she does not identify Thomas Larcom as the head of the survey. My study, however, does not attempt to write a history of nationalism's counterdiscourses. Instead, my goal is to examine the complicities and resistances registered in the single yet central figure of William Wordsworth, and to use Wordsworth's response to the nation as a way of understanding his public actions, especially after 1807. At the center of this study is Wordsworth's self-conscious attempt at midcareer to define and control his poetic identity and position himself as the national poet. Sharing the common heritage of an Enlightenment episteme of measurement, classification, and control, the institutions of the census, the map, the museum, and the literary institution named Wordsworth demonstrate dialectically how the attempt to consolidate available representations—of the nation, the poet, or the national poet—calls counterrepresentations into existence.

The categories of social reality that underlie much recent and excellent work on Britain in the early nineteenth century and Wordsworth in particular—occupation, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, dwelling, locale, regional characteristics (urban, rural, arable, forested, mountainous, monumental, archaeological), and local variations (folklore, history, customs, practices)—found their empirical and institutional manifestations in the act of governance, whether it be that of the state or of the poet. These categories, like all categories, were and are both descriptive and prescriptive, reflective of what were and are perceived to be the particulars of social reality and formative of that social reality. Like all structure, as Foucault notes, some particulars were made visible and others invisible. That the categories frequently required supplementation in the form of more categories, unclassifiable categories (the ubiquitous census category of "Other"), and apologetic or defensive narratives justifying the categories, while signaling the impossibility of ever "getting it right," also are testaments to the undying belief that one can "get it right." The census, the map, and the museum all represent attempts to create the totalizing classificatory grid that is desirable (for governments as well as poets and critics) and possible, as Anderson notes, "in principle." And while the grid has proven incapable of containing the proliferation of data, we have retained in our own critical practices a remarkable faith in our own ability to identify and adjust the coordinates of that grid. From the census, the map, and the museum, we have inherited the categories of social reality that we hold up to texts as if these categories were themselves social reality and not the products, with a history of their own, of some prior attempt to classify social reality. The grid, while ostensibly posing the threat of the totalization of all detail, actually creates the details that it purports to subsume. As we conduct our own censuses, draw our own maps, create our own curiosity cabinets, we deploy

those procedures that, despite their failings, provide a systematic way of dealing with aggregates through abstraction.

It would be simplistic, however, to see the relationship between these institutions of nationalism and the career of the poet, between the poetics of the nation and the national poet, as moving in only one direction, from the discursive formations that make the nation imaginable to how these same formations make the national poet imaginable. Wordsworth's classification of his poems in 1815 was not an overt attempt to conduct his own census but was his use of a mechanism that had proven itself useful on a wide range of seemingly inassimilable elements. Wordsworth was not influenced by the census; the census and Wordsworth utilized the methodologies of counting (unifying) and classifying (redispersing) to represent abstractly the body or the self, methodologies that had proven "successful" in other disciplines. In this procedure I appear to be treading dangerously close to what Alan Liu has called the "embarrassment of the New Historicism," the holding up "to view a historical context on one side, a literary text on the other, and, in between, a connection of pure nothing" ("Power" 740, 743). Where embarrassment is forestalled (or at least temporarily removed to a higher level of abstraction) is in my focus on the abstract modalities of power and the institutional methodologies reified by that power as well as on actions of agents, such as Wordsworth, who both participate in and are subtly resistant to such modalities. Unlike Anderson's apocalyptic humanistic vision of government's success in implementing these mechanisms of control, my narrative attempts to recover both the paranoia of the classified object as well as the anxiety of the classifying subject. The context enacted repeatedly by census officials, cartographers, curators, and literary critics is that between the particular and the universal, the global and the local, the sum and the dispersed bodies, the map and the physical land, the exhibition and the archive, the neatly contained Great Decade revolutionary turned Tory hireling poet and the complex, contradictory historical phenomenon named Wordsworth. But this study is not an argument for the local and the particular, what Liu elsewhere calls the "overdetermination" that "goes under the name of 'particularity'" (Review 177), nor is it an attempt to replace, as David Simpson suggests, "every use of the word *culture* with the word *subculture*" ("Return" 741). Rather, my argument is that culture and subcultures are themselves categories defined principally by the definitional power of the unified sign of the normative employed by the state, the poet, and the literary critic. Further, the pointedness given to this opposition arises during this period, and the valorization of the particular emerges out of the threat of subsumption of all particulars under the unified signs represented and propagated by institutional structures like the census, the map, the museum, and the poet.

