

John Stoddart, 'Michael' and Lyrical Ballads

R. S. WOOF

TWO YEARS before his death in 1854 Stoddart assured a certain I. Richardson, that he did not believe that Wordsworth had given Coleridge any substantial aid in the translation of *Wallenstein*. Richardson had obviously appealed to Stoddart as a friend of both poets and as himself an early translator of Schiller. (With the help of G. H. Noehden, Stoddart had published *Fiesco* in 1796 and *Don Carlos* in 1798.) This was the reply Stoddart gave him:

I have every reason to remember my walk from Edinburgh to London in 1800, with my dear friend James Moncrieff; for it was then that I first confided to him my attachment to a sister of his, with whom I afterwards passed 42 years of married life. And the communication gave him much pleasure as coming from so intimate a college friend. We deviated several times from the direct route, and I took him to my friend Wordsworth who then inhabited a Cottage near the Church, besides Grasmere Lake. Hence we found Coleridge; and I have the general impression of having been much gratified by their poetical communications; but of the translation of *Wallenstein* I can speak with no degree of certainty. I have no doubt that I entered with great interest into such parts, as were shown to me, of what you justly call an excellent translation. But I am fairly convinced that its merit was substantially Coleridge's; though he may have willingly received an expression or even a thought, from Wordsworth, to whom he at this time looked upon [*sic*] with great deference. For my own part I believe, I could have been nothing more than a humble admirer. If Wordsworth took any considerable part in the translation (which I do not believe) it must of course be mentioned in his Life . . .¹

¹ From a transcript made in 1956: the original letter was loose in a book in Blackwell's Bookshop, Oxford, and was sold without trace. It has not been possible to identify I. Richardson. The letter, dated 20 September, was addressed to him (he may have been on holiday) and this address followed: Mrs Woods, Paignton Sands, Paignton, Devon.

This recollection testifies quite clearly to the fact that Stoddart was an intimate of both Wordsworth and Coleridge some months at least before he is generally known to have been visiting them. The meeting described in the letter to Richardson must belong to the spring of 1800, for John Wordsworth, waiting in London to begin his first voyage as Captain of the *Earl of Abergavenny*, wrote to Mary Hutchinson on 16 February 1801, 'I call upon Stoddart very often on purpose to have the pleasure of talking about you'. This probably indicates that there was a time when John, Mary Hutchinson and Stoddart were in the same company and this time seems to have been early April 1800, in Grasmere, for Mary departed thence for home about 5 April. The day after, properly enough, in the light of Stoddart's letter of 1854, Coleridge arrived from London with a nearly completed translation of *Wallenstein*. Some confirmation that Stoddart thought of Grasmere as a possible stopping place between London and Edinburgh (he was then preparing his *Remarks . . . on Scotland*, published in 1801) comes in a letter to Aza Pinney of 13 July 1800:

. . . my own departure depends partly on my companion who will be either Barwis or Moncrieff . . . In my way I shall probably visit Wordsworth and Coleridge, to either of whom if you have any message I will gladly take it.¹

He was in London until at least 26 July, and there is no mention of a Grasmere visit in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*; at that point, in pursuit of Isabella Moncrieff, in a further endeavour to persuade one of his influential Scottish friends to get a promotion for his father (who was a lieutenant in the Navy), in obtaining the final details for his book, Stoddart had reason enough to hurry up to Scotland.

It was not until October that he managed a visit of some length and by now he was welcomed in Grasmere and Keswick as an established friend. He reached Grasmere on 22 October, the next day went off with Coleridge to Keswick, and for a week Coleridge's notebook is a blank; on 30 October, the day after Stoddart returned to Grasmere, Coleridge records what seems rather a desperate attempt to begin work once more. Back at

¹ From the Pinney papers, Bristol University, quoted by permission of Mrs Hester Marsden-Smedley.

Grasmere, Stoddart appears to have stopped Wordsworth's work entirely. On 30 October Dorothy records:

Wm. talked all day, and almost all night, with Stoddart. Mrs and Miss Ll. called in the morning. I walked with them to Tail End . . . W. and S.¹ in the house all day.

Such excess had its consequences, for the next day's entry reads, 'W. and S.² did not rise till 1 o'clock. W. very sick and very ill'. On 1 November Dorothy wrote, 'Talk in the evening', and on 3 November, 'Wm. and Stoddart still talking'. Dorothy's astonishment is scarcely to be wondered at: yet one must remember that to John Stuart Mill, Wordsworth seemed 'the best talker I ever heard (& I have heard several first-rate ones)';³ and a facility for talking seems to stand out in what we know of Stoddart's early career.

Wordsworth must have run into Stoddart in the early summer of 1796 when he had gone up to London from Racedown for a few weeks. At that point Stoddart seems to have reached one of the crises in his life. To the consternation of his family, ever anxious about money and status, he had just left, or lost, his post as tutor to the great-nephews of his patron, Shute Barrington, then Bishop of Durham. Barrington, always eager to help merit, noticed Stoddart when he was Bishop at Salisbury, and Stoddart a schoolboy in the Cathedral Close (where one of the teachers was Coleridge's brother, Edward). From Salisbury, Stoddart went to Christ Church, Oxford, was elected to a Studentship, was a founder member of the Lunaticks, an essay and discussion society whose members included William and James Moncrieff of Balliol, and George Forster of Lincoln, a relative (to Stoddart's advantage) of his future patron, Lord Stowell.

T. F. Dibdin later recalled Stoddart at this period:

Taking the art of speaking and the composition of an essay, together, I think Mr. (now Sir John) STODDART of Christ Church beat us all. He was always upon his legs, a fearless opponent; and in the use of a pen, the most unpremeditating and successful.⁴

¹ Editors of the *Journal* have misread 'S' as 'P', a self-evidently impossible reading in the entry for 30 October. This manuscript and all others subsequently quoted are (except where specially noted) among the Dove Cottage Papers, Grasmere, and are quoted by the kind permission of the Trustees.

² see fn. 1, above.

³ *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848*, ed. F. E. Mineka, Toronto and London, 1963, p. 82.

⁴ See T. F. Dibdin, *Reminiscences of a Literary Life*, 1836, I, 100-2.

Stoddart took his B.A. in 1794. All this Oxford achievement presupposes an adherence to the Thirty-nine Articles, but, according to Hone's scurrilous *Origin of the Name of Doctor Slop* [Stoddart] (1821), it was the Bishop's discovery that he did not accept the Articles that led to the rupture about May or June 1796. A remark of Lamb's endorses this explanation: writing to Coleridge on 8 June 1796, Lamb commented on an old school friend, Robert Allen,

Allen I am sorry to say is a *confirmed* Atheist. Stodart, or Stothard, a cold hearted well bred conceited disciple of Godwin, does him no good.

It had been Allen's misfortune to lose his post as a school-usher in 1795 because of republican views. Stoddart's political opinions were likewise of an intransigent nature; according to William Hone he was called Citizen Stoddart and wore his hair short, deeming long hair aristocratic. Pitt had taxed hair powder for war revenue, and so, like other radicals, Stoddart rejected the use of it. But even if his coiffure had not given him away, it would have been difficult for such a talker as Stoddart to conceal the notions that he was picking up from Godwin's conversation. Since 12 January 1796 he had been calling frequently on Godwin, and in June of that year Godwin records several meetings in which Stoddart and Wordsworth are in company. Stoddart had a large acquaintance, in London and up and down the country, and his speculative interests and conversational powers must have made him attractive, at least for short periods. Holcroft commented in his diary for 5 August 1798, 'Stoddart as usual, acute, but pertinacious and verbose'. Coleridge, not yet disillusioned, caught a brighter aspect; he wrote to Godwin on 8 July 1801:

And now for 'my late acquisitions of *friends*' — Aye — *friends!* — Stoddart indeed if he were nearer to us and more among us, I should really number among such — he is a man of uncorrupted integrity & of a very, very kind heart — his talents are respectable — and his information such, that while he was with me I derived much instruction from his conversation.¹

Briefly, then, this is Stoddart, a man with friends more talented than himself; and in 1800 he saw a good deal of them, staying

¹ Coleridge's letters throughout this article are quoted from *Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs, 1956; and the Wordsworth letters are quoted from C. L. Shaver's revision of de Selincourt's edition, *The Early Years*, of 1967.

twice with Wordsworth and once, during the summer, with Walter Scott, to whom he wrote on 26 December 1800:

At Keswick I pass'd some time with Coleridge & at Grasmere with Wordsworth, of whose poetical productions I have I believe (a more favourable & therefore) a juster notion than ever — of their talents I never doubted — By the bye, if you visit that country do not neglect to call on them, they both assured me that they should be happy in your personal acquaintance, and I can promise you no small mental treat in theirs — The 2d. Vol. of *Lyrical Ballads* containing some most exquisite pieces of poetry, admirably descriptive of natural feeling, is finish'd & perhaps while I am writing this, may be publish'd. Coleridge is engaged in a poetical Romance called *Christabel*,¹ of very high merit.²

Certainly Stoddart had passed some time with the two poets and must have obtained a notion of their poetical productions during the long talks in the autumn of 1800. Dorothy's *Journal* tells us nothing of the topics of conversation but something of the nature of these can be conjectured from an examination of the literary activities of Stoddart, Wordsworth and Coleridge in the few months that follow. Stoddart was with the two poets just after Wordsworth and Coleridge had decided to take 'Christabel' out of the new *Lyrical Ballads*, and while Wordsworth was struggling to write another poem to replace it. When Stoddart reached London he told John Wordsworth about that poem, but clearly his account of it prepared John for something different from the poem he finally read, and he wrote to William:

I was at first reading disappointed with Michael at the second reading I was not a little pleased — but latterly I have been excessively delighted with it. When I first read it I thought the circumstances too minute & the language too low for a blank verse poems [word erased] from what Stoddart had told me I thought it would have been a poem in rhyme but I now think it most inter[e]sting & particularly to those who are acquainted & have liv'd in Cumb[erlan]d . . . I think Stoddart is a very poor judge of Poetry . . .³

¹ Stoddart later recited the unpublished 'Christabel' to Scott, and thus gave him the notion of writing a long ballad poem [*The Lay of the Last Minstrel*]. 'Dr Stoddart had a very wicked memory,' said Wordsworth (see Samuel Rogers, *Table Talk*, ed. Dyce, 1887, p. 209); 'It shows how cautious Poets ought to be in lending their manuscripts . . .' wrote Dorothy Wordsworth on 27 October 1805.

² From MS. in the National Library of Scotland.

³ From the manuscript. C. H. Ketcham, in his edition of the *Letters of John Wordsworth*, Ithaca, New York, 1969, dates this letter '30 January', but the post-mark seems to be that of 29 January. The letter was written over several days.

The poem Wordsworth was working on throughout October which Dorothy calls 'the sheepfold' was not, then, 'Michael' as we know it, but an abortive fore-runner of that poem. Editors have, understandably, not discerned this behind Dorothy's cryptic entries. The first mention is of an actual sheepfold: 11 October, 'After Dinner we walked up Greenhead Gill in search of a sheepfold . . . The Sheepfold is falling away. It is built nearly in the form of a heart unequally divided'. Helen Darbishire (1958) annotates this, 'The beginning of the composition of *Michael*', but, all we can be sure of is that the Wordsworths went to look at the sheepfold which, from the Fenwick note, we know Wordsworth had in mind when he wrote 'Michael'. Dorothy thereafter refers frequently to 'the sheepfold':

- 15 October, Wm. again composed at the sheepfold after dinner.
- 18 October, William worked all the morning at the Sheepfold, but in vain. . . . We did not walk all day.
- 20 October, William worked in the morning at the sheepfold.
- 21 October, Wm. had been unsuccessful in the morning at the sheepfold.
- 22 October, Wm. composed without much success at the Sheepfold. Coleridge came in to dinner. He had done nothing. We were very merry . . . In the evening Stoddart came in when we were at tea . . . Wm. read after supper, *Ruth*, etc.; Coleridge *Christabel*.

