IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE: THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY IN WORDSWORTH'S EARLY POETRY

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In an anthology entitled *British Cultural Studies*, the authors address the construction of British identities in the context of today's post-empire multiculturalism. Catherine Hall, in her contribution, discusses the significance of race in Britain and asks the provocative question: "What difference does the history of being colonizers make to the constitution of British cultural identities?" (28). This recent book explores the development of twenty-first-century notions of "Britishness" in the context of the United Kingdom's increasing racial and cultural diversity. It identifies one place on a cultural trajectory, ethnicity and Britishness today, and proves a useful marker for readers investigating culturally tendentious texts from previous historical eras. In a sense, the poetry of William Wordsworth can be seen as an earlier part of this same conversation. He wrote as the sizable, but not yet dominant, British empire burgeoned to incorporate a wide variety of religiously, ethnically, and racially diverse peoples. Readers today can fruitfully interpret a series of works from Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* and subsequent collections in the context of their imperial moment, seeing the ways that they reflect the construction of British identities and the ways that Britain's imperial culture affected the poet himself. More specifically, the poet's narratives of abandonment and expulsion reproduce the social dynamic of forming and dissolving communities. Wordsworth's families serve as archetypes of these collectives, straddling public and private spaces. Examining the poet's images of "Other" families reveals his personal and cultural anxieties about English families. Such poems show both his public concerns that the agricultural and industrial revolutions have separated people from the land and from each other, as well as his private worries about family and finances.

Wordsworth's images of child abandonment would have had broad and potent ideological resonance for readers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in part because of the social practices of the nobility and John Locke's writings about education. Eldest male children of titled families inherited a name and entailed property to pass along to posterity, a situation without parallel among the bourgeoisie. Consequently, the middle class came to see children's physicality as an inherited attribute comparable to the titles they lacked; healthy offspring could carry on the family name and consolidate whatever might constitute dynastic wealth. This led to increased interest in children's bodies and behavior, particularly as relates to issues of health and reproduction.[1] More relevant to my argument, Locke claims that children, born *tabula rasa*, develop ideas and words from experiences with material reality. Consequently, the family plays a critical role in early childhood development, with responsibility for the education that leads to economic and social advancement. By illustrating the advantages of a successful upbringing, Lockean educational theory implicitly identifies the deleterious effects of a dysfunctional family; abandonment can be traumatic.

The issue of abandonment proves a complicated one for Wordsworth. His poems regularly link separation with community, and works featuring solitaries, such as "The Old Man Travelling," "The Old Cumberland Beggar," and "The Female Vagrant," gain poignancy because these individuals once belonged to collectives from which they now find themselves excluded. Wordsworth valued community—local, cultural, national—and images of family abandonment in his poetry serve as metaphors for broader social alienation. Families abandoned by sailors and soldiers figure frequently as Wordsworthian images, evoking a sense of loss common to families whose members left to serve in the military or to pursue the empire's economic opportunities. Beyond their dramatization of social history, Wordsworth's poems about family abandonment must be understood in the context of the personal losses, by death or separation, that the poet experienced: of his parents, brother, child and lover. As a child, William felt profoundly abandoned after the deaths of his parents. These deaths produced a further sense of familial disconnection because the siblings, separated by resulting economic hardships, grew up apart. William also experienced separation when his brother John left to sail with the East India Company and ultimately died in a shipwreck. William's words upon hearing of

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[1] For two important, but different views of this subject, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage books, 1990), 121-7 and passum, and Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1979) chapters 5, 9 and passim.

John's death, "the set is now broken" (Gill 240), convey his sense of loss and demonstrate the closeness of their family bonds.

Wordsworth's poems about family abandonment share motifs with other works. These explore economic themes and reveal the poet's anxieties about the state of his finances, which remained precarious until almost mid-career. As we will see, poems about abandonment and money link rhetorically with still other poems about ethnicity and religion, whose creation ironically depended on Wordsworth's support from the slave-trading community. In much of this poetry, pathetic portraits of women and children abound. These representational commodities evoke sympathy and locate the author, persona, and reader in a sentimental economy in which feminine and feminized characters circulate. Consider two poems written in Alfoxden in 1798 that appeared in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, "The Complaint of a forsaken Indian Woman" and "The Mad Mother" (Wordsworth*, Ballads* 108-110, 83-6). Both tell stories of abandoned mothers and their children.

