

SPATIAL MEMORY AS PLACE IN WORDSWORTH'S *THE EXCURSION* AND ROUSSEAU'S *REVERIES OF A SOLITARY WALKER*

[ABSTRACT]

This essay takes as its point of departure the idea that we usually experience ourselves in relation to place. The conception of human identity as bound up with the sense of place is not a specifically romantic phenomenon. However, in romanticism place acquires a new significance: it is linked through memory to the events experienced by the self. Thus the romantic self is constituted not only through memory understood as a temporal category but also as a spatial category. Such reading of the chosen romantic texts is contrary to the well-established readings, which prioritize the mind of the writer over the material world. However paradoxical it may seem to regard Rousseau and Wordsworth as 'bodily writers', acutely aware of the significance of place, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* and *The Excursion* reveal writers aware of man as a physical being and of his capacity to remember through the body. Therefore, through phenomenological readings of the afore-mentioned texts (drawing on Bachelard, Casey, and Malpas) I will explore the relationship between the mind and the place through such concepts as 'body memory', localization of memory, and intersubjective memory.

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KEYWORDS *Body Memory, Localization of Memory, Intersubjective Memory, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Wordsworth*

William Hazlitt, the first English critic who noticed the resemblances between Rousseau and Wordsworth, observed that:

[Rousseau] owed all his power to sentiment. The writer who most nearly resembles him in our own times is [Wordsworth]. We see no other difference between them, than that the one wrote in prose and the other in poetry; . . . and we will confidently match the Citizen of Geneva's adventures on the lake of Bienne against the Cumberland Poet's floating dreams on the lake of Grasmere. Both create an interest out of nothing, or rather out of their own feelings; both weave numberless recollections into one sentiment; both wind their own being round whatever object occurs to them.¹

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There is much more to the complex relationship between Rousseau and Wordsworth than ‘that the one wrote in prose and the other in poetry’, and I want to focus on the importance both ascribe to memory. Whilst both address different aspects of memory in their work (associative, affective, circumstantial, etc.), it is one aspect in particular that I want to discuss here, namely, the importance both attach to the relationship between memory and place. In this respect, two works in particular come to mind: Wordsworth’s *The Excursion* (1814) and Rousseau’s *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1776–1778). Both works form the last part of an autobiographical whole. In Wordsworth’s case, *The Excursion* is the last completed portion of a larger work, *The Recluse*, which he would never finish.² Similarly, the *Reveries* are the last part of an autobiographical trilogy comprised of *The Confessions* and *Dialogues* (also known as *Rousseau, the Judge of Jean-Jacques*), with the final Tenth Walk of *Reveries* being left incomplete at Rousseau’s death (1778).

In the Preface to *The Excursion*, Wordsworth says that he ‘retired to his native mountains’ in order to write a philosophical poem about ‘his own mind’.³ Already in these introductory pages the mind and place coalesce and his ‘voice proclaims / How exquisitely the individual Mind . . . / to the external World / Is fitted: – and how exquisitely too – . . . / The external World is fitted to the mind’.⁴ Likewise, the *Reveries* have long been regarded as another attempt by Rousseau to explore his own soul. As is the case with *The Excursion*, Rousseau’s work is a kind of meditation in isolation. In a telling phrase jotted down on a playing-card whilst he was writing this book, Rousseau says: ‘My whole life has been little else than a long reverie divided into chapters by my daily walks’.⁵ As the human mind is the main locus of experience for both writers, and their works speak about a ‘psycho-natural’ parallelism (M. H. Abrams’s term), it is fair to claim that their ‘inward landscapes’ matter more than the outward aspects of nature.⁶ Therefore the question arises as to the right we have in claiming that they were both ‘nature’ writers, where ‘nature’ could preserve its materiality and be translated into a natural scene, spot of greenery or a specific locality.

In drawing a distinction between eighteenth century loco-descriptive poetry and romantic lyrics, M. H. Abrams argued that in the former:

“Composition of place” was not a specific locality, nor did it need to be present to the eyes of the speaker, but was a typical scene or object, usually called up . . . before “the eyes of the imagination” in order to set off and guide the thought by means of correspondences whose interpretation was firmly controlled by an inherited typology.⁷

Paul de Man, on the other hand, has been convinced of the persistence of unspecified locality in romanticism. In the climactic passages of *The Excursion* and the *Reveries*, the evidence of moving beyond nature in order to establish contact with time is unmistakable. Take for example the Great Dane accident in the Second Walk of the *Reveries*, when Rousseau is knocked down by a big dog and he instantaneously loses consciousness only to be ‘born again’ a few seconds later. The same idea of recovering the lost time rather than nature is true of Words-

worth who, in the guise of the Wanderer, hears the narratives told by the Solitary and they are ‘deposited upon the silent shore of [his] memory’.⁸ In such passages, one has no difficulty in seeing that the romantic consciousness holds priority over the realities of the object (both writers question the ontological primacy of the object seen).⁹ Wordsworth warns us that accurate natural description, though a necessary, is an inadequate condition for poetry. When he says that ‘The mind of Man is / My haunt, and the main region of my song’ he expresses his anxiety at the possibility of a ‘despotism of the eye’.¹⁰ Rousseau, for his part, is also not so much concerned with accurate natural description as with the abundance of feelings that come alive in the presence of nature. On taking the second walk Rousseau laments:

The country was still green and pleasant, but it was deserted and many of the leaves had fallen; everything gave an impression of solitude and impending winter. . . . I saw myself at the close of an innocent and unhappy life, with a soul still full of intense feelings and a mind still adorned with a few flowers, even if they were already blighted by sadness and withered by care. Alone and neglected, I could feel the approach of the first frosts.¹¹

A desolate scene reminds Rousseau of his own isolation and the hatred that men feel towards him. Therefore, in many passages of the *Reveries*, we are faced with Rousseau’s lively inner life – he says his body was idle, but his mind remained active in producing feelings and thoughts.

However, we cannot say that nature in both *The Excursion* and the *Reveries* exists only as signified within human culture.¹² What Wordsworth manifests in his poem is his rootedness, his knowledge of a particular place, his self-conscious relation to that place. Wordsworth adopts the frame of a country walk and links all the stories, reflections, and conversations to his native ground.¹³ *The Excursion* is full of topographical notes which give a sense of the poet’s need to belong to a place (Hawkshead, the Esthwaite Water, Borrowdale, the Bowder Stone, Langdale Tarn, the valley of Grasmere, the summit of Snowdon). Likewise, in Rousseau’s descriptions of the island of Saint-Pierre and the Lake of Bienne, he insists on the importance of localness. ‘Locale’, as he states in *Émile*, ‘is not unimportant in the culture of men’.¹⁴ Hence if we accept the notion of unspecified locality for the Romantic writer’s view of place, we might miss the fact that the material world, the surrounding nature or landscape in which Rousseau and Wordsworth lived, could be more than just inanimate stone – it could be the place with the power to restore the mind equal to the power of time.

Recent phenomenologists of memory such as Edward S. Casey and Jeff Malpas, relying primarily on the work of Heidegger and Bachelard, have discussed the importance of place in the constitution of human identity and have pointed out that the self is to be discovered through an investigation of the places it inhabits.

The conception of human identity as bound up with the notion of place is by no means exclusively European or Western. Neither is it a specifically romantic

phenomenon. However, in romanticism the sense of place takes on a new importance: it is linked through memory to the events experienced by the romantic self. Hence the romantic self is constituted not only through memory understood as a temporal category, but also as a spatial category. The Wordsworthian phrase ‘spots of time’ coined in *The Prelude* is telling in this respect, as it links the idea of time with the idea of place.¹⁵ The final conception of memory as a process and a place is central to the overall character of Rousseau’s and Wordsworth’s meditative art.¹⁶

As Edward Casey suggests: ‘Place is the limit and the condition of all existing things. This means that, far from being merely locatory or situational, place belongs to the very concept of existence. To be is to be bounded by place, limited by it.’¹⁷ Even the idea of ‘keeping the past in mind’ alludes to memory as a kind of secondary home which represents a reconstructed version of the divine childhood, and can be regarded as the poet’s ‘dwelling place’.¹⁸ Such representations of memory are also found in John Locke for whom memory becomes ‘the Storehouse of our Ideas’ and which is therefore perceived as a place, albeit, in mechanistic terms.¹⁹ As such the conception of memory moves away from metaphors of imprinting and impressions familiar since Plato’s time. Memory functions as a means to mental safe-keeping, ‘a Repository to lay up those Ideas which at another time the narrow Mind of Man might have use of’.²⁰ Memory, therefore, cannot be thought of as completely independent from spatiality. In Jeff Malpas’s words, ‘memory always stands in relation to the temporal and the spatial, which are themselves held together in place. Memory that was disembodied, that was therefore unplaced, would be no memory at all’.²¹

In this essay I want to argue that the sense of place in *The Excursion* and the *Reveries* is acquired through both writers’ physical isolation and their sense of nostalgia, because things do not stay the same. Furthermore, they both cherish a habitual relation to the place where body memory plays an important part.²²

In order to remember, both writers seek secluded places and want to be left physically alone. This is why they share their love for the life in the country. The country differs from the city in two essential ways: it is less densely populated – it offers the possibility of being left *physically* alone – and it is less densely circumscribed by objects and potential signs.²³ The solitary condition of the poet and the secluded place thus become intricately bound up with each other. The idea of a solitary poet is nothing new in the history of Western literature and Rousseau’s exile is no different, except that he is a self-exile. In Book IV of *The Confessions*, Rousseau admits to being a ‘solitary walker’, the idea he would later expand in his *Reveries*. Here the reader feels that there is something almost triumphant in the way he repeats the verb ‘to travel’, as if he was proud of his solitariness: ‘I was travelling on foot, and travelling alone’.²⁴ There is no doubt that throughout his autobiographical trilogy Rousseau is a solitary exile. He begins his *Reveries* by saying: ‘So now I am alone in the world, with no brother, neighbour or friend, nor any company left but my own’.²⁵ At the beginning, the reader feels that this condition was imposed on Rousseau from the outside; he wants to get away from

his fellow-men, as they take him for ‘a monster, a poisoner, an assassin, . . . the horror of the human race, the laughing stock of the rabble’.²⁶ However, as his quest for his own true self unfolds (he says that the purpose of his writing is to know oneself) we realize that solitude has become a personal choice:

These hours of solitude and meditation are the only ones in the day when I am completely myself and my own master, with nothing to distract me or hinder me, the only ones when I can truly say that I am what nature meant me to be.²⁷

During the eighteenth-century, the solitary is often a religious figure, ridiculed by the new philosophy of the Enlightenment. Diderot’s *La Religieuse* is a fine example of the possible consequences of isolation in a convent – the message is clear: solitude is torture, man is a social being. Only the wicked person, Diderot said, is alone, but Rousseau firmly disagrees.²⁸ On the island of Saint-Pierre, in the *Reveries* (Fifth Walk), Rousseau opposes one of the main tenets of Enlightenment philosophy based on the necessary sociability of people: ‘The idleness of society is deadly because it is obligatory; the idleness of solitude is delightful because it is free and voluntary’.²⁹ The society of private property is a solitary society for Rousseau. The solitariness of each and every individual becomes more prominent as the society progresses, but this solitary state differs fundamentally from the solitude felt in the company of nature.

Hence, when in Book VII of *The Confessions* we see Rousseau confined to a small cottage called the Hermitage that he acquires, thanks to the kindness of Madame d’Epinay, we immediately realize that it was a refuge absolutely made for him. In the middle of a vegetable garden, close to the forest of Montmorency, Rousseau indeed deserves to be called Mr. Bear, as Madame d’Epinay would nickname him. Rousseau’s recourse to solitude and the world of fantasy ‘springs from frustration in the real world’ and it is bound up with his special place.³⁰ In the *Reveries*, this special place is the Island of Saint Pierre in the middle of the Lake of Bienna, an island scarcely known even in Switzerland, where Rousseau would spend only two months. As Eugene Stelzig correctly observes: ‘The precondition of his happiness there was a kind of Wordsworthian “wise passiveness” . . . of a man dedicated to leisure’.³¹ Rousseau would replace his small cottage with a large house belonging to the hospital of Bern and inhabited by a steward, his wife and servants. Yet, he would constantly seek solitude on the shores of the lake, ‘roaming about the island, stopping to sit now in the most charming and isolated corners where [he] could dream undisturbed’.³² His daydreaming is a sort of compensatory activity in which the fictions make him forget his real condition. Thus the books he read avidly as a boy make him forget about his master’s cruelty and the imaginary worlds he would plunge himself into later in life make him forget about his friends’ conspiracy against him. There is a constant need in Rousseau to build himself an alternative world as soon as he becomes dissatisfied with the world around him. It is a sort of escapism in which imagination plays the vital role: ‘When alone I have never known boredom, even if absolutely

without occupation, my imagination can fill all voids, and it is in itself enough to occupy me'.³³

This alternative world is impossible without a place of his own, where solitude becomes again a natural state, the state in which man contents himself with his own existence ('Never have I been so much myself . . . as in the journeys I have taken alone and on foot').³⁴ In the *Reveries* (Third Walk), Rousseau insists that the rural solitude in which he spent the best days of his youth only served to strengthen his naturally affectionate tendencies. Both nature and rural simplicity serve as a moral anchor for the adult Rousseau.

When trying to write *The Recluse* (the title itself is telling), Wordsworth had to live on his own in the mountains, and it is no wonder that the two main protagonists of his dramatic poem are the Wanderer and the Solitary. In Book I, the poet reaches a ruined cottage and meets the Wanderer resting under the shade of the trees that surround it. The Wanderer then tells the tale of his own childhood in Hawkshead, a little town at the head of Esthwaite Water (which in many ways resembles the poet's own childhood) and then relates the history of the cottage's last inhabitant – poor Margaret who died after having lost her husband and her two children. The story of Margaret and her ruined cottage in Book I of *The Excursion* was originally conceived by Wordsworth as an independent poem, and was reconstituted and published in the twentieth century by Jonathan Wordsworth. Through a number of such small tales told to the poet by different people he encounters on his way across the Lake District, the poet is faced with the harshness of life in the mountains and the perseverance of their inhabitants for whom the land is all in all. Every inhabitant of the Lake District had formed a peculiar bond with his/her native place and, as the Wanderer points out, even the senseless rocks speak:

. . . I see around me here
 Things which you cannot see: we die my friend;
 Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
 And prized in his peculiar nook of earth
 Dies with him, or is changed; and very soon
 Even of the good is no memorial left.
 . . .
 And senseless rocks, nor idly – for they speak,
 In these their invocations, with a voice
 Obedient to the strong creative power
 Of human passion. . . .
 . . . Beside yon spring I stood,
 And eyed its waters till we seem'd to feel
 One sadness, they and I.³⁵

It is a common Wordsworthian insistence on 'the fitting and the fitted' (as he points out in the Preface to *The Excursion*) – the individual mind fits the external

world and the external world reflects the mind. Yet, throughout the pages of *The Excursion*, the external world becomes a particular place – a peculiar nook of earth, a rock or a spring. Place thus becomes the limit and the condition of human existence. As phenomenologists would insist, to be is to be bounded by place and it proves to be a deeply constitutive factor in the phenomenon of time. Margaret and her family are no longer there (their time had run out) but the Wanderer's imaginative leap into what could have been, if only they were alive, the memory of the past and the place remain.

Hence, as Edward Casey insists, memory and place are the two phenomena complementary in character and they are both vitally important to Wordsworth. Despite her daily Promethean suffering, Margaret could not have parted with her place – living 'reckless and alone / Until her house by frost, and thaw and rain / Was sapped', still 'she loved this wretched spot'.³⁶ Later on, as the poet and the Wanderer continue their walk through the Lake District, the poet relates how they could not pass a single hamlet or a house which would not yield remembrances to the Wanderer. Indeed, *The Excursion* thus becomes an eight-book narrative about places triggering memories.

In Book II the poet and the Wanderer meet the latter's friend, the Solitary. The Solitary lives alone in a lowly little vale, yet one high among the mountains. After his wife and two children die and he loses all faith in political action, he becomes a recluse, avoiding contact with other men. His cottage is the only one in the area and it is surrounded by little ploughed fields. The Solitary calls his cottage 'my domain, my cell, my hermitage, my cabin' and he loves it better than a snail his house.³⁷ In a way, just like Margaret, the Solitary becomes a part of his little, dark cottage. It is an image of his life and of his own self, but also, being a hermit's cottage, it is the centre of a legend (in Bachelard's sense of the word).³⁸ In other words, it thrusts us back to the beginnings of humanity and to the experience of 'centralized solitude', which is hermit's own but also our own. The Solitary finds the essence of life in his solitary condition: 'You dwell alone; / You walk, you live, you speculate alone'.³⁹ The poet listens and registers it all upon 'the silent shores of memory' so that he may heal his own wounded spirit and renovate his mind in the years to come.⁴⁰ Like in Rousseau's case, the natural surroundings and the rural simplicity serve as the moral anchor for the poet.

I have already stressed the idea that both Rousseau and Wordsworth were writers with deep awareness of the sustaining power of their surroundings, and of the need to preserve the spot and the land. Nature, in that sense, is more than a linguistic construct serving as a vehicle for something else: the hegemony of imagination over the sensory object. Furthermore, place becomes more than a mere locality, it becomes 'integral to the very structure and possibility of experience'.⁴¹ Nature or landscape is not only 'environment', an organic-systemic totality, but rather an ontological unity. In the second half of the eighteenth century people begin to tamper with nature and places change their outward aspect. However anachronistic it may seem to call them pedestrian environmentalists, Rousseau and Wordsworth were aware of that and they could easily be mistaken for 'greens'

as their works are imbued with a sense of nostalgia, because things do not stay the same.⁴² As Edward Casey explains:

nostalgia is not merely a form of regret for lost times; it is also a pining for lost places, for places we have once been in, yet can no longer re-enter (childhood places are especially dear to us and the self is vitally connected to a few square miles of land) . . . For the sense of self, personal or collective, grows out of and reflects the places from which we come and where we have been.⁴³

In the *Reveries* we are often faced with Rousseau walking along the lakeside, across the mountains or through the woods with a notebook and a pencil in his hand, making plans for future works. He had never lost his taste for solitary walks and they had remained the vital prerequisite for writing. Furthermore, he sometimes seems like an ecologically conscious man:

Trees, bushes and plants are the clothing and adornment of the earth. There is no sight so sad as a bare, barren countryside that presents the eyes with nothing but stones, mud and sand. But brought to life by nature and dressed in her wedding dress amidst the running waters and the song of birds, earth in the harmony of her three kingdoms offers man a living, fascinating and enchanting spectacle, the only one of which his eyes and his heart can never grow weary.⁴⁴

When Rousseau made a botanical expedition in the region of Môtiers in Switzerland, he believed he had found a wonderful, unspoiled and secluded spot of greenery, but was disappointed to discover a nearby mill:

I got up, pushed through a thicket of undergrowth in the direction of the noise, and in a hollow of twenty yards from the very place where I had thought to be the first person to tread, I saw a stocking mill. I cannot express the confused and contradictory emotions which this discovery stirred up in me. . . . a feeling of distress at not being able, even in the depths of the Alps, to escape from the cruel hands of men intent on persecuting me. . . . But after all, who could have anticipated finding a factory surrounded by precipices? Switzerland is the one country in the world where you can find this mixture of wild nature and human industry. The whole of Switzerland is like one great city.⁴⁵

Apart from being an eco-conscious attack on the defilers of nature, this passage alludes to Rousseau's fear of persecution. Here the stocking mill becomes a metonym for the civilized world of men and their obsessive desire to follow him wherever he goes. The description of the walk invites us to read the entire scene as an embodiment in nature of Rousseau's darker inner world as he is haunted by the sense of persecuted isolation. The stocking factory is not only the emblem of his thwarted expectations, but also of the triumphant Enlightenment machine synonymous with the machinations of his persecutors.⁴⁶

As has been noted earlier, Wordsworth visited the same countries as Rousseau did, and he also explored the mountain ranges and countryside of his own country. When Wordsworth composed his poetry, he mostly did it in the open air. As has been remarked by William Hazlitt, his steadiness as opposed to Coleridge's variety is also a matter of choosing some paths rather than others while composing out aloud: 'Wordsworth always wrote (if he could) walking up and down a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption'.⁴⁷

The Lake District and the Quantocks had been criss-crossed by Wordsworth's feet and according to De Quincey, by the 1830s, he had 'traversed a distance of 175 to 180,000 English miles' on foot, 'a mode of exertion which, to him, stood in the stead of wine, spirits, and all other stimulants'.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Wordsworth wrote two letters to the editor of the *Morning Post* on the subject of Kendal and Windermere Railway. These two letters were crucial in stopping the projected extension of the railway from Kendal to Low Wood, near the head of Windermere in the Lake District. Indeed, with the clairvoyance of a twenty-first-century green activist, Wordsworth saved the area from the intrusion of Windermere railway and people in the area still think about it as his greatest achievement. Hence the Wanderer's final words in the *Excursion* are hardly surprising:

I grieve, when on the darker side
Of this great change I look; and there behold
Such outrage done to nature as compels
The indignant power to justify herself;⁴⁹

In fact, some parts of *The Excursion* exemplify Wordsworth's own fear of change through the voice of the Wanderer. The birth of a huge town causes the natural surroundings to change and ultimately, to vanish, and the Wanderer deplors this fact:

The footpath faintly mark'd, the horse-track wild,
And formidable length of splashy lane, . . .
Have vanish'd - swallowed up by stately roads,
Easy and bold, that penetrate the gloom
Of England's farthest glens. The earth has lent
Her waters, air her breezes; and the sail
Of traffic glides with ceaseless interchange,
Glistening along the low and woody dale,
Or on the naked mountain's lofty side.
Meanwhile, at social industry's command,
How quick, how vast an increase!⁵⁰

What follows is a description of factory work, where men, maidens, youths, mothers and little children go to work under unnatural light of this 'illuminated

pile'.⁵¹ Their 'unceasing toil' is part of the daily routine, which is harsher than human suffering in the time of war.⁵² The factory remains their only 'temple', where they offer 'perpetual sacrifice' to their capitalist master.⁵³

When 'the world is too much with us', as the title of a Wordsworth's sonnet suggests, the only safe and happy shelter is to be found within the loved place. Peace is for Wordsworth the central feeling of all happiness and the ultimate peace can be experienced only in the habitual relation of the self to the place.⁵⁴ Habit is related to the body and the habitual repetition of daily work. However paradoxical it may seem to regard Wordsworth as a 'bodily poet', *The Excursion* reveals a poet acutely aware of man as a physical being and his capacity to remember through the body.

Body memory alludes to memory that is intrinsic to the body, to its own ways of remembering: how we remember *in* and *by* and *through* the body.⁵⁵ The basic borderline it occupies is traced between mind and place: it is their middle term.⁵⁶ The sense of the role of the body in the workings of memory draws on medieval sources and is still strongly felt in empiricist philosophy.⁵⁷

Bergson was the first philosopher to have devoted attention to body memory, but he only took a part of body memory, i.e. 'habit memory' for the whole of it.⁵⁸ Bergson described the body as a continual 'centre of action' and as that 'ever advancing boundary between the future and the past'.⁵⁹ As Edward Casey explains, 'if remembering were only a temporal phenomenon it would remain largely disembodied'.⁶⁰ In that sense, memory involves more than a mere repetition of the past, as 'personal identity' and everything that pertains to an individual life is ultimately rooted in body memory. Nowhere is that assertion more true than in romantic writing, but with a different twist in Rousseau and Wordsworth. As it is clear from various passages in the *Reveries* walking is, to Rousseau, a hypnotic state, where his body forgets itself. This activity makes him utterly self-absorbed. An 'inexplicable void develops' and the mind loses its grip on reality.⁶¹ Especially in reveries his body becomes absorbed in the rhythm of walking and conscious reflection is eliminated. The only purpose of Rousseau's 'actions' (like digging in the garden or collecting plants) is to maintain a state of dreamy passivity. The body is active, but the activity is experienced by the mind as passivity. Both, his interest in botany and his work as a copyist of music are the result of his spontaneous engagement in therapeutic activity. Mechanical motion and an almost automatic life become the sources of pleasure for the older Rousseau, where the separateness of his body makes him care more about himself than about others.

Conversely, the Wanderer's walking triggers the memory of other people and acts as a trigger for his belief in universal humanity. As Wordsworth is using him as his poetic persona, the Wanderer's self-absorption is never final, and it includes everyone around him. The Wanderer remembers other people as being bound up with a particular place and his memory of them is very 'bodily' – the intimate relationship between memory and place is realized through the lived body: his own and the bodies of his fellow men.

Likewise, he is rich in experience and wisdom, because he witnessed the pro-

gress and decay of many families, 'of their minds and bodies', as the Wanderer tells us. Even the dead bodies 'speak' as the Pastor would show us in Book V: the dead in the local churchyard are still very much alive within the local community; the stories of their lives would never be forgotten. As Geoffrey Hartman explains, at one point, 'the poem declines into a massive communion with the dead, noble raptures spoken above their graves'.⁶² Thus the emphasis shifts from individual fates to a universal concern about man's mortality and human strength at the face of life's tragedies and Books V-IX register a series of 'living epitaphs' resurrected by the Pastor.⁶³

As places bring with them intersubjective relations, Avishai Margalit's binary concepts of 'thick' and 'thin' relations might be of use here. While thick relations are anchored in a shared past or moored in shared memory, thin relations are backed by the attribute of being human. Thick relations are in general, Margalit explains, our relations to the near and dear, while thin relations are in general our relations to the stranger and to the remote.⁶⁴ What is of special interest to Rousseau and Wordsworth is the fact that memory is 'the cement that holds thick relations together'.⁶⁵ What distinguishes Wordsworth from Margalit's useful opposition is that his memory encompasses the lives of shepherds, the poor and distressed, i.e. his 'thin' relations.⁶⁶ Thus in Book V of *The Excursion*, when the poet and the Solitary meet the Pastor and he gives an account of poor people's lives in the area, the poet is convinced that the highest moral truth resides with the lowly class:

And they perhaps err least, the lowly class
Whom a benign necessity compels
To follow reason's least ambitious course;
Such do I mean, who, unperplexed by doubt
And unincited by a wish to look
Into high objects further than they may,
Pace to and fro, from morn till eventide,
The narrow avenue of daily toil,
For daily bread.⁶⁷

What follows is the Pastor's apotheosis of rural simplicity, the one that recalls Wordsworth's own words from Preface (1800) to *Lyrical Ballads* where he states that it is possible to trace the primary laws of our nature in the simple language of common people and the incidents and situations from their ordinary life.⁶⁸

Wordsworth's 'thickening' of thin relations is best seen during the feast in *The Excursion* when the poet and the Wanderer accidