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"Changes in Our Physical Nature":

Medical Wonders and Two Lyrical Ballads

Affixed to the historic first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) is a defensively worded Advertisement by Wordsworth, as if he sensed that his attempt to reform taste and return poetry to its rightful principles might offend the reader. Among the handful of poems mentioned by name in this notice is "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," said to rest on "a well-authenticated fact which happened in Warwickshire"—the only poem so documented.[1] The implication seems to be that we dare not dismiss as unbelievable a record of events known to have happened.

Endowed with the simplicity of a morality play, "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" draws on the physician Erasmus Darwin's account of a case in which an impoverished old woman, caught stealing firewood from a farmer's hedge one winter night, called down a curse of cold on her apprehender—in Wordsworth's rendition, "God! who art never out of hearing, / O may he never more be warm!" So deep an impression did this solemn entreaty make on the farmer, mind and body, that an incurable chill took hold of him from that moment. (In Darwin's version the farmer takes to his bed and huddles there for upwards of twenty years.) A hostile commentator or community might well judge the old woman a

witch, but Wordsworth, like Darwin, will have none of that. In the poem before us the malice is Harry Gill's, and the text gives no hint that sorcery or any other force outside nature is at work.

Seized by Harry Gill, who had been lying in wait for her despite the season, Goody Blake goes down on her knees in prayer, and in a turning of the tables[2] her heartfelt words seize *him*: "Young Harry heard what she had said: / And icy cold he turned away." Like the ancient mariner, then, Goody Blake proves to have "strange power of speech." Also like the mariner, Harry himself descends into a condition of living death as a result of his transgression against charity. It seems the only power necessary to bring about his imprisonment in cold is his own imagination, but whereas Darwin's farmer succumbs to the insanity that mistakes imagination for reality,[3] Wordsworth's emphasis seems to fall on the poetic justice of the sentence passed by Harry's mind on his body.[4] After all, the ambush he laid for Goody Blake was cold-blooded to begin with.

Though uttered on the spur of the moment when she is quite literally taken by surprise, Goody Blake's prayer is no improvisation but, quite to the contrary, a ritualized performance with centuries of tradition behind it. It belongs to the genre of the "beggar's curse": a plea for divine retribution uttered by the wronged poor (often on their knees, like Goody Blake), in accordance with deeply held communal norms. "It was above all the poor and the injured whose curses were believed likely to take effect. The legend of the Beggar's curse—the fateful malediction upon those who refused alms—enjoyed a continuous currency from the Dark Ages to the nineteenth century."[5] Though Darwin writes as a modern in casting the story of the cursed farmer as a parable of insanity,[6]

traditions as rooted and resonant as that of the beggar's curse were not to be scoffed out of existence. Well might a prayer as powerful as Goody Blake's—a curse with the blessing of history—have captured the imagination, and thence the body, of Harry Gill.

In later editions of the *Lyrical Ballads* the original Advertisement grows into a full-fledged philosophical manifesto that at one point holds up the ballad of Goody Blake and Harry Gill—"one of the rudest of this collection"—as an illustration of the principle that "the power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous." Wordsworth could have cited a second, if less dramatic, instance of the same phenomenon in the *Lyrical Ballads*: the story of Susan Gale and her stunning recovery from a debilitating illness in "The Idiot Boy."[7] That turn of events is overshadowed by the narrative of a poem "tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings" (as Wordsworth puts it in the Preface), which helps explain why it has received little critical attention despite bearing out the remarkable influence of mind over body cited by Wordsworth himself. If reading "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" as a tale of "the power of the human imagination" saves us from misreading it as a validation of witchcraft or an incendiary assault on private property, reading "The Idiot Boy" with attention to Susan Gale gives a good vantage on a poem that is difficult to place tonally and is too readily taken as either a pleasing or displeasing exercise in pathos.[8]

Where "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" is constructed back to front (with the farmer already wracked with cold as the poem begins), Wordsworth began "The Idiot Boy" with its last lines, then constructed the back-story leading up to them. The act that sets the tale in

motion is Betty Foy's dispatch of her simple son Johnny—at night—to get the doctor for her neighbor Susan Gale, who lies grievously ill, it seems, with an unknown ailment. It is a gauge of Betty's concern for her friend that she would thus risk her child, who understands the directions to the doctor's house no more than the pony does, and whom she sends off with a double plea to "Come home again," as if only too aware that he might not. As the hours pass and he fails to appear, Betty finally tears herself from Susan even though she is "growing worse and worse," and searches desperately for Johnny, at last finding him. Meanwhile, however, Susan, also in a state of desperation, pulls herself out of bed and goes in search of the other two. In effect, the vividness of her fears for both Betty and the idiot boy, "her messenger," vivifies Susan herself, enabling her to shake off an illness only recently so disabling that Johnny had to be sent on his moonlight ride in the first place. In keeping with the poem's motif of lost and found and its unusual mood of arch levity, Susan finds relief of her ills when she ceases to look for it. Could the doctor's presence at her bedside possibly have benefited her as much as his absence did?

Though the poem refers serio-comically to saints and goblins at various points, and though we're told that Susan rose from her bed "As if by magic cured," it's clear that her recovery comes about in the course of nature and not by magic or miracle. (To say that the power of imagination over the body "might almost appear miraculous" is not to say it *is* miraculous.) The chill that claims Harry Gill is surely be understood in the same way, as a fact of nature, not divine intervention or black magic. Both poems recount "changes in our physical nature" engendered somehow by the psyche, but the transformations run in opposite directions, with Harry Gill descending (as noted) into a death-like state and Susan

Gale returning to life.[9] Fittingly, it appears the term "psychosomatic" was coined by Wordsworth's co-author.[10]

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For many, the electricity drawn from the heavens by Benjamin Franklin opened the prospect of healing without recourse to age-old medical practices. Franklin himself experimented with electrical treatments of paralysis and other ills.[11] John Wesley, founder of Methodism, spread the good news of an electrical apparatus that could heal the halt and the blind, as if traditional miracles had adapted themselves to modern methods. "If Franklin could visibly conduct lightning from sky to earth then Wesley could bring the same heavenly power to bear on the body."[12] While radicals in the 1790's looked to the overthrow of the established order to produce a correspondingly salutary effect in the body politic, some enthusiasm for electrical medicine as such persisted.

Almost simultaneously with the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, a pamphlet composed not far from Alfoxden reported an experiment inspired by one such treatment. In the midst of a rage for a rod-like contrivance of brass known as a "tractor" for its purported ability to pull pains from the body as it was drawn over the skin, John Haygarth in Bath and his associates (some in Bristol) treated a number of patients with a wooden replica on the theory that article's reputation as a conductor of animal electricity, not its composition, was responsible for its marvels. They were right. It turned out that patients reacted to sham tractors as to real ones—reporting in most cases relief of pain—which

meant, of course, that the authentic Perkins tractor was a sham itself. Being worthless did not preclude its exerting an effect on the body, provided that it had a cult following and was used in a ritual manner, and that for both of these reasons it stirred the imagination of those treated with it. In one instance an experimenter struggled to keep a straight face as he presented the tractor as a lineal descendant of Franklin's lightning rod. Clearly, the Haygarth team used every form of suggestion at its disposal to recommend the instrument to the patients' imagination, understood by them as a faculty of delusion. "If any person would repeat these experiments," states Haygarth, "it should be done with due solemnity. . . . The whole effect undoubtedly depends upon the impression which can be made upon the patient's Imagination."[13]

As a test of a purported conductor of animal electricity, the Haygarth experiment followed in the footsteps of the historic inquest into Mesmerism by Franklin, Lavoisier and colleagues at the behest of the King of France in 1784. What was true of the Perkins tractor was all the more true of the healing mania that swept France in the latter years of the pre-revolutionary era. At the center of the cult was no homely object of brass but the charismatic figure of Mesmer himself, foreign, exotically costumed, and professedly in touch with a healing power of cosmic origin, known as animal magnetism. Whereas Haygarth et al. exposed the Perkins tractor as a sham by demonstrating that the same effects could be induced by a look-alike that could not possibly conduct electricity of any kind, the Franklin commission found that blinded subjects reacted to an ordinary tree as if it had been magnetized, provided only that it was represented to them as magnetized; and conversely, could not recognize a tree that had been magnetized if they were not told. The

commissioners concluded that animal magnetism does not exist and that the frenzied behavior and miracles of healing associated with it were artifacts of suggestion—or, as they put it, imagination.

As in the Haygarth experiment for which they furnished the precedent, the power of imagination was at issue for the Franklin commissioners. Their report to the king constitutes a virtual treatise on the subject. Having undertaken to determine "up to what point the imagination can influence feelings," they found, in fact, that it was difficult to set any limit on it; the imagination alone, for example, "can produce various sensations & make one feel pain, heat, even a substantial amount of heat in all parts of the body." When a young man "fell into a crisis under a non-magnetized tree" in one of their trials, they concluded that this was "an effect . . . which can have no cause other than the imagination." But that is not to say such events are innocuous.

> It is a well-known adage that in medicine faith saves; this faith is the product of the imagination. . . . But when the imagination produces convulsions, it acts through violent means; these means are almost always destructive. . . . At the group treatment of magnetism, crises repeat themselves every day, they are long, violent; the situation of these crises being harmful, making a habit of them can only be disastrous.[14]

Where Wordsworth shows the imagination working to salutary effect in the case of Susan Gale but quite otherwise in that of Harry Gill, the commissioners see in imagination a fickle

power more likely to harm than help. Haygarth, for his part, judges the imagination both "a Cause and . . . a Cure of Disorders of the Body,"[15] like a mercenary who will fight for either party, and records in detail the case of a patient whose pains grew worse when he was treated with a wooden tractor.

In contrast to the curse underwritten by centuries of tradition that captures the mind and body of Harry Gill, it seems both Mesmerism and, in its own way, the Perkins tractor inflamed audiences with the special intensity of a fever or a fashion that burns itself out. Of the two phenomena, Mesmerism was the weightier, and yet its run in France lasted but a few years, the maestro himself fled Paris shortly after the Franklin report and eventually sank into ignominious obscurity, and the ethereal harmonies, Dionysian passions and sexually charged healing rituals over which he once presided died out. Yet Haygarth's pamphlet alludes to animal magnetism, much as if memory of the craze had not been extinguished even by the French Revolution, while Coleridge, writing in 1795, took exception not to animal magnetism per se but the induction of mass hypnosis for political ends; hence his charge that "WILLIAM PITT, the great political Animal Magnetist, . . . has most foully worked on the diseased fancy of Englishmen; and by idle shew, and alarming bustle, and many a mysterious trick has thrown the nation into a feverish slumber, and is now bringing it to a crisis which may convulse mortally!"[16] In two of the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth depicts the operation of the imagination on the body without the impressive machinery—the "idle shew"—of medicine itself.

While the investigators of animal magnetism and animal electricity were convinced that the secret of these healing forces lay their appeal to the imagination, they were not

interested—as Wordsworth was—in purifying the imagination itself and restoring it to something like its native dignity. For Wordsworth "the power of the human imagination . . . to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous" is not a comment on human gullibility but a matter of legitimate wonder. While Wordsworth does not concern himself with medical fashions in the *Lyrical Ballads* (indeed his use of the ballad form suggests a deliberate detachment from anything as ephemeral as a fashion), his portrayal of the nature and workings of the imagination, both in the Preface and in the poems themselves, attests a belief that the imagination can be quite other than the instrument of delusion known to the Franklin commissioners and John Haygarth. Consider the case of Susan Gale.

As we meet her, Susan Gale lies "sick, and makes a piteous moan, / As if her very life would fail." After dispatching her son to get the doctor, Betty Foy nurses her "as if in Susan's fate / Her life and soul were buried," just as Susan in turn enters fully into Betty's voiced or unvoiced fears as the clock tolls the hours and still the boy does not return from his errand on her behalf. Sympathy seems to run between the women like a current, and being thus connected they imply more than they say. Imagining that Johnny has drowned or become hopelessly lost, Susan guardedly confesses her fears to his mother, sensing what these words will do to *her* imagination. At that point Betty Foy simply must go in search of her son.

