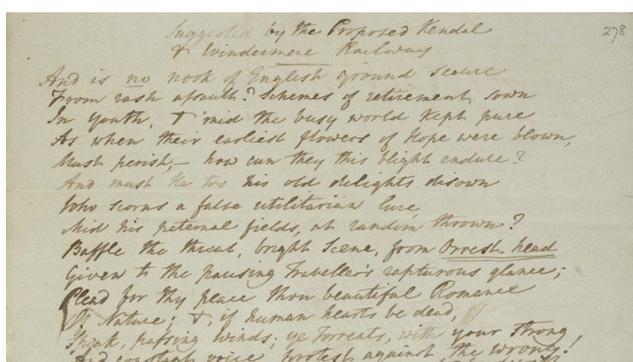


REMEMBERING THE RAILWAY: LOCATING NOSTALGIA IN WORDSWORTH'S 'SUGGESTED BY THE PROPOSED KENDAL AND WINDERMERE RAILWAY' AND THE CREATION OF THE MUSÉE D'ORSAY

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Abstract: Although not immediately apparent, the relationship between a sonnet written by the Poet Laureate at Rydal Mount, England, and a train station designed and built five decades later in Paris, France, delineates the polyvalence of nostalgia. By depicting, via the two artefacts, the shifting nostalgia of a Victorian collective consciousness, this article thus intends to explore interactions with the railway that provoked and evoked emotional reactions. It has been argued that 'in a little over a generation... [the railway had] introduced a new system of behaviour: not only of travel and communication, but of thought, of feeling, of expectation.'¹ This article explores the way that this 'new system' constitutes a dual nostalgic gaze that looks both to the past and to the future.



'Suggested by the Proposed Kendal and Windermere Railway' by William Wordsworth (1844) © British Library Board (Add MS 44361 f.278), reproduced with permission



Photograph of the interior of Musée d'Orsay, 'Musée d'Orsay, Paris 7th' by Moonik is licensed under CC Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported

Nostalgia's etymological provenance begins with the Ancient Greek word, 'nostos' meaning to return home. The term was coined, from *nostos* and the suffix -logia, in 1668 by Johannes Hofer to give a name to the diagnosis of 'homesickness'.² It appears to then function as a medical diagnosis, particularly in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and it is retrospectively described by Albrecht Erlenmeyer in his 1892 *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* as, 'the abnormally exaggerated longing for his home of a man who lives away from it, whether it be that relatives or friends who were left behind, or the peculiarity of the home as regards landscape or climate, are

¹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. xiii

² Svetlana Boym, *Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) p. 3

the object of his longing³. Towards the end of the nineteenth century nostalgia does however, become a more abstract concept denoting an emotional memory of or longing for one's own experiences or time period, rather than a specific place or person that is akin to home for the suffering subject.⁴ This article will attempt to explore this variety of meaning, via the mechanisation of the Victorian period, by considering the relationship between the two seemingly unrelated artefacts: Wordsworth's sonnet, 'Suggested by the Proposed Kendal and Windermere Railway' (1844) and the space that was the Gare d'Orsay (begun in 1898, completed in 1900) which became, in 1986, the Musée d'Orsay.

Set against the backdrop of the second period of 'railway mania' in Great Britain, William Wordsworth sent an angry response, provoked by the proposed branch line at Kendal and Windermere, to the 'Morning Post', to be published on 16th October 1844. This 'mania' was a rapid expansion during the mid-1840s that saw approximately 9000 route miles built and huge, often speculative and frenzied, investment in railway securities.⁵ In order to justify the building of new lines and expanding of existing routes, railway companies argued for the utility of the railway. Unlike the exploratory sonnet 'Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways' (c. 1833), which somewhat embraced the sublimity of the technological advancements that were visible across the British landscape, Wordsworth's response to the potential railway that would run through, and perhaps more importantly *to*, his beloved Lake District, demonstrates an incensed and impulsive reaction. The sonnet of 1844 invokes a nostalgic reverence for the power of nature, calling upon these forces to 'protest against the wrong.'⁶ As Wordsworth's work often illustrates, the act of recollection is irrevocably connected with place; often it is the imagination's invocation of landscape, such as that surrounding Tintern in Monmouthshire,⁷ which acts to replenish creativity when surrounded by the 'din of towns and cities'.⁸ 'Suggested by...' demonstrates a kind of homesickness for the Lake District of the early-nineteenth century, unmarred by the so-called 'random' acts of railway companies and consumer-focused development. Wordsworth's nostalgia exhibits an idealisation of this place, and by extension this period.⁹ Within 'Suggested by...' we see his nostalgia transcend the notion of longing for a specific place, as it becomes a reconstruction of a narrative past that is remembered via the locations, but which epitomises an aesthetic remembering of idyllic rural life.

The mind's reconfiguration of the past in order to produce meaning is demonstrated by Wordsworth's idealised 'bright Scene' of youthful folly, creating an account of his life that

³ Albrecht Erlenmeyer, 'Nostalgia', in D. Hack Tuke, Ed., *A dictionary of psychological medicine, giving the definition, etymology and synonyms of the terms used in medical psychology, with the symptoms, treatment, and pathology of insanity, and the Law of lunacy in Great Britain and Ireland* (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co., 1892) p. 858

⁴ See the Oxford English Dictionary Online's two definitions. The first definition describes the concept to be an, 'Acute longing for familiar surroundings, esp. regarded as a medical condition; homesickness.' Whilst the second definition, first recorded in 1900 is of: 'Sentimental longing *for* or regretful memory of a period of the past, esp. one in an individual's own lifetime; (also) sentimental imagining or evocation of a period of the past.' (<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/128472?redirectedFrom=nostalgia#eid>, accessed 18th January 2014)

⁵ Jack Simmons and Gordon Biddle Eds., *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History from 1603 to the 1990s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 311

⁶ Wordsworth, William, 'On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway', *The Wordsworth Book of Sonnets* ed. by Linda Marsh (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1995) p. 174, Li. 14

⁷ See 'Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour. July 13, 1798' (written and published 1798) in Bartleby.com <<http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww138.html>> [accessed 18th January 2014]

⁸ *Ibid*, Li. 25-6

⁹ Wordsworth, William, 'On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway', *The Wordsworth Book of Sonnets* ed. by Linda Marsh (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1995) p. 174 Li. 8

connects the past, present and future.¹⁰ This version of nostalgia, it is suggested by Nicholas Dames, is a kind of forgetting, that when applied to Wordsworth's verse demonstrates the rapidity of nostalgia's growing force as it acts to reshape memory or experience.¹¹ Dames argues that nineteenth-century nostalgia is a 'struggling to transform the chaos of personal recollection into what is useful, meaningful, able to be applied to the future'.¹² Wordsworth's accusation of 'rash assault' reveals his own hasty attempt to organise his past in order to preserve his future, his reaction accelerated akin to the speed of expansion, and the literal speed experienced by railway passengers.¹³ In an attempt to address this increased pace of change, a kind of universal nostalgia is invoked by the poet, as he attempts to reunite his idealised past with a collective Romantic consciousness in order to challenge the proceeding alterations that are swiftly restructuring his anticipated future.

Wordsworth's nostalgia for his adopted home of Grasmere, approximately thirty miles south of his birthplace of Cockermouth, manifests initially as a determined conservation and preservation of place. His anger towards the 'rash assault' of the railway mimics the physicality of the attack; the railway tracks literally cut through the 'paternal fields' of the Lakes. The lack of security for the location that represents many 'Schemes of retirement', is bemoaned throughout the sonnet, but the nostalgia is not simply for place. It can be traced as a yearning for a 'greater simplicity', kindled by the rustic and pastoral 'because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature'.¹⁴ These words, from the Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, suggest the necessity of close access to his rural idyll for all who are to be enlightened by imagination. He reviles in the same essay those poets who have attempted to 'separate themselves from the sympathies of men'.¹⁵ This is an attitude that the Wordsworth of 1844 does not display. Despite mimicking the sentiments of the Romantic movement and particularly referring back to the opening line of another of his sonnets, 'The world is too much with us', the angry voice of 'Suggested by...', written by a seventy-four year old Wordsworth, does not comply with his manifesto of poetry as 'emotion recollected in tranquility'. His rallying cry for the natural world to make use of their 'torrents' and 'protest', is a desperate one that invokes nature as 'pure' and the tourists and train travellers as 'rapturous' in their consumption of the landscape. The materialistic and utilitarian railway companies are facilitating the pillage of his home, and his reaction looks forcefully backwards with a lens shadowed by the fear of progress. He has no reverence for the previously observed 'triumphs' of the railway, and with the progressing mechanisation of the landscape, he attempts to reclaim his old revolutionary loyalties to the natural world.¹⁶

The sixth line of the sonnet, in the version of the poem that was printed in the 1844 newspaper and pamphlet that followed (and which is therefore the published version widely available today), reads, 'And must he too the ruthless change bemoan', the adverb 'too' exposing

¹⁰ Wordsworth, William, 'On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway', *The Wordsworth Book of Sonnets* ed. by Linda Marsh (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1995) p. 174, Li. 9

¹¹ Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting and British Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 3-4

¹³ Wordsworth, William, 'On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway', *The Wordsworth Book of Sonnets* ed. by Linda Marsh (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1995) p. 174, Li. 2

¹⁴ William Wordsworth, 'Observations Prefixed to *Lyrical Ballads*' (1800) in Poetry Foundation <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/237834?page=2>> [accessed 18th January 2014] p. 2

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2

¹⁶ William Wordsworth, 'Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways' (written 1833, published 1837) in Bartleby.com <<http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww846.html>> [accessed 18th January 2014] Li. 12

Wordsworth's assumption to speak for all who object to the 'abuse'¹⁷ of the railway and lament the changes that the 'ruthless'¹⁸ companies are able to implement. He paints the protestors as victims of a callous and violent enemy who will stop at nothing to fulfill their intentions. However, in the version sent to William Gladstone three days later (see Fig. 1), Wordsworth alters the line to 'And must he too his old delights disown'.¹⁹ He takes a softer and more diplomatic approach, appealing perhaps to Gladstone's sympathy and, as he states in the accompanying letter, 'taste and feeling'.²⁰ Wordsworth admits his nostalgic leaning in this alteration, his association of the 'old' with 'delights'; reverentially identifying the Lakes as one of the 'temples of Nature' that should be left untouched by those who are not culturally literate enough to worship.²¹ His judgement is biased however, and the universal 'he' who 'bemoans' seems to represent a local and minority, appeal.²² When based on a lack of utility, Wordsworth's argument has strength, however he belies his own cause when he complains of the increasing number of tourists expected to make use of the railway, therefore precluding his assertion that the railway companies have a 'a false utilitarian lure' for the branch expansion.²³ Despite his objections, the Kendal and Windermere railway was built, and Wordsworth himself died in 1850. By the end of the century, opposition and expansion in Britain had slowed and discussions had now turned to the buildings of stations in metropolises. Most cities were, in the early nineteenth century, ringed by termini yet, 'As the cities extended outwards... ..so the railways penetrated further into their central business districts.'²⁴ This took place in Britain throughout the 1840s and the building of Gare d'Orsay is an example of this phenomenon in Paris.