David Aram Kaiser has suggested that this essentially philosophical opposition between the particular and the universal helps explain the competing models of culture and of the nation-state that emerged in the nineteenth century. In Kaiser's analysis, the competing models were liberalism, specifically the very English liberalism of "doing what one likes" and cultural nationalism, and they received in England their synthesis in Coleridge's concept of the symbol, which provides "a dialectical reconciliation between universal idea and particular instantiation" (31). Wordsworth's relationship to both the particular and the universal, though,

cannot be neatly resolved, dialectically or otherwise, and, as the brief biography of Thomas Larcom shows, historical figures do not line up on one or the other side of this or any other debate. Larcom was instrumental in conducting the triangulation survey of Ireland—the reduction of land to abstract geometric space—as well as the census, and yet he was also responsible for generating reams of local information and was credited with saving culture from the abyss of forgetting. While all these activities suggest the archiving mentality of the modern bureaucrat, what remains unresolved, and perhaps irresolvable, is the incompatibility of these two tendencies of the archiving mind—more and more abstractions to contain more and more particulars—the unified and empty sign and the unaccountable and unclassifiable particular. Wordsworth is both the classifier of poems, readers, and the objects of his poetic vision, and the celebrant of the unclassifiable particular object or experience—the one lone tree, the blasted hedge, the beetling rock, the blinded mountain summit, the echoing vale, the lonely prospect dim—that we identify as the literary sublime. Some contemporary critics (as well as modern ones) accuse him of being too abstract, and some accuse him of being too local, parochial, and particular. I want to suggest that he is both, and I take as a working assumption of this project Alison Hickey's claim that this "conflict between an incorporating or systematizing impulse and the resistance to it manifests itself as a fundamental aspect of Wordsworth's thought" (131). Wordsworth's self-presentation and self-preservation and our subsequent reimaginings and reclassifications of him are testament to the unending dialectic of detail, category, inassimilable detail, and proliferating categories. The dominant narratives in Wordsworthian scholarship testify to this ongoing dialectic. From Arnold's Great Decade to Hartman's *akedah* and apocalypse, our narratives about Wordsworth have subdivided and reclassified his unwieldy six-decade poetic career by centering that career on such critical constructions as the lyric poet of 1798–1807 or the poet of *The Prelude*. Even Thomas Pfau's sophisticated rethinking of Wordsworth's self-representation in *Wordsworth's Profession* narrowly focuses on the early career of Wordsworth, aligning the construction of that career with attempts at middle class legitimation, and Kenneth Johnston's work while offering a new center for that career—the unfinished long poem *The Recluse*, which has the utility of extending Wordsworth's career—shares with the earlier narratives a quintessentially Romantic narrative of lost opportunities, failed projects, and waning power, and his massive biography of Wordsworth makes no attempt to go beyond 1807. Hickey's book-length study of *The Excursion* and Peter J. Manning's essays on the later Wordsworth are remarkable not merely for their critical perspicacity but for their audacious claim that Wordsworth after 1807 might be of interest to scholars and readers.² Marc Redfield's semiserious summary of Romanticism could serve

2 Hickey offers a more detailed overview of the "Wordsworth's anti-climax" narrative in *Impure Conceits: Rhetoric and Ideology in Wordsworth's 'Excursion'* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1–7. Manning's growing body of work on the later Wordsworth includes "Wordsworth at St. Bees: Scandals, Sisterhoods, and the Later Wordsworth," *ELH* 52 (1985): 33–58, "Cleansing the Image: Wordsworth, Rome, and the Rise of Historicism," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33 (1991): 271–326, "Wordsworth in the Keepsake" in *Literature in the Marketplace*, edited by John L. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge:

equally well as a summary of critical narratives about Wordsworth: “It is, after all, a movement destined to die young or end badly, bequeathing only its promise to us as our own utopian possibility” (32). I would like to recenter Wordsworth’s career not on a particular work or poetic project but on a particular goal, that of the writing of the nation. The effect of this recentering is a decentering, shifting attention away from a particular work or project to the larger and more diffuse production of texts for public consumption that occupied Wordsworth throughout his career and can be said to define that career.