But if Susan knows that speaking her fears aloud will set Betty's imagination on fire,[17] the fears themselves are valid. That Johnny has wandered away, that he has drowned (like Lucy Gray or the ass's master in "Peter Bell")—these are perfectly real

possibilities under the circumstances, as her own imagination has grasped. While such apprehensions of danger may have been suggested or heightened by guilt she feels as the one responsible for Johnny's misadventure, there is nothing far-fetched about them. They are as well-founded as her sense that she had better be careful in confiding her fears to the boy's mother. (In point of fact, when found Johnny is near a waterfall that "thunders down with headlong force.") It is Betty Foy whose mind floods helplessly with gothic fantasies—among them, that Johnny's pony has carried him into "the goblins' hall," or that he is somehow courting his own death amid the ghosts of an unspecified castle. The extremity of these visions measures her love of her son. With the same hallucinatory power at work, Betty when searching for the boy seems to see him everywhere: in bushes, in trees, in towers. Susan's fears for the missing boy have nothing of the fantastic about them.

Similarly, when both Johnny and Betty Foy fail to reappear by the approach of dawn and Susan suffers "many dreadful fears" on their behalf (Johnny having been absent since the previous evening and his mother since the middle of the night), her apprehensions are entirely sound. Under the circumstances someone who did *not* dread that Johnny or Betty or both had come to grief would be morally wanting. And it is the power of imagination that gives her such a lively feeling for the fortunes of these others. As if to establish that Susan Gale's imagination is an honorable faculty, the poem shows us that her mental torment has everything to do with her sudden recovery from a prostrating illness: "And as her mind grew worse and worse, / Her body it grew better." Like someone passing through a crisis, then, Susan Gale improves by deteriorating; but there is no resemblance between the famous convulsive crises of Mesmerism and the solitary drama she undergoes as the

power of her imagination infuses itself into her body. Betty Foy and her son are so painfully present to the mind of this bedridden woman that she can finally bear no more and "posts"—that is, hurries—"up hill and down," searching for them. What ailed her? We can't say, but just as a power that "might almost appear miraculous" is not absolutely miraculous, so Susan's recovery—her return to life—is within the order of nature, like some but not all of the dangers envisioned as menacing the idiot boy on his journey.

Accomplished in accordance with Wordsworth's understanding of the power of the unaided imagination to act on the body, Susan Gale's recovery stands in sharp contrast to the pomp and circumstance of Mesmerism. In a healing session à la Mesmer,

> Thirty or more persons could be magnetized simultaneously [in a special tub or *baquet*]. . . . Mesmer, wearing a coat of lilac silk and carrying a long iron wand, walked up and down the crowd, touching the diseased parts of the patients' bodies. . . . Every now and then he would place himself *en rapport* with a subject seated opposite him, foot against foot, knee against knee. . . . Those who fell into convulsions were carried to a special, padded room.[18]

In "The Idiot Boy" the bond between Susan Gale and Betty Foy produces a magnetic effect of its own, as if imagination had been freed of its association with stagecraft, costume, props, factitious crises, catchy theories, and—not least—the influence of mutual suggestion.[19] Just before she finds her son, Betty Foy "hardly can sustain her fears"; around the same time, but in a different place, Susan Gale exclaims, "These fears can

never be endured." The two women are in rapport, so much so that when Betty at one point inwardly blames Susan for the loss of her son, it is hard to believe that Susan herself does not feel the very same thing.

Just as "The Idiot Boy" admits no magnetism other than that of love and friendship, so the concept of delusion—central to the concept of imagination held by both the Franklin commission and the Haygarth group—applies to Susan Gale's cure not al all. It's not as if she quaffed some local remedy in the absence of the doctor and then found herself suddenly improving. In no way does she attempt to cure herself. Possibly without even realizing that she is recovering, she simply regains her strength in the process of agonizing over the whereabouts of two missing others.