Towards the *fin de siècle*, Victor Laloux was chosen to build the Gare d'Orsay and accompanying hotel in central Paris, coinciding with the preparation for the Exposition Universelle that was scheduled to take place in 1900. This station would bring passengers from southwestern France into central Paris, opposite the Louvre and to the centre of the city's cultural activities. Similarly to the Kendal and Windermere railway, the Gare d'Orsay has the potential to facilitate the cultural development of railway passengers, creating an experience that

¹⁷ The full quote explains that, 'it is not against the Railways but against the abuse of them that I am contending.' From William Wordsworth, *The prose works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) Vol. 3, p. 335, quoted in: Scott Hess, *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: The Roots of Environmentalism in Nineteenth-century Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012)

¹⁸ Wordsworth, William, 'On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway', *The Wordsworth Book of Sonnets* ed. by Linda Marsh (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1995) p. 174, Li. 6

¹⁹ William Wordsworth, 'Suggested by the Kendal and Windermere Railway' (1844) in London, British Library, 'GLADSTONE PAPERS. Vols. I-CCLXVI. Special correspondence of W. E. Gladstone' Add MS 44361 f.278, Li. 6

²⁰ William Wordsworth, a letter to Gladstone to accompany the sonnet (1844) in London, British Library, 'GLADSTONE PAPERS. Vols. I-CCLXVI. Special correspondence of W. E. Gladstone' Add MS 44362 f.278

²¹ From William Wordsworth, *The prose works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) Vol. 3, p. 353, quoted in: James Garrett, *Wordsworth and the Writing of the Nation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008)

²² Wordsworth, William, 'On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway', *The Wordsworth Book of Sonnets* ed. by Linda Marsh (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1995) p. 174, Li. 6

²³ It is noted in the *North Wales Chronicle*, 21 December 1850 that between 1846-1850 Henry R. Marcus, the 'father of cheap trips' based in the north west of England took 100,000 people on railway excursions. Although not precisely indicative of how many tourists used the Kendal and Windermere branch, it is possible to extract an indication of the popularity of tourism in the period. Study of the *Kendal Mercury* suggests that once open the branch was carrying roughly 5000 passengers in the last week of July every year between 1848 and 1850. How many of these are passengers are tourists would be speculation, but given the number drops by roughly 3000 passengers per week in the month of November it could be argued that a large proportion of these Summer travellers were tourists.

'Interesting to Tourists', *North Wales Chronicle*, 21 December 1850, p. 3

²⁴ John R. Kellett, *Railways and Victorian Cities* (London: Routledge, 1979) p.13

when recollected is inseparable from the progress of the transport that increases access to ‘high’ culture. Despite its lack of success as a railway station, the decision to build Gare d’Orsay on the site chosen, and in the *Beaux-Arts* style, indicates a grand ambition. The Gare at once looks back to an idealised classical style, preserving this form of architecture to disguise the industrial, mechanised railway, whilst also looking forwards to the twentieth century through its status as the first electrified station in the world.²⁵ Its intrinsic connection with the nineteenth world fair reinforces this dual gaze; the aim of the fair was to celebrate the century gone by and to look purposefully forward to the development of the next.²⁶ The building of the Gare suggests an inherent nostalgic reaction to the railway itself, as the experiences of the railway and its associated spaces had become an entrenched part of nineteenth-century life, offering a stimulus to the recollection of the past and present, home and away.