'The sheepfold' here is clearly a poem. Several of these attempts to write were unsuccessful, and Dorothy records more periods of composition, generally unsatisfactory, on 23, 24, 25, 27, 29 October; then on 30 October Stoddart arrived and nothing was written. He left on 4 November, but Wordsworth became immediately ill and seems to have taken to his bed until 8 November; there is no mention of composition. On 9 November William is pronounced better and Dorothy adds a sentence that has become an enigma, 'W. [burnt ?] the sheepfold'. This is how de Selincourt read it. Helen Darbishire hazarded no guess and simply left a question mark, clearly feeling it nonsense to think that Wordsworth had burnt 'Michael'. Once, however, we know that 'the sheepfold' was that poem in rhyme which Stoddart had described to John Wordsworth, 'burnt', which is what the word does seem to be, becomes thoroughly acceptable. But, perplexingly,

two days later Dorothy writes, 'Walked to Rydale before dinner for letters. William had been working at the sheepfold. They were salving sheep'. Without doubt we must resist the interpretation that Wordsworth had been washing sheep; the solution probably is that a fragment that survives in Verse MS 18 (Dove Cottage Papers) is either Wordsworth's final effort to rescue the poem he had burnt, or a beginning of 'Michael', incorporating elements from the earlier poem, and still entitled 'The Sheepfold'. Here is a readable version of that fragment; the many variants and deletions will be printed later in a Clarendon Press edition of Wordsworth's verse manuscripts.

Perhaps the old man is a provident elf
 So fond of bestowing advice on himself
 And of puzzling what may befall
 So intent on making his bread without leaven
 And of giving to earth the perfection of heaven
 That he thinks and does nothing at all

Two shepherds we have the two wits of the dale
 Renown'd for song satire epistle & tale
 Rhymes pleasant to sing or to say
 To this sheepfold they went & a doggerel strain
 They carved on a stone in the wall to explain
 The cause of old Michael's delay

But all their suggestion & larks to repeat
 And all that sly malice so bitter & sweet
 My pen it would sadly distress;
 When I say that our maidens are larks in their glee
 And fair as the moon hanging over the sea
 The drift of those rhymes you will guess

That pastoral ballad is sung far & near
 So thoughtless a falsehood it grieves me to hear
 And therefore I now will relate
 What old Michael once told me while on a loose stone
 One sweet summers morning depressed & alone
 By the side of his sheepfold he sate

[a space, followed by difficult readings which
 include these lines]:

Then think of this sheepfold my Son let it be
 Thy anchor and watch tower a bond between thee
 And all that is good in thy heart

The insistent rhythm here recalls such poems as 'The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale', even 'The Convict'; the stanzaic form is one

which, as in many other poems, Wordsworth invented; but, despite the professionalism, the stanza has an awkward potential for sounding facile and trite. Yet the fragment does contain some elements that are carried over to 'Michael': an old man and his son; an unfinished sheepfold, the symbol of their broken bond; the old man 'depressed and alone' in the sheepfold. The narrative structure emphatically is not carried over. In the fragment the poet appears to be telling the story in order to correct village gossips, particularly those 'two wits of the dale' who, in a false and irreverent 'pastoral ballad' assign a romantic cause for Michael's despondency. At this point the old shepherd's own words would take over, whereas in 'Michael' the poet at the sheepfold is the narrator throughout and the pathetic figure at the fold comes memorably at the end of the poem, and not, as in the fragment, at the beginning. In 'Michael' the introduction is immediately intense and ambitious in scope; the poet explains that the narrative is one that he heard when a boy, and one that first 'led me on to feel / For passions that were not my own'; its private and quiet tone, describing a place and revealing its secret, is close to the 'Poems on the Naming of Places' (Wordsworth was involved with these about this time: two were sent to the printer in October and three more in December). Yet those pleasant poems are, by comparison, records and diary notes, while 'Michael' has a higher aim and is even defiantly for fit audience, 'for the sake / Of youthful Poets, who among these hills / Will be my second self when I am gone'. Thus, while in a poem like 'It was an April morning' the poet hopes that the shepherds who notice him will, in their casual talk, memorialize his presence and his devotion to Emma after both are in the grave, in 'Michael' there is the more audacious notion of a time-defying poet who will be born again and again among the hills to feel and renew the power of Michael's tale.