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Whereas Susan Gale rises from sickbed as a result of the inspirational effect of sympathy with others,[20] Harry Gill sinks into a permanent winter as a result of his want of sympathy. If Susan Gale's imagination does not tyrannize her with senseless fantasies but fastens upon credible dangers and acts with moral intelligence, what of the imagination of Harry Gill?

Recall that after he arrests the impoverished Goody Blake one winter night in the act of stealing sticks from his hedge, she calls down a devout curse which is immediately realized: "God! who art never out of hearing, / O may he never more be warm!" Not only is this plea or prayer supported by a long tradition, it constitutes a living instance of the

“plainer and more emphatic language” characteristic of rural life, according to Wordsworth’s Preface. We may call the curse mesmeric if we like, but such language seems worlds away from a special term like “Mesmerism,” coined as if the phenomenon were so singular that only the name of its inventor could capture it. How different is the naming of Hart-Leap Well for the leap of a hart.[21]

Just as the power of imagination over the body in “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” and “The Idiot Boy” is to be distinguished from the power of imagination in a cult like Mesmerism, so the moral drama of the poems comments on the cult’s theatricality. Kneeling and raising her arm in supplication, Goody Blake makes her plea to God with a simplicity antithetical to the flamboyance of Mesmer’s rituals, with their stage props, musical accompaniment and histrionic displays. Mesmer wore silk robes; Goody Blake is “thinly clad.” Haygarth advises anyone interested in replicating his experiment to conduct the sham therapy “with due solemnity”;[22] Goody Blake entreats God with true solemnity.

A proof of the non-existence of animal magnetism is that persons who were not told that an object had been magnetized failed to react to it as if it had been. The tale of “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” suggests that it is precisely because Harry witnesses Goody’s prayer that an icy chill comes over him as soon as it is uttered, the implication being that he would not have suffered his fate if he had not known that he had been cursed. “Young Harry heard what she had said: / And icy cold he turned away.” Yet the fact that his imagination realizes Goody Blake’s prayer does not mean it or he has been duped as the reaction to a reportedly magnetized tree shows susceptibility to the mummery of animal magnetism. Her prayer is not mummery. As noted, her words take possession of Harry Gill not because

of wizardry but because they manifest the uncorrupted sentiments of rustic life as asserted in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*; that is, they ring with the simplicity of truth. According to Wordsworth, rustic life provides the setting for most of the *Ballads* because there "the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are under less restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language." What could be more expressive, simple, forcible than the prayer "O may he never more be warm!"?[23] No wonder it lays hold of Harry Gill's imagination. After all, the prayer was inspired by his own cruelty, an "essential passion" that ran so deep in this case that he not only lay in wait for Goody Blake but actually rejoiced to find her stealing his kindling, as he could now take "vengeance." Obsessed beyond all reason with the old woman, he kept her under observation, biding his time, enduring "frost and snow" (!), poised to spring the trap. In all likelihood the odd sticks Goody Blake collected for firewood were nothing to him until they were somehow magnified by his brain. Maybe he was maddened by an attack on the boundary-line of his property, his hedge. (For what it's worth, in the pastoral opening lines of "Tintern Abbey," small plots are separated from one another not by hedges as such but by "little lines / Of sportive wood run wild.")

The sincerity of Goody Blake's prayer makes for a comment on medical stagecraft. Though he well knew a doctor's attestation of a therapy like the Perkins tractor could give it a semblance of power, John Haygarth did not care to license this sort of imposture, and at the end of his pamphlet he makes it clear that the doctor engaged in the right and proper practice of medicine really does believe in his treatments; when he recommends them to the patient, he speaks with a conviction that cannot be feigned and is all the more effective

for that reason. "The language of self-conviction is undoubtedly the most persuasive. One must speak what he feels 'si curat cor spectantis tetigisse' [if he wants to touch the spectator's heart]. He should not express confidence to a patient which he does not possess, but he should express it with pathetick energy."[24] Goody Blake does not need to be reminded to speak with conviction and express herself with pathetic energy. She does it untaught, which is why her words not only affect the spectator but persuade his very body.