Anticipating Linda M. Austin’s theory that nostalgia transitions from a diagnostic term to an aesthetic concept in the nineteenth century, Eduoard Détaillé’s nostalgic reaction to the Gare d’Orsay in 1900 states that it ‘is superb and has the air of a palace of Beaux-Arts while the Palace of Beaux-Arts resembles a station.’²⁷ This reaction to the building displays Détaillé’s nostalgia for the expected architecture of a train station. The Palace of *Beaux-Arts* is constructed in the *Beaux-Arts* style, as is the Gare, but the industrial roof of glass and steel establish the building’s modernity whilst the evidence of the Gare d’Orsay’s industrial purpose is hidden behind a neo-classical façade. As a *Salon* painter, Détaillé denounced the technologically innovative design of the Palace, suggesting instead that the traditional architecture of d’Orsay was better suited to the purpose of displaying high art. Contrasting with Wordsworth’s denunciation of the railway for its quintessentially industrial qualities; those of force and progress, Détaillé begs the space of the railway to display its industrial origin. Détaillé’s nostalgia is for the very industrial markers that Wordsworth rails against, and his reverence for the building, created by Laloux, demonstrates the ‘aesthetic concept’ described by Austin. A beautiful building should hold ‘beautiful’ art, and an industrial building should be purposed with ‘industrial’ tasks such as the conveyance of passengers and goods on trains; design reflecting purpose. The nostalgia Détaillé feels for the experience of the train station, and the art gallery, is demonstrated by his desire for them to denote their purposes in design and construction. The exterior of the Gare d’Orsay conforms to the architecture that surrounds it, in order to assimilate an industrial building into the centre of Paris, whilst the Palace is a forward-looking institution. This status is confirmed in the twentieth century by the Palace’s exhibition of the second controversial *Salon d’Automne* in 1904.²⁸ Feelings of nostalgia, by the end of the nineteenth century, had become intrinsically linked with the desire to interact with a remembered experience, and the expectations of the railway experience were fundamental to the changing of this process of remembering. The nostalgia located in both Wordsworth’s sonnet, and the Gare d’Orsay, is that of stimulated recollection. For Wordsworth the place he remembers connects him with a yearned for period, whilst d’Orsay acts to contravene the expectations of those who have grown to understand and remember the industrial experience. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes, the railway passenger became the ‘object of industrial process’ who literally and metaphorically looked back to the idyll of the rural as it

²⁵ Soon after its building, in 1939, the platforms were declared too short for the new longer trains and it was relegated to serve suburban trains only; Gare St Lazare was reinstated as the primary terminus for southwestern railway services.

²⁶ Quotation taken from Andrea Kupfer Schneider, *Creating the Musée d’Orsay: The Politics of Culture in France* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998) p. 10 Schneider’s translation was checked by the author of this article for accuracy, before using verbatim.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1

²⁸ An exhibition of innovative twentieth-century painting, that mainly fell outside of the remit of the *Salon*.

passed by and as it was replaced by the railway as the focal site of nostalgia for the modern individual.

The concurrency of the old and the new, as visually perceived in the Palace of *Beaux-Arts* and present but veiled in the Gare d'Orsay, is a distinct feature of modernity and encompasses the nostalgic dual gaze. From the train carriage, 'visual perception [is] diminished by velocity', and nostalgia as 'an organizing force in the imagination and memory' is able to resolve this loss of vision as it acts to govern the understanding of this rapid journey forward in time, place and experience. The station acts as a 'gateway' to modernity, and the use of the *Beaux-Arts* style in building the Gare d'Orsay acts to mediate the anxiety of loss, caused by technological innovation, that is overt in Wordsworth's sonnet. Architecturally, the station is two buildings, fused together by a common purpose. The juxtaposition of the traditionally built front façade that greeted the passengers paired with the train departure point, forged in industrial glass and steel, reinforces the station's in-between status. Not entirely hand-crafted or industrialised; urban or rural; exit-point or destination, the station itself offers a mediated point at which nostalgia for either the pastoral locations of Wordsworth, or the light-filled glass and steel structures that were an expression of the industrial process, can be both felt and expressed. As electric lighting became more widely available, by the end of the nineteenth century, these ferro-vitreous roofs became unnecessary, and were often hidden by exaggerated frontage as seen in the Gare d'Orsay. Nostalgia's polyvalence in the nineteenth century reflects the need for a reaction that is able to locate a period in time, rather than simply a place. The accelerated speed with which one can reach physical places, and pass them by, causes the world to take on an almost virtual reality, and making distinctions between one place and the next is reliant upon the signage found on the platform. As George Gissing describes upon his return to London from the Lake District, 'it is the platform of the Terminus that seems alone real, and all behind it 'mere dream'.²⁹

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²⁹ From a letter dated Sunday, August 17, 1884 in George Gissing, *Letters of George Gissing* (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1927), p. 146

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