Stoddart's visit and the illness that followed it gave Wordsworth a break, and at the end he was not committed to the rhymed poem, 'The Sheepfold'. The *Journal* is short on comments on Wordsworth's writing in November and early December; then, on 9 December Dorothy noted, 'Wm. finished his poem today'. Since the account of the early life of Michael and Luke, the first half of their story, is drafted on some interleaved pages

of Coleridge's *Poems* (1796), broken up for scrap paper, it seems possible to hazard the view that Wordsworth began drafting in that book after he went, without Dorothy, to stay with Coleridge on 15 November. Dorothy, when she joined him, was caught up in the more social activities of Keswick, and then, back in Grasmere after 22 November, there was Sara Hutchinson to distract her from William and from making long entries in her *Journal*. She noted, 'William very well, and highly poetical' on 26 November, and 'William was not well, had laboured unsuccessfully' on 6 December, but that is all. On 10 December, the day after the poem was finished, William and Dorothy went to Keswick, stayed there until 14 December, and completed the arrangements for *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge copying out the first half of 'Michael' for the printer.

There are two interesting textual points. First, Wordsworth wrote more for 'Michael' than finally found a place there; of particular interest is the tale of the father and son searching for a lost sheep, a passage ultimately placed in the *Prelude*, 1805 (VIII, ll.222-311). This tale Wordsworth had certainly heard 'while yet a boy' ('Michael', l.26) from Ann Tyson. We do not know whether or not this episode, like the total Michael story, also stemming from Ann Tyson, came from her knowledge of the family who had once lived at Dove Cottage. Ann Tyson could have known the story of the Grasmere family at first hand since she had spent part of her younger days in service with a Mrs Knott (née le Fleming) at Rydal.¹ Dorothy characterized Ann Tyson in her *Journal* for 1 September 1803, as 'the old woman with whom William lodged ten years at Hawkshead who used to tell tales half as long as an ancient Romance'. If Wordsworth was projecting forward to future 'youthful poets' in 'Michael', he was also exploring links between his own past, with Ann and her tales at Hawkshead, and his present chosen life at Grasmere, particularly at Dove Cottage. As in the 'Poems on the Naming of Places', he is bringing this Grasmere landscape, which was new to him as a place to live, under his imaginative control.

The search for the strayed sheep, then, is excluded from 'Michael' and it is possible that the poem has lost something by

¹ See *Wordsworth's Hawkshead*, by the late T. W. Thompson, Oxford, autumn 1970.

its exclusion, since the episode establishes in a rich and dramatic way the relation between the father and son. There is a connection here with the second textual point. The Wordsworths did not receive their copies of *Lyrical Ballads* until some two months after publication and only then did they discover that 'Michael' had been misprinted; some 15 lines 'absolutely necessary to the connection of the poem', wrote Wordsworth to Thomas Poole on 9 April 1801,⁴ had been omitted. And a month before on 16 March 1801 Coleridge spoke of this omission as 'an infamous Blunder of the Printer' which made 'Michael' 'nearly unintelligible'. Lines 192-206 were missing and it is in these lines that we get a summary of how the relation between father and son strengthened Michael's love of what he possessed — the small estate, his family and their way of life:

But soon as Luke, full ten years old, could stand
 Against the mountain blasts; and to the heights,
 Not fearing toil, nor length of weary ways,
 He with his Father daily went, and they
 Were as companions, why should I relate
 That objects which the Shepherd loved before
 Were dearer now? that from the Boy there came
 Feelings and emanations — things which were
 Light to the sun and music to the wind;
 And that the old Man's heart seemed born again?

Thus in his Father's sight the Boy grew up:
 And now, when he had reached his eighteenth year,
 He was his comfort and his daily hope.

If ever the episode about the lost sheep were to be put into the poem it would surely have belonged at about the point where the lines quoted begin. Restriction on space for the final poem of the volume, a sense of throwing the poem's concern away from Michael and on to Luke, whatever the reason, the episode was excluded and the summary-passage quoted was placed in a position of importance. Wordsworth was distressed at its omission. The lines stand at a point where the poem turns into another direction, where the family have to decide whether Luke should leave home to work in the city; they stress the close bond between father and son. A man's closeness to his family and his pride in and love of his own portion of land are intimately connected,

and are the source of his dignity, and we remember Wordsworth's impressive statement in his letter of 14 January 1801 to Fox about this being the social theme he intended 'Michael' to have. It did not help in the first issue that those thirteen lines were left out. In that and other printings Wordsworth's typographical directions to the printer were not, and are not, carried out precisely; had they been, his intentions would have come through more strongly. Those lines, for example, should have stood out ostensively as the conclusion to the middle section of the poem.