As Jerome Christensen has remarked on Coleridge’s own attempt at controlling his literary representation in his *Biographia Literaria*, those texts do not constitute “a Shandean fiction nor an organic development but a writer’s career” (20–21). Building on Christensen’s insight into the rhetorical nature of Coleridge’s and Byron’s public representation of their literary careers, I examine Wordsworth’s publication of individual volumes of poetry and prose as well as the republication of his collected works as public acts of self-representation and self-definition, attempts by the poet himself to contain the proliferation of detail that marks his poetic output and poetic reputation. Always solicitous of his reputation and demanding in the presentation of his work, Wordsworth sought continually to control his public identity as a poet, an attempt at control that contemporary and subsequent criticism has shown to be futile. Just as Anderson’s apocalyptic vision of national consolidation proves inadequate to the proliferation of detail it seeks to contain, Wordsworth’s similar attempt at consolidation fails because of his own willingness to entertain the intractability of the local and the particular. That Wordsworth succeeded in becoming the national poet through his embracing of the local points to the need for a complex reimagining of the nation as both abstract and particular, as both generalized and specific, or more accurately as a particularized abstraction and a generalizable specific.

Marlon Ross sees Wordsworth’s apologetics for nationalism as starting at what he calls Wordsworth’s center—the attachment to the local native soil. From this center, however, it “spreads itself wide,” finding “[i]n every nook ... its destined fulfillment” (64). Ross’s triumphal characterization, though, is possible only when some significant portion of Wordsworth’s career is excluded from consideration. Extending Wordsworth’s career beyond the conventional parameters of 1805 or 1807 (or at the latest 1814) enables us to read the ironies and difficulties of the writing the nation. For example, Anne Janowicz persuasively argues for Wordsworth’s centrality to the formation of national identity. In *England’s Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape*, she persuasively argues that Wordsworth’s writing of the self is the necessary epic structure underlying the writing of the nation. She concludes her discussion of *The Prelude* with a ringing claim of Wordsworth’s triumph:

The mutual making of nation and self is the climax of the poem. The reparative action of the Imagination and of its nationalist function are inseparable: here in native geography,

Cambridge University Press, 1995), “Touring Scotland at the Time of the Reform Bill: William Wordsworth and William Cobbett,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 31:2 (2000): 80–3, and “The Other Scene of Travel: Wordsworth’s ‘Musings Near Aquapendente,’” in *The Wordsworthian Enlightenment: Romantic Poetry and the Ecology of Reading*, edited by Helen Regueiro Elam and Frances Ferguson (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 2005), 191–211.

the country answers the poets, for here “had Nature lodged / The soul, the imagination of the whole” (1805, XIII, 64–5). To speak of nature is to speak of the nation: the fragments cohere into a whole, the ruin is repaired, and as the nation moves through each person, so each person moves through the nation. (144)

Like many discussions of Wordsworth’s development, stopping in 1805 is not merely conducive but necessary to make claims about Wordsworth’s triumph or psychic wholeness or integration. To move beyond 1805 is to encounter that time after the moment of vision, the time of doubt, uncertainty, failure. Unlike Ross’s narrative that moves from the center outward, or Janowicz’s, which builds to the Snowdon climax, the narrative that I want to trace focuses less on a movement from the center outward and more on the tension between the center and the periphery, between the abstract and the particular, between the local and the national. The narrative of Wordsworth’s career that emerges is, like that identified by William Galperin’s consideration of Wordsworth’s revisions, essentially ironic—the normative census identity diffusing into multiple authorial identities, the abstract map of imperial dominion disappearing under the pressure of local sublimity, and the narrative of national identity and centralized power being challenged by a narrative of local idiosyncrasy. This book is about Wordsworth’s stories about himself as well as our stories about Wordsworth, about representations of the nation and the poet who would write the nation, and how such representations were challenged by the local variations both sought to contain. Wordsworth’s “service to the nation”—a phrase that appears frequently in tributes to and eulogies of him—was the construction of a theory of the particular and an abstract representation of the local.