Based on Wordsworth's reading of Samuel Hearne's 1795 *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean 1769-1722, by order of the Hudson's Bay Company* (Wordsworth, *Ballads* 295), the "Complaint" tells the story of a sick, weakening Indian Woman left behind to die as her tribe migrates. Another woman now cares for her child, "A woman who was not thy mother." The Indian Woman, weary and cold, her fire dead, her food stolen by a wolf, sees death as imminent. "I feel my body die away, / I shall not see another day." Like the Indian Woman's "Complaint," "The Mad Mother" also tells the story of an abandoned mother and child. While her primitive community abandons the Indian Woman, the Mad Mother has been abandoned by her civilized husband.[2] Together with her husband and child, she had shared the community of family. Now, that family shattered, maternal bonds alone connect her with her infant, though this connection too seems threatened. The Mother dreams of "fiendish faces, one, two, three" pulling at her breasts, but wakes to see her son. "Oh joy for me that sight to see! / For he was here, and only he." Breast-feeding soothes her physically and psychologically; she says, "It cools my blood; it cools my brain; / ... Draw from my heart the pain away." She loves her son and urges him not to "dread the waves below, / When o'er the sea-rock's edge we go." Although she considers suicide, the poem ends with the pair searching for her husband in hopes of reconstituting their family.

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[2] I have eschewed the use of "scare quotes" throughout, but readers should recognize that my use of such words as civilized, primitive, and savage has some ironic valence.

The description of the Mad Mother links her rhetorically with the Indian Woman; in hair and skin tone, she resembles a Native American. "The sun has burnt her coal-black hair" and her "cheek" is "brown." As the Mad Mother wonders aloud about protecting her son, she offers to "build an Indian bower" in which they can sleep comfortably. Both abandoned women, concerned about their children, afford the reader opportunities for sentimental responses. Pathetic because of their maternal sorrows, they evoke empathy in the reader. Their difference, as psychologically or ethnically Other, transforms the reader's empathy into sympathy. Ultimately, however, while they differ from each other and presumably from Wordsworth's rational, white, implied male reader, they also share Native American characteristics and the less ethnically specific state of mind derived from maternal and individual loss.

Moreover, the poet views the Indian Woman through a colonial lens. The source of Wordsworth's inspiration, an exploration narrative, portrays the New World as one of savagery and wonder, a wilderness to be commodified. A note prefacing the poem explains abandonment as a phenomenon peculiar to Native American culture, as though the woman's abandonment would be incomprehensible without the disclaimer that identifies these people as, after all, savages. The distinction between savage and civilized child mistreatment collapses, however, in an era when local British officials, to keep down poor taxes, conveyed pregnant poor women across county lines so their children would be born in another jurisdiction. Remember also that bastardry increased significantly during the late eighteenth century, a statistic to which Wordsworth personally contributed. In his native Lake District, "the rate of illegitimate births was so high that...Cumberland and Westmorland earned the scandalous reputation of bastardry capital of England, with rates running 80 percent above the national norm" (Liu 255-6). Many of these fathers refused to support their offspring. Wordsworth wanted to support Caroline, the daughter he conceived in France during his affair with Annette Vallon, but the ensuing war and his limited finances left him unable to do so. For contemporary readers of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the image of maternal abandonment would have had a still darker side: the increasing reliance on infanticide as a method of population control. As Alan Liu indicates, the number of women prosecuted for infanticide in eighteenth-century Surrey equals the number of women prosecuted for all other types of homicide combined. By the nineteenth century, British infanticide had "swelled to account for one-fifth of all homicides in the population at large (almost one-half if we include children as well as infants)" (Liu 255-6).[3] Surely, this behavior proves no more primitive than that of the Native Americans.

If the "Complaint" represents uncivilized society, it also serves as a reminder of the ways in which turn-of-the-century British society violated moral strictures regarding infanticide and child abandonment. If the Mad Mother evokes a sentimental response when she contemplates suicide as her only option, she reminds readers of myriad mothers left behind by men who never returned from the military or colonial services, and whose families received little, sometimes no, government support for their sacrifices. Overall, we see the child abandoner as savage, powerless, and callous, all of which comes home for Wordsworth. He presents abandoned women and children as compassionate objects worthy of sympathy and implicitly condemns as uncivilized their abandoners, in whose company, if unwillingly, he belongs.