In his instructions to the printer on 18 December 1800, Wordsworth states firmly that he does not want 'Michael' to be formally divided into parts (as 'Hartleap Well' had been, for example), but he does intend that there should be three perceptible sections: an introduction and then the tale proper in two parts. Large initial capital letters were to be used for the first words of sections two and three, i.e. **U**pon (l.40) and **W**hile (l.207); thus, ll.192-206 would, quite emphatically, have formed a concluding paragraph to the second section. But Sara Hutchinson who copied out the second half of 'Michael' did not use a large initial 'W' for 'while' and thus the printer left it in normal type,¹ though he did begin l.207 on a new page as Wordsworth had additionally instructed — a vain endeavour since he had omitted altogether the section's conclusion, ll.192-206. Meanwhile Coleridge, who copied the first half of the poem wrote 'Upon' (l.40) with a simply huge capital 'U',² and so the beginning of section two where the story proper begins was adequately indicated. This confusion was sorted out for the edition of 1802; there was no new page for each section, but there was an extra space and very large initial letters for the now capitalized **U**PON and **W**HILE, and, of course, the inclusion of the omitted lines. With a new printer in 1805 the intended emphasis was less stressed; capitals were used certainly, but much smaller ones, pretty well indistinguishable in size from the rest of the type. This was the practice up to 1836 after which even this diminutively capitalized **W**HILE was lost entirely. That emphatic pause that Wordsworth intended for the middle of 'Michael' is not

¹ Dorothy in writing to Poole on 9 April 1801, asked him to correct his own copy and give 'While' a 'large letter'.

² The MSS sent to the printer are now at Yale University.

noted in any modern edition, nor is it printed in any reprint of *Lyrical Ballads* — except George Sampson's in 1903.

The chaos over the first printing of 'Michael' was probably in part the result of both copyists and printers having to rush their work; as it was, *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) was not out until 23 January 1801. But the poets, as soon as they had dispatched the manuscript, turned their attention to the problem of adequate sales. 'I have already commenced negotiations for securing them a fair & honest Review,' wrote Coleridge to Longman on 15 December 1800, and in the same letter he outlined a scheme whereby copies of the new *Lyrical Ballads* should be sent to persons of eminence, accompanied by complimentary letters from Wordsworth. Coleridge's negotiations had apparently no great success, for there appeared only three reviews, and one of these seems to have been nudged into existence by Wordsworth himself.¹ Many journals, of course, probably avoided the volume under the impression that it was a tired re-print of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* (Wordsworth had wanted a fresh title, but Longman rejected this idea). The review that was touched off by Wordsworth was the work of that 'very poor judge of Poetry' (John Wordsworth), that 'most unpremeditating and successful' wielder of the pen (Dibdin), his Grasmere visitor, John Stoddart. Stoddart wrote to Coleridge on 1 January 1801:

I find here a letter from Wordsworth recommending me to enlist in the Monthly Fencibles but little know I of their soft phrase, for till now some 3 moons wasted I never dreamt of criticising & know not one of that Corps — If my literary Talents entitle me to become 'an occasional Writer in the British Critic' tis all I can hope — the Christian humility of Dr. Parr aspired no higher, & shall I who am nothing to that great man lift myself into a loftier pulpit — Yet if I can contrive to creep into the Monthly I will — but as I said before pressus nihil sum, by the favor of Dr. Shaw I may be introduced into the Anti-chamber of Poeticide in the British Critic, but who shall say unto Griffiths enroll him among the Elders of your venerable bench. Perhaps if you were to come to town & take me by the hand even

¹ W. S. Ward, 'Wordsworth, Lake Poets and Contemporary Critics', *Studies in Philology*, XLII, 87-113, lists in addition a review in the *Literary and Masonic Magazine* for September 1802, I, 462, but does not realize that this is simply a reprint of the brief note in the *Monthly Review*, so that the reference to an 'earlier notice' does not posit yet another review but is a reference to an earlier number of the *Monthly Review*. The only review that Coleridge might have 'negotiated into existence' is that in the *Monthly Mirror*, XI, June 1801, 389-92.