This book is divided into three parts, “Census,” “Map,” and “Museum,” and is structured mostly along the chronology of Wordsworth’s career. While some texts published prior to 1815 receive extended treatments (especially in Part I), greater attention than is usual in book-length studies of Wordsworth is given to poetry published after 1815. This should not be read as a call for greater appreciation of the later Wordsworth, though such attention is necessary if we are to address the idea of our construction of Wordsworth, but is necessitated by my argument, which sees Wordsworth as active in the creation of his own self-image. Because of my emphasis on Wordsworth’s “actions” as a public figure, the volumes he set before the public, especially during what I identify as the crucial period between 1814 and 1820, are read as rhetorical gestures requiring careful attention to the revision history of individual poems as well as to the placement of the poems in the individual volumes. What emerges from this examination of the purportedly quiescent middle-aged poet is a figure solicitous not just for his public identity as a poet but also for the purported identity of the nation. To counteract the increasing abstractions of commercial and governmental London, Wordsworth offered his own idealized particulars—the sheltered vale, the independent statesman, the republic of shepherds, the local river, the landscape of tower, hamlet, and church spire, the local tales, superstitions and idiosyncratic names, what Anne Janowicz calls Wordsworth’s “naturalized nationalism” (133). These particulars were not in opposition to the totalizing classificatory grid; they were created or made visible by it. The celebration of local variation always presupposed that the “true” national character could be

abstracted from the local. The particular was still representative of the series, only Wordsworth posited a different set of particulars to produce a different series.

In Chapter 1, "Counting the People," I examine the origins of the British census in the late eighteenth century and how the perception of the census shifted from being seen as an attempt by the government to impose order and restraint on specific physical bodies to the demands of abstract physical bodies that imposed duties and responsibilities on the government. Counting the people served as a mechanism of control, and for Wordsworth counting became a discipline that exemplified both the power to control the material and—as legitimated in Book XIII of the 1805 *Prelude*—the power to control the representation of the material. The sum produced by enumeration is the totalized and empty sign of unity and is produced by a procedure that Wordsworth identifies as a key component in his definition of imagination. Counting is a form of data coercion, the aesthetic counterpart of which is the "abstracting, and the modifying powers of the Imagination." But like the census, which sought and failed to contain the dangerous multitudes, so Wordsworth encountered repeated resistance to his egotistical sublime. This desire to make the world accountable paradoxically also makes Wordsworth so open to the unaccountable, or the sublime. Wordsworth's "Gipsies" articulates a national preoccupation with the uncounted and seemingly unaccountable, the racial otherness of a "knot" of people that is both contained by the knot and yet seemingly opaque and unavailable for inspection. If counting is containment, not being counted is dangerous and requires a further form of control. The Kantian aesthetic sublime represents such an attempt to place the unknowable within structure. The sublime is an aesthetic means of containing unaccountable difference, and it is striking that Wordsworth invokes the machinery of the entire cosmos to address the purported idleness of a band of gypsies. This containment of the "other" accounts for the unaccountable and renders it safe. In Wordsworth's encounter with a "knot of gypsies," the reduction of human presence to a knot and a *not* is the inevitable outcome of an encounter between the powerless and the poet's power of abstraction.

This desire for control recurs in Wordsworth's classification of poems and readers in 1815, which is the subject of Chapter 2. Wordsworth's procedure mirrors the statistical classification of the people of Britain in that both processes aim at exploring, breaking down and rearranging the body in order to subject it to ever more rigorous control and discipline. But what these processes actually reveal is the diffusion and multiplicity of the poems, readers, and people that must be defined as abnormal or accounted for by ever-proliferating categories and ever-increasing justifications. Wordsworth's purpose was absolute control over the conditions under which he was read, or rather the conditions under which his textual self was read. The national census was a similar attempt at control; but, like all classificatory schemes, what came to count and what counted as difference could be read only through the categories themselves. The inevitable result was a taxonomy that erased the material object and replaced it with an object of inquiry visible only through the structure that purported to describe it. Perversely for Wordsworth, the classification of the poems became the writing of a life and the assertion of a subject that was constituted by writing, while the classification of the readers became the reading of a life and the assertion of a subject that somehow remained immune to reading.