The *Lyrical Ballads* repeatedly distinguishes between the civilized and primitive, the reasonable and mad, the productive and indolent. Civilized people know the value of material things, as savages do not, a point made by explorers and exploiters beginning with Columbus, whose writings express his astonishment that indigenous people did not fetishize gold as Europeans did.[4] Images of difference in many of Wordsworth's poems express his anxiety about the legitimacy of poetic production as work in bourgeois society. In his 14 January 1801 letter to Charles James Fox, which accompanied a copy of the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth links selfhood and independence with property ownership. Contemporary political participation also required real property; only landowners, thought to have a permanent stake in society, earned a say in its governance.[5] This issue remains at the heart of Wordsworth's anxieties about community. How can he consider himself aesthetically and intellectually independent and part of the national collective without property? How can he write about public issues without private capital? How does the written word itself become a tangible asset inheritable as property by succeeding generations, a concern which in part accounts for Wordsworth's aggressive pursuit of copyright protection for his work.

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[3] For further discussion, see Liu's chapter 6, "The Tragedy of the Family," especially 251-275.

[4] See in particular the opening sections of Fray Bartolome de las Casas, *The "Diario" of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America 1492-1493* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1989).

[5] For an extensive discussion of the relationship between political participation and property ownership, see Part II of J.G.A. Pocock's *Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Abandonment also appears associated with Wordsworth's attitude toward money, particularly as it relates to identity, employment, and economic class. By the time Wordsworth had published the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, his male siblings had established professional identities, Richard as a lawyer and John as a sailor. William struggled to balance his identity as a writer earning a living in a print capitalist society with the tradition of the vatic poet, to balance poetry for profit with poetry as Miltonic public utterance. The prefaces that Wordsworth wrote for his works complicated matters. They present his poetry as the product of a transcendently aestheticized lifestyle which seems incongruous with the notion of writing as a business, of writing which pays bills, as it did for Walter Scott and Lord Byron. Tragically for Wordsworth, questions of financial solvency became entwined with the deaths of loved ones; hopes and worries about economic independence became associated with the passings of his father, his friend Raisley Calvert, and his sailor brother John.

When William's father John died, Sir James Lowther, for whom he worked, owed the family money, a debt which remained unsettled for many years and caused financial hardship to the children left behind. William took care of Raisley Calvert, the sickly son of a friend, who left him a legacy on his death. John, who had given William part of his patrimony to help defray the costs of Cambridge, also took money from William for investment. After several money-losing voyages, John, finally a captain, embarked on what he had hoped would be the most lucrative passage of his life, the profits from which would find their way back to William and Dorothy. Instead, he died in a shipwreck in 1805 (Gill 13-36, 68-93, 212-287). This is not to suggest the insincerity of William Wordsworth's feelings for his father, friend, or brother, just that complicating his genuine affection, he likely felt concern for money, happiness for the independence its receipt would guarantee, and guilt for that sense of happiness.

Examination of "Gypsies" (Wordsworth, *Poems* 735) and "Song for the Wandering Jew" (Wordsworth, *Ballads* 178) reveals Wordsworth's concern about providing his own livelihood, particularly in another motif, the relationship between motion and stasis, here signifying production and non-production. The first, written in 1807 (Wordsworth, *Poems* 945), tells of a group of Gypsies the poet passes as he walks along one day. As it so often does for Wordsworth, the road serves as a contact zone. The Gypsies form an "unbroken knot / Of human Beings"; they comprise a community. Indeed, those poems in which Wordsworth walks along, meets someone, and leaves to write a poem about their interaction, reproduce in microcosm the formation and dissolution of human society. The Gypsies' community appears static, however. Wordsworth walks for "Twelve hours", and when he returns, he sees the Gypsies exactly where he left them and "the whole spectacle the same!" Significantly, Wordsworth practiced a highly peripatetic composition technique; a great walker, he frequently composed while hiking.[6] Thus, walking becomes a mode of production; he moves through the world and transforms that experience into verse. The Gypsies, in contrast, remain static, and Wordsworth condemns their "torpid life" which produces nothing. Though the Gypsies differ from Wordsworth ethnically, this does not mark their most singular distinction from the poet. More importantly, static, they do not produce wealth, and therein lies the rub.