Phillips might suppose me in the way of being a great literary character — Still you see harping on my daughter — still come to town . . .¹

Stoddart might have preferred the *Monthly Magazine* of Richard Phillips, or the *Monthly Review* of Ralph Griffiths, but it was to the *British Critic* that he obtained admittance. The review he wrote has been frequently attributed to Francis Wrangham, and it is worth saying here that there is no evidence that Wrangham ever reviewed Wordsworth.² Stoddart at once got down to his review. Volume II only of *Lyrical Ballads*, oddly enough, is noted in Longman's account as being sent to Stoddart.³ Stoddart had probably had Volume I in advance of publication; he certainly did not rely for his review on the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, for he gives considerable attention to the Preface, which was printed for the first time in Volume I in 1800; he could have got a copy of this from Davy who was seeing the *Lyrical Ballads* through the press in Bristol, for he visited him in December. On 28 January 1801 John Wordsworth reported to William,

I have seen Stoddart's review but I thought it too flattering I mean too much of a panegyric they will see immediately that it has been written by a Friend & it is to be submitted to the perusal of the Reviewers . . .

And on 25 February John wrote to Mary Hutchinson, ' . . . he has shown it to the Reviewers & they approve of his review — but will make some small alterations'. On 2 March John sent a summary of the review to Dorothy. Wordsworth could not have read either John's summary or the review itself (which appeared in the *British Critic*, February 1801), when in a letter of February / March 1801 he sent, 'for Coleridge's entertainment', some 'harmonies of criticism' from his friends. One of these is Stoddart who, as Wordsworth quotes him, is made to play the role of a comic uncomprehending blockhead, saying, for instance, of the 'Idiot Boy', 'Thrown into a *fit* almost with disgust, cannot *possibly* read it'. Yet the review, as John Wordsworth comments, is flattering; more important, it contains some touches of real perceptiveness. Stoddart had benefited from the hours of talking

¹ From the MS. in the Langlais Collection, Pierpont Morgan Library, quoted by kind permission of the Trustees.

² Patricia Hodgart and Theodore Redpath, *Romantic Perspectives*, London, 1964, 57-63, attribute all *British Critic* reviews of Wordsworth, 1799-1821, to Wrangham.

³ See MS. in Dove Cottage Library.

he had had with Wordsworth and Coleridge in October and November. Coleridge evidently was generally pleased with it, for without indicating that he knew who the author was, he told Poole on 16 March 1801, 'The character of the Lyrical Ballads is very great & will increase daily. They have extolled them in the *British Critic*'. Then, in June, the *British Critic* summarised the favourable verdict of the review in its half-yearly account of literature, and in the same June, Wordsworth received his first notice in America with a re-printing of the review in the Philadelphia journal, *Portfolio*; again, in January 1802, the *Gazette of the United States* used it to puff Wordsworth's first American edition. Not a great review, but it was the friendliest Wordsworth received before 1815.

There is a sense in it of Stoddart's conversations with the poets. Of Wordsworth's earliest verse he commented that it had 'the fire and fancy of the true poet, though obscured by diction often and intentionally inflated'. It is helpful to have the word, 'intentionally', for, on the whole, we know all too little about Wordsworth's aims in *Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*. Then, apropos the Lucy poems, Stoddart quoted 'Strange fits of passion' and 'She dwelt amongst', and commented 'As they have a secret connection, we shall insert both'. This is as baffling as de Quincey's later dark comment that the poems might be connected with some 'tragical story' of Wordsworth's Hawkshead days. Stoddart is probably nearer the truth when he said of these two poems and 'A slumber did my spirit seal', that these are 'masterly sketches of those "strange fits of passion" which sometimes unaccountably flash across a poetical mind'. Secret connection or no, this more nearly fits Coleridge's supposition about 'A slumber did my spirit seal', that perhaps it sprang from Wordsworth's fancy that his sister might die (6 April 1799). Certainly the comments of both Stoddart and Coleridge do nothing to strengthen the notion that there was a real Lucy who could be identified.