Both "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" and "The Idiot Boy" recount medical wonders brought about not by a cosmic force or any other remarkable agency but simply by the workings of our moral nature—in particular, such "essential passions" as sympathy, guilt and terror. In place of showmanship and miracle-mongering they offer homeliness of diction and incident. In "The Idiot Boy" the action is so homely that events of the exciting kind are deliberately excluded, or so Wordsworth implies by reporting that the Muses refused his request to tell Johnny's "strange adventures." Though comical banter with the Muses rubs some readers the wrong way, Wordsworth appears to be making a number of points: that we should not necessarily assume that anything particularly notable befell Johnny, that if something out of the ordinary did happen to him he wouldn't be able to tell of it and Wordsworth is not about to tell it over his head, that a poet shouldn't pander to a lust for incident, and that the most important events may be those where nothing much seems to be happening. "True life," writes Gary Saul Morson, "takes place when we are doing nothing especially dramatic."[25]

In and of itself, the disappearance of at first one, then two persons as a direct or indirect result of her own illness means that from Susan Gale's perspective only too much

is happening as the hours pass and nothing takes place to confirm or refute her tormenting "doubts" and "fears." In his fascinating *Dissertation on the Influence of the Passions upon Disorders of the Body* (1788), William Falconer—the dedicatee of Haygarth's pamphlet on the power of imagination—observes that an access of fear has been known to act as a powerful stimulant, restoring speech to the dumb and "strength to the paralytic patient."[26] In the singular case of Susan Gale, fear for others, not herself, has this rousing effect. Susan recovers and returns to the world not as a result of some sudden shock that makes her fear for her life, but as a result of lying immobilized for hours in a state of unrelieved terror over what may have befallen two missing persons, both of whom have ventured themselves for her sake. When she finally goes in search of them and "spies her Friends," the plural ought to lay to rest the notion that only a mother can possibly feel a bond with the idiot boy, divorced as he is from humanity.

Susan Gale, then, undergoes a transformation—shedding an illness that had her bedbound—while doing nothing but struggling with her own thoughts. Contrast this complete absence of visible drama with the spectacle of a healing session conducted by an exotic maestro who sends a thrilling energy coursing through people packed body to body in a magnetic tub. And the rigorous exclusion of the sensational from a poem that seems tailor-made for it, a poem that could conceivably have been as fantastic in its own way as the "Ancient Mariner," accords with the principles laid out in the philosophical Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Emphasizing the importance of the topic, Wordsworth there declares that "the human mind is capable of excitement without the application of gross and violent stimulants," and goes on to deplore the "craving for extraordinary incident"

and, more specifically, the outpouring of “idle and extravagant stories in verse.” As “The Idiot Boy” denies the desire for the extraordinary by raising possibilities of kidnapping and suicide that are never realized,[27] and by according no reality to goblins and ghosts, so Susan Gale owes her recovery to nothing as extraordinary as an occult force. It is as if she were simply electrified with terror, the energy of which passed to her body, recharging it. From this point of view, animal magnetism and animal electricity (the currencies of Mesmerism and Perkins-ism respectively) resemble nothing so much as stimulants contrived to meet consumer cravings. The same passage in the Preface censures the urban demand for “the rapid communication of intelligence”; and it was the buzz surrounding both healing movements that gave them such magnetism as they actually possessed—social magnetism, that is.[28]

Perhaps we can distinguish the faculty of imagination as depicted in “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” and “The Idiot Boy” not only from the instrument of deception known to the Franklin commission and the Haygarth group but from the debased imaginings of the villagers in “The Thorn,” who seem convinced that Martha Ray, the mourner by the thorn, murdered her infant but quit their search for its bones when the mound that marks its grave begins “to stir.” In this instance imagination acts collectively, with one party’s lurid fantasies setting off another (that Martha Ray hanged the child, that she drowned it, that its face still looks out from the pond) in the tell-tale manner of a social contagion. It is a feeding-frenzy of superstition.[29] We must accept that we simply do not know Martha Ray’s story, much as we will never know what exactly happened to Johnny over the nine hours of his journey or what exactly ailed Susan Gale, or for that matter whether or not Goody

Blake's prayer was answered.[30] By isolating both Harry Gill and Susan Gale—each in his or her own way—from third-party influences, second-hand ideas and circulating theories, Wordsworth preserves the integrity of the imagination and elevates its ability to act on the body into something more than a testimony to the power of communal fevers.