In contrast to "Gypsies," the "Song for the Wandering Jew" tells the tale of one excluded from community, whose curse prevents stasis by condemning him to wander the earth forever. Published in the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the poem contains five stanzas. The first four describe fountains, a chamois, a raven, and a seahorse, each of which move, but also have a place of rest. The final stanza describes the Wandering Jew, who, in contrast, moves but never rests. He comes "Never nearer to the goal" and always feels "the Wanderer in my soul." The title of the poem, presented in the first person, suggests a song intended for the Wandering Jew to sing. Significantly, therefore, although the static Gypsies produce nothing, the Jew wanders and like Wordsworth, produces poetry.

These poems about Gypsies and the Wandering Jew portray people who for Englishmen like Wordsworth would be ethnic and/or religious Others, but as with the poems about the Mad Mother and the Indian Women, beyond surface distinctions, they can seem uncannily familiar. Wordsworth sees the Gypsies as idle and static, though shared idleness forms the basis of their community. They differ from him in their idleness, but resemble him in their need for community. In the “Song for the Wandering Jew,” motion and production again serve as a basis for comparison. While the Gypsies remain static and unproductive, the Jew wanders and produces the song. The Wandering Jew differs from Wordsworth in his ethnicity and religion, but resembles him in his peripatetic mode of aesthetic production.

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[6] We find many examples in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals* of her brother composing while walking. Probably the most famous describes the writing of "Tintern Abbey," which the poet claims to have composed in his head during several days travel, not writing it down until completing the draft.

These images of the Gypsies and the Jew, of the Mad Mother and the Indian Woman, all serve to connect cultural anxieties about race and gender with the poet’s personal anxieties about money, family, and identity. Wordsworth’s writing required an educated bourgeois audience that valued art and independence, but which prospered in large part because of colonial and slave-supported industries. Wordsworth did not experience these contradictions in the abstract, however. His uncle and brother both worked for the East India Company, which according to John Keay, the public saw as having “in its gift a dazzling new array of appointments” by which almost anyone might “acquire such wealth as would sustain the comforts of opulence and the fruits of influence for several generations to come” (366-7). More directly, an offer Wordsworth accepted to live rent free in North Dorset at Racedown Lodge subsidized his early poetic career. The property belonged to John Pretor Pinney, “a very wealthy Bristol merchant and sugar plantation owner” (Gill 92) and participant in the slave economy with property in the West Indies. Pinney earned 35,000 pounds as a planter between 1764 and 1783 before returning to England to remain an absentee owner. Winifred Courtney describes Pinney as a “firm but humane” slave-owner. Pinney’s instructions to his manager on how to treat slaves during an 1800 visit by pro-abolition Tom Wedgwood, however, undermine this claim to humanity:

> Do not suffer a negro to be corrected in his presence, or so near for him to hear the whip...point out the comforts the negroes enjoy beyond the poor of this country...show him the property they possess in goats, hogs, and poultry, and their negro-ground. (Courtney 249-50)

Intriguingly, in an 1801 letter to Robert Southey, Coleridge suggests that together with the Wordsworths, they might all become slave-drivers on Pinney’s estate as part of the Pantisocracy scheme. Coleridge writes:

> Now mark my scheme!...Nevis is the most lovely as well as the most healthy Island in the W. Indies—Pinny’s [sic] Estate is there... & perhaps Pinny [sic] would appoint us sinecure Negro-drivers at a hundred a year each, or some other snug and reputable office...Now I & my family, & you & Edith, & Wordsworth & his Sister might all go there...Do think about this! (Courtney 249-50)

Wordsworth published the *Lyrical Ballads* in Bristol, where the profits in that center of Britain's slave trade supported a thriving mercantile community. In a very real sense, then, the slave trade tainted the money that supported Wordsworth as he wrote his early, often politically radical poetry.

In the contemporary abolition debate, the theme of family dissolution became intertwined with general issues of gender and power. Women's abolition writings came to constitute a proto-feminist discourse, according to Moira Ferguson. Women writing anti-slavery novels increasingly used sentimentalism as a rhetorical strategy and underscored slavery's destructive disregard for the nuclear family. Authors frequently present heart-wrenching scenes of families broken up by slave traders, and, in particular, images of mothers separated from their children. In these novels, female authors plead the case for feminized Africans, who lack education, as well as economic and political power, implicitly pointing out the ways in which slaves resemble white women, also denied the same agency. Abolitionist sentiments found their way into enlightened conduct books, such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Female Reader*, an anthology designed for young women, which includes several stories about the abuses of slavery (Ferguson 186-7).