Stoddart was not content with his partisan review; he carried on his praise of Wordsworth in his own *Remarks . . . on Scotland* (1801), perhaps somewhat over-zealously trying to be helpful in Wordsworth's cause:

Poetry is not an art, to whose highest cultivation cities are generally favourable. Society, and the faces of men supply it, indeed, with the richest materials of imagination and feeling; but solitude, silence, and self-feeding meditation, are requisite to perfect its energies. These may be found, perhaps, in cities; but they are most naturally sought 'under the shade of melancholy boughs', 'in woods where secret waters are', where the poet

— 'murmurs near the running brooks,
A music sweeter than their own.'

To say, therefore, that the highest poetical taste and genius are rare at Edinburgh, is saying nothing. They are proportionally rarer in London. (II, 208-9)

Stoddart's unacknowledged quotation from 'A Poet's Epitaph' points to the Wordsworthian origin of these notions. His commentary upon Edinburgh would do little to recommend Wordsworth to literary circles there. Then, there are direct references to Wordsworth in the *Remarks*. Talking of the effect of bells, and bringing forward examples from the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Cowper, and Hogarth, and Schiller's *Fiesco* (to whose translator he modestly makes no reference), Stoddart includes Wordsworth:

In Wordsworth's Descriptive Sketches, the 'matin-bell', on the Lago di Como, gives an interest to the landscape; and the 'dull tinkling bells of passing mules' are introduced in just harmony with the lulling sounds of evening. (I, 68)

Later, commenting on cairns on mountain tops as the work of shepherd boys, he says, 'such a practice is universal in similar situations, and has become the subject of a little poem, by my much valued friend W. Wordsworth' (I, 208). Speaking of mountain accidents, he writes of 'Mr Wordsworth, one of the few poets of modern days, who deign to consult Nature, has beautifully touched on those accidents, to which a mountainous country is peculiarly liable, in the *Brothers*, a local eclogue, of a new, and original species' (II, 30). All this — and nine or so quotations from the poems made without naming Wordsworth — was thought to be excessive by at least one reviewer of Stoddart's *Remarks*. The *Anti-Jacobin* commented in February 1803:

... our author launches out into the most indiscriminate and extravagant praise of the poets, *Burns* and *Wordsworth*, the former of whom he regards as the first of poets, and the latter as the genuine poet of

nature. His incessant allusion to them is not less offensive than his unqualified praise. He may certainly be allowed to retain his own opinion of their merits, but he should not attempt, so dogmatically, to impose it upon others.¹

Stoddart espoused Wordsworth's poetry, not only in his review and his *Remarks*, but also in an Essay on Taste, published with the *Remarks*, 'a long, long essay' as John Wordsworth called it in a letter to Mary Hutchinson of 10 January 1801. In sections of this essay, while not naming Wordsworth, Stoddart succeeds in making ideas prosaic that are poetry in, say 'Tintern Abbey'. And all the time, at least since October and November 1800, Stoddart must have been talking, talking about Wordsworth and Coleridge. As Southey wrote to John Rickman on 8 June 1803:

Coleridge thinks that the reason why those Scotchmen hate him as they evidently do, is because Stoddart once went to Edinburgh and fell in company with these men and his praise — God knows would be motive enough to make honest men *a priori* dislike the object. *Exempli gratia* if you and I had never seen or known Lamb or Coleridge and heard this unhappy Spider-brained metaphysician speak of them as the greatest men in the world and his most particular friends — should not we be apt to think that Birds of a feather flock together, and put down his friends for a couple of Jack Daws?²

This seems to have been Wordsworth's fate, too, to have been befriended by Stoddart. Beyond the celebrated attack by Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review*³ of October 1802, there was also that of the *Edinburgh Magazine*, which managed to snipe at Wordsworth and his friends during 1803 (in vols 22 and 26-7). With a little help from Stoddart a great literary controversy had begun.

¹ The review was probably by Robert Heron (1764-1807), a Scot living in London, who had known Burns, and himself written on Scotland, *A Journey through the Western Counties of Scotland* (1793).

² *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. K. Curry, New York and London, 1965, I, 316.

³ Stoddart almost certainly would have met Jeffrey at one or other of the houses of his Edinburgh acquaintance — Brougham, Moncrieff, or perhaps Sydney Smith, the founder of the *Edinburgh Review*, and editor of the first issues, in which Jeffrey's review appeared. We do know that Sidney Smith had 'supper at Stodarts', pleasantly enough, in early 1800 (see *Heber Letters*, ed. R. H. Cholmondeley, 1950).