Surveying and the “prospect-view” or grand imperial vision it afforded provided Wordsworth with a way of writing the nation as if it were an abstract unified whole, the self-contained and self-similar island nation united in purpose by the war with France. In Chapter 3, “Surveying and Writing the Nation,” I demonstrate how the Thanksgiving Ode and its accompanying poems can be read as Wordsworth’s most overt attempt to write the nation, to assume the bardic voice and explain to the people the meaning of great national events. Wordsworth’s flurry of publication activity in the years between 1814 and 1820 marked his self-conscious emergence as poet of the nation and demonstrated his varied and evolving strategies for writing a national poetry, activities that call into question our narratives of the inactive middle-aged poet. Yet, as the dominant critical position holds, it was at this time that Wordsworth retreated from the cares of the nation into the seclusion of his native hills and dales to brood over his failures and rejections and endlessly revise the great poetry of his youth. The pressing reality of dissension and disunity that marked post-Waterloo Britain and the uncomfortable linkage between imperial ambition and Napoleon’s lawless reign rendered the prospect-view both inadequate and suspect; and Wordsworth’s *Thanksgiving Ode* poems of 1816, while seeking to celebrate the abstract notion of the nation, instead recount the story of the poet’s own frustration over his failure to write the nation. What is clear about this episode is that when Wordsworth attempted to write the nation he was himself caught between opposing visions that he could neither unify nor resolve.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I examine how after the Thanksgiving Ode debacle, Wordsworth’s view of the nation shifted increasingly toward the local landscape, people, and manners of his native Westmoreland. Like the local surveyors who sought to contain the proliferating survey data they were collecting, Wordsworth felt that a great deal went unrecorded on the national map and sought to repopulate the landscape with the monuments and meaning of the locally understood landscape. In short, the abstract vision required the subsumption of local details, congruous and incongruous, but as the mapmakers to Britain were discovering at this time, it was the delineation of local detail—not the impossible mountaintop vision—that proved the accuracy, utility, and beauty of the finished map. For Wordsworth, the unending prospect of imperial Britain was only one possible vision of Britain, and clearly what was needed in the tempestuous years following Waterloo was an explication of the British national character from the local details of the imagined British landscape, a character formed by and responsive to the local. That landscape was his native Westmoreland. Wordsworth’s turn or return to the local was not a retreat from the politics of the nation, but a conscious attempt to redefine the nation along the lines of the local. In what might be called an abstract vision of the particular, Wordsworth holds up local idiosyncrasy as the true exemplar of the national character, and a local river, the Duddon, as the true representative of the progress narrative of the British nation.

In *Peter Bell*, *The Waggoner*, and *The River Duddon*, all published between April 1819 and May 1820, Wordsworth presented his rethinking of the nation not as monolithic totality but as regional ideal. Local identity provided both an idealized national identity to counterbalance what Wordsworth saw as a troubled nation forgetful of its past and a cautionary tale of what was to come when local

idiosyncrasies were subsumed within the national identity emanating from the metropole. For Wordsworth, this return to local traditions recovered the meaning of the landscape by investing it with human transit and human purposes. Unlike the unpeopled and impossibly abstract imperial landscape, the local landscape is marked everywhere by a history that reconnects the present with the past. Imperial dominion is replaced by historical contingency, as the abstract map is filled in with local detail. The local landscape is not simply background or picturesque attraction but is revealing in the associations built up over immemorial time of the ways in which people have observed and interpreted that landscape.

Increasingly for Wordsworth, local identity was found to rely on local customs, folklore, and history, and so the depiction of the local landscape was itself an act of preservation, an artifact for the national museum. As early as 1820, Wordsworth had called for the preservation of the Lake District as “a sort of national property,” marking a curious point where the landscape itself becomes an artifact worthy of preservation. In Chapter 6, “A National Property,” I examine how Wordsworth’s poetry both enacts a type of museum presentation and becomes one of the bases for the later Victorian preservation movement. The local geography, traditions, and people of the Lakes, marked by idiosyncrasy and a narrative of rugged resistance, stood in a synecdochic relationship to an idealized vision of the nation. This landscape was both commonplace and exotic, representative and rare, representative of the nation paradoxically because it was becoming increasingly rare. As an object of study, isolated yet threatened, as a site of pilgrimage and promised transformation, as a ritual space set apart from everyday life by geography and the imagination, the landscape of the Lakes can be likened to a vast national museum space dedicated, like the contemporary British Museum and National Gallery, to the education of the modern citizen, the construction of national identity, and the demonstration of state power. This construction of the landscape as a museum creates what Svetlana Alpers refers to as “the museum effect,” the transformation of all objects into objects of aesthetic interest. This aestheticizing gaze, so frequently the subject of recent Wordsworth scholarship, finds its parallel ironically in Wordsworth’s transformation of the British landscape into a kind of museum space and the debate surrounding a planned railway connecting a large manufacturing town with the Lake District. While both Wordsworth’s poetry and the railway seemed dedicated to the common goal of providing widespread access to the improving influence of aesthetic contemplation, both also threatened to destroy the objects of contemplation they purported to make available. This irony, known in conservation circles as the problem of balancing preservation and access, cannot be attributed solely to Wordsworth’s narrow self-interest but must be seen as revealing commonly held ideas concerning who the “people” were and who constituted the nation.

Ironically, the landscape celebrated and the ancient manners preserved by Wordsworth had already vanished from the land. For the local surveyors attempting to represent the local landscape, for the antiquarians attempting to preserve the local history, and for Wordsworth who sought to do both, the preservation of the customs, folklore, history, and artifacts was a national imperative. National heritage based on local idiosyncrasy became the basis of national identity. In Chapter 7, “Service to the Nation,” I demonstrate how by the second half of the nineteenth century, Wordsworth

himself and the local landscape he celebrated were themselves subsumed into that heritage, the poet transformed by Victorian editors and scholars into the “Great Decade” poet of Nature and the landscape he celebrated combed for and inscribed by its relation to his poems. This Victorian construction of the consummate Romantic poet polished and preserved a version of Wordsworth suitable for display in the museum of national heritage. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, out of the plenitude of Wordsworths available, two primary versions emerged: that of the poet of the Lakes so essential to the British tourist industry and that of the global competitor in the international competition of world literatures. Both were nostalgic visions of the past, of the nation, the land, poetry, and the power of poetry itself. While seeking to preserve the nation and the poet, both Matthew Arnold’s version of Wordsworth and the preservation movement’s version of Wordsworth preserve a nostalgia for the possibility of nostalgia itself, for a time when poetry or nature or history could be seen as salvific. While Wordsworth sought to preserve a landscape of speaking monuments that would speak the “ancient manners” so needed by a forgetful nation, the landscape increasingly came to speak only a single word: Wordsworth. In the poem *Eighteen Hundred Eleven*, Anna Laetitia Barbauld uses an imagined end of the British Empire to critique her nation’s travails. In this dark and somber poem, she prophetically sees the future of Britain. American tourists, she imagines, “with duteous zeal their pilgrimage shall take” to Britain, and there, “With fond, adoring steps,” they will “press the sod / By statesmen, sages, poets, heroes, trod” (129–31). The landscape, the poet, and his poems had become artifacts in a national museum that has come to encompass virtually every part of the nation itself. By the end of the nineteenth century, with the creation of the National Trust under Wordsworth scholar and celebrant H.D. Rawnsley, the great national museum was no longer the repository of the Rosetta Stone and the Elgin Marbles but the land itself and its ruins, castles, churches, houses, prospects, farmlands, moors, and coastline. While the museum had always been the nation, as Barbauld foresaw, the nation would become the museum.