The connotative connections among the rights of slaves, the rights of women, and, in a pamphlet of the same title by Thomas Spence, "The Rights of Infants," underscores the ideological power resident in images of domestic abandonment. These conflicts become evident when we examine two more poems about expulsion from community, "Poor Susan," published in the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (Wordsworth, *Ballads* 170), and "September 1, 1802," published in 1803 in the *Morning Post* under the title "The Banished Negroes" (Wordsworth, *Poems* 578, 995). "Poor Susan" tells of a desolate young woman in the city, who hears a bird singing and thinks back on an earlier, domestic idyll from which she has been excluded. Susan "loves the cottage" and left it unwillingly. The poem closes by urging her to "return—to receive thee once more / The house of thy Father will open its door." The narrator does not specify the reason for her expulsion, but the three streets mentioned, "Wood," "Lothbury," and "Cheapside", situated in the City of London's mercantile district (Wordsworth, *Poems* 942), suggest an inappropriate liaison with a merchant or apprentice. By casting her out, her father shatters the community of the family; he violates the social rules governing paternal love and forgiveness, and instead heeds the laws of bourgeois propriety that constrain female sexuality.

The traditional hierarchies that gave fathers power over daughters also placed white races in dominion over those of color. In "September 1, 1802," the poet shares a boat with a "white-robed Negro," who along with other Africans has been expelled from Napoleonic France (Wordsworth, *Poems* 578). Although racially Other, she seems familiar, looking "like a lady gay, / Yet downcast as a women fearing blame." The closing sestet indicates that the beauty of her eyes, which "retained their tropic fire", and "the lustre of her rich attire...mock[ed]" her "downcast" state of mind. That is, the exotic appeal of her sexually alluring exterior betrays, by failing to conceal from the male gaze, her troubled emotions. The poem ends with a plea to the "Heavens" to "be kind! / And feel, thou Earth, for this afflicted Race!" This plea to the "Heavens" and "Earth" calls to patriarchal Christianity, ammunition in both pro- and anti-slavery debates, and to Nature, invoking the "natural rights" discourse prominent in the abolition debate.

In these poems, we see Wordsworth's treatment of gender and racial difference, but again, as much connects these figures as separates them. The Wordsworthian narrator refers to the Negro woman as "the Outcast" and addresses the presumably white Susan as "Poor Outcast". Both women appear as objects of the poet's gaze and victims of patriarchy. The speaker, who presents Susan as infantilized, occupies the perspective of a caring parent, the good father who—unlike her own father—would forgive her unstated offense. The Negro, a victim of Napoleonic oppression, probably shares the narrator's implied anti-French sentiments. Still, the masculine, European response to the Negro's exoticism—"tropic fire", "rich attire"—eroticizes her, and the poet's benevolent condescension trivializes the agency that she exhibits in traveling alone from France to England. Furthermore, she occupies the feminized position of Africans generally, who, as represented in slave narratives, needed well-meaning whites to speak for and to validate them. Contemporary slave narratives generally contained prefaces and/or appendices written by whites testifying to the veracity of the slaves' statements, sometimes even inspecting the slaves' bodies to bear witness to scars from punishments.[7] In her reverie, Susan finds herself mocked by "the song of the bird", which reminds her of the safety of her patriarchal home, while the Negro's exterior allure mocks her inner sadness. Both women have been presented as though guilty of something. The Negro behaves as though "fearing blame," but for what? Susan too finds herself excluded from the security of her home for an unspecified offence.

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[7] See my article on "Slave Narratives" in the *Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1998).

Finally, consider the ways that all these images—of abandonment and Otherness, of gender and race, of motion and stasis—converge in "The Affliction of Margaret," composed between 1800 and 1807 (Wordsworth, *Poems* 97). Margaret's son has left home; "Seven years, alas! to have received / No tidings of an only child" have left her distressed. Margaret has not abandoned her child, but been abandoned by her child, as, in a sense, was the Indian Woman. In "The Complaint," the Indian Woman saw something "most strange" as the tribe separated her from her child. The infant moved, "As if he strove to be a man, / That he might pull the sledge for me." An instant later, however, he again seems "like a little child", unable to rescue his mother, who remains left behind to die in the wild. More generally, like all of the female characters discussed here, Margaret lacks any family to aid her.

Although "Margaret" specifies neither the son's occupation nor destination, his mother's concerns prove telling:

> Perhaps some dungeon hears thee groan,
> Maimed, mangled by inhuman men;
> Or thou upon a desert thrown
> Inheritest the lion's den;
> Or has been summoned to the deep,
> Though, thou and all thy mates, to keep
> An incommunicable sleep.