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Noting that the romantics did not call themselves romantics, Marilyn Butler makes a strong case that Wordsworth did not even partake of the revolt against the Enlightenment conventionally said to characterize romanticism, and that in fact the originality of his *Lyrical Ballads* lies in "the thoroughness and consistency with which he tries to apply Neoclassical precepts" such as simplicity, humanity and public spirit.[31] To this we might add that the poet endowed with "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present" (in the words of the Preface) possesses imagination very much as Dr. Johnson defined it some decades before: "the power of representing things absent to one's self or others."[32] Significantly, it is precisely because absent others are so present to her mind, or her imagination, that Susan Gale finds herself recovering her own power.

Susan Gale well knows that both the dangers threatening the incompetent rider and the terrors of his mother are on her account, and she can surely intuit that Betty Foy blames her for Johnny's loss ("'If Susan had not been so ill, / Alas! I should have had him still'"), but guilt does not seem to disorder her mind but only to render her imagination

stronger—strong enough, at any rate, to pour itself into her body. The poem makes us doubt that the doctor, or any doctor, or mesmerist for that matter, could have brought Susan Gale back to life as effectively as this jolt of moral electricity. Here and elsewhere in the *Lyrical Ballads*, the imagination quite transcends Haygarth's (and the Franklin commission's) faculty of deception.

Harry Gill, similarly, is not an example of insanity but a violator of an established moral code that upheld the rights of the afflicted. His imagination enforces a curse uttered in the name of this code with great solemnity, a curse moreover that springs from Goody Blake's heart as spontaneously as the ancient mariner's blessing of the water snakes. That the curse has all the marks of the sort of malediction traditionally "believed likely to take effect"[33] helps explain why it does take effect. As with a medicine that works because it is believed to work, so with the words of Goody Blake, except that in this case belief is supported not by the fancies of the marketplace but by centuries of deeply held assumptions about the rights of the poor and the threat of divine retribution. If we were to rationalize the fulfillment of Goody Blake's curse, we could say that cold claims her apprehender because the poetic justice of this sentence has "the inward and full persuasion of his mind," in the words of Locke's treatise on freedom of conscience,[34] and that nothing less could engender effects as profound as those he suffers. The simple but eloquent comment that the next day "his heart was sorrow"[35] suggests a man overcome with remorse. But no matter how we interpret the realization of Goody Blake's prayer, the imagination that wields power over the body of Harry Gill is not the hocus-pocus faculty depicted by John Haygarth.

It is because poetic fashions and fictions could not possibly command the inward and full persuasion of his own mind that Wordsworth set out to forge a poetry in which "no abstractions, no symbols, no myths . . . stand between the mind and its true object."[36] Hence the concreteness of the poems discussed. Hence too the evocation in the concluding poem of the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, "Tintern Abbey," of a nonspecific power

> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

Here then is Wordsworth's answer to the "superfine fluid that penetrated and surrounded all bodies," proclaimed by Mesmer.[37] The universal spirit in which Wordsworth professes his faith in "Tintern Abbey" makes animal magnetism, and animal electricity too for that matter, seem like stage lightning by comparison.

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[1] Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, ed. Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4. Quotations from poems and the Preface are taken from the 1802 text.

[2] One of the *Lyrical Ballads* is "The Tables turned . . ."

[3] Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; or The Laws of Organic Life*, Vol. II (London: J. Johnson, 1796), 356, 359.

[4] Carl Woodring, *Wordsworth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 23.

[5] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), 506. The author continues, "The Old Testament held out the promise that God would listen to the cry of the widows and the afflicted" (507). The honorific "Goody" probably marks the old woman as a widow. Thomas places "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" in the tradition of the beggar's curse: 506n.

[6] James O'Rourke, "'Goody Blake and Harry Gill,' 'The Thorn,' and the Failure of Philanthropy," *European Romantic Review* 9 (1998): 109.