The stanza's triplet suggests that her son works as a sailor, for she fears that he and his mates may have drowned at sea. He has gone to sea to help support his family, just as Wordsworth's brother John did, and in both cases, met with tragedy. To where might Margaret's son have been traveling? Her fear that he may be lost in a desert and eaten by lions places her son in Africa. While her son's possible captivity in a dungeon suggests to the modern reader that he may have been imprisoned for a crime, under contemporary criminal and civil codes, authorities generally did not imprison offenders except for debt. Besides, she fears he may be imprisoned by "inhuman men," presumably not British but savage. Perhaps Margaret worries that pirates kidnapped her son and held him for ransom on Africa's Barbary Coast, a fate not uncommon for European sailors who violated the principalities' territorial sovereignty. For example, in "1720 George I ordered an ambassador to negotiate a peace treaty with the Sultan of Algiers that resulted in the release of 296 British captives, of whom about one-twelfth were ships' masters" (Ferguson 15). What would he have been doing in Africa in the first place? Most likely, her son worked in some aspect of the slave trade, as there existed little trade with Africa except in slaves or slavery-related commodities. In that case, her fears seem justified. Sailors viewed Africa as the most dangerous—and hence least popular—destination, because of the risks of dying from sickness or other causes. In fact, Marcus Rediker believes that a higher percentage of sailors than of slaves died in passage from Africa to Europe. Investors paid slave traders a royalty for each slave they shipped alive, but paid no such royalty for live sailors. Hence, owners over-manned slave ships to compensate for sailors' high mortality rate and to retain a crew large enough to put down not uncommon slave rebellions (Rediker 45-50).

Margaret, abandoned by her son, remains separated from the community of family. Like the Wandering Jew and others, Margaret produces a narrative as she tells her story. She remains static, but her concern for her son's fate, even if she fears learning of his death, "That I may rest", suggests emotional turbulence which constitutes psychological motion. Her son, on the other hand, as a sailor and slave trader, both moves and generates wealth. The narrative leads the reader to feel that Margaret, like Susan and the Negro, has committed some offense, in her case over-valuing material success. Margaret urges her son to return, whether "prosperous or undone," for now she has learned to "see with better eyes; / And worldly grandeur I despise." Their separation pains her, but she feels partially responsible for that separation because of the emphasis she placed on seeking wealth. As an abandoned mother, Margaret's sorrow over separation from her child echoes the sentimental tropes of abolition poetry which lament the pain of slavery-imposed family separation, as seen in Hannah More's "Slavery," for example. Her son, perhaps a slave trader, separates others from their family members, so his relation with his mother reproduces slavery's dynamic of family disruption.

"The Affliction of Margaret" evidences what should by now seem familiar Wordsworthian elements for representations of difference: community and abandonment, movement and stasis, gender and race. The characters these poems present tend to be feminized, without social or economic capital and with little agency: Jews, Gypsies, and slaves, abandoned mothers and children. In the "Indian Woman," primitive society abandons the woman, but as we have seen in "The Mad Mother" and "Poor Susan," members of civilized society also abandon and expel. While the Gypsies differ ethnically from the implied Wordsworthian narrator, they share his need for community. The Wandering Jew presumably differs religiously, but shares a peripatetic composition style. The Negro, though presented as primitive and eroticized, demonstrates agency in the face of Napoleonic power. Margaret, blameless but indirectly supported by the imperial economy, perhaps mostly closely resembles the poet himself. In delineating these characters, Wordsworth relies on received notions of civilized and primitive behaviors, but his representational strategies for constructing difference fail to reify that difference, because of uncanny similarities between these scenes and the practices of nineteenth-century British society. Closer examination shows that, as Montaigne had observed two centuries earlier in "Of Cannibals," little differentiates the civilized from the savage.

On a more personal level, these poetic images of abandonment and expulsion evoke central issues for the poet, connected with the importance of community in his life and writing. The adult William carried with him the emotional scars caused by the childhood deaths of his parents and the separation from his siblings. He experienced that pain anew with the death at sea of his brother John. Moreover, the imperial war separated William from his lover and daughter. In that sense, the figures in the poems discussed resemble palimpsests, which, when examined carefully, reveal personal pain beneath anxieties about identity.

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