[7] Like "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," "The Idiot Boy" appeared in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

[8] Interestingly, Wordsworth's contemporary John Wilson deplored "The Idiot Boy" but conceded that "the manner in which you show how bodily sufferings are frequently removed by mental anxieties or pleasures, in the descriptions of the cure of Betty Foy's female friend, is excessively well managed—and serves to establish a very curious and important Truth." See Wilson's letter to Wordsworth, 24 May 1802, reprinted in the Stafford edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, 314.

[9] As if to complete his punishment, Harry Gill is deprived of the power of communication and reduced to a kind of idiocy in his own right, able only to mutter to himself "Poor Harry Gill is very cold"—echoing "Poor Tom's a-cold" without knowing it.

[10] Coleridge's is the first usage given in the OED, albeit in 1834. On Harry Gill's "psychosomatic nightmare," see Sue Weaver Westbrook, "A Note on Hartley's Theory of 'the Sensation of Chilliness' and Wordsworth's 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill,'" *The Wordsworth Circle* 10 (1979): 124-26.

[11] Stanley Finger, *Doctor Franklin's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

[12] Tim Fulford, "Radical Medicine and Romantic Politics," *The Wordsworth Circle* 35 (2004): 17.

[13] John Haygarth, *Of the Imagination as a Cause and as a Cure of Disorders of the Body* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1800), 17, 4.

[14] Benjamin Franklin et al., "Report of the Commissioners Charged by the King with the Examination of Animal Magnetism," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 50 (2002): 344, 348, 349, 361.

[15]See the title of his pamphlet.

[16] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion* (London and Princeton: Routledge & Kegam Paul and Princeton University Press, 1971), 328.

[17] "She prefaced half a hint of this / With, 'God forbid it should be true!'"

[18] Claude-Anne Lopez, "Franklin and Mesmer: An Encounter," *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* 66 (1993): 326.

[19] For Coleridge in his radical phase, Mesmerism "worked not by transmission of an imponderable material but through psycho-social relationships." Tim Fulford, "Conducting the Vital Fluid: The Politics and Poetics of Mesmerism in the 1790s," *Studies in Romanticism* 43 (2004): 72.

[20] On sympathy as a force that animates the body, see C. Kerr, I. Milne and T. Kaptchuk, "William Cullen and a Missing Mind-Body Link in the Early History of Placebos," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 101 (2008): 89-92.

[21] The 1802 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* includes a cluster of poems on places named for persons.

[22] Haygarth, *Of the Imagination as a Cause and as a Cure of Disorders of the Body*, 4.

[23] In Darwin the apprehended old woman exclaims, "Heaven grant, that thou never mayest know again the blessing to be warm," which Wordsworth transforms into a much more dramatic direct entreaty to God.

[24] Haygarth, *Of the Imagination as a Cause and as a Cure of Disorders of the Body*, 30.

[25] Gary Saul Morson, *"Anna Karenina" in Our Time: Seeing More Wisely* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 223.

[26] William Falconer, *A Dissertation on the Influence of the Passions upon Disorders of the Body* (London: Dilly and Phillips, 1788), 16. A sort of obverse case, that of a man who dies on the scaffold of fear itself, even as he is about to be pardoned, is related by Montaigne in his essay "On the Power of the Imagination."

[27] On kidnapping, see ll. 235-36; on suicide, l. 303.

[28] Stewart Justman, *To Feel What Others Feel: Social Sources of the Placebo Effect* (University of California Medical Humanities Press, 2012).

[29] Observed the Franklin commission, the imagination "doubly excited . . . by its own movement & that of the surrounding imaginations" is especially potent. "Report of the Commissioners Charged by the King with the Examination of Animal Magnetism": 357.

[30] On such indeterminables in the *Lyrical Ballads* see Duncan Wu, "Looking for Johnny: Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy,'" *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* 88 (1994): 170. Also unknown is "What cause the Hart might have to love this place" in "Hart-Leap Well."

[31] Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels & Reactionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 60.

[32] See https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/page-view/?i=1048.

[33] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 506.

[34] Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1950), 18.

[35] See l. 107.

[36] Basil Willey, "On Wordsworth and the Locke Tradition," in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 85.

[37] Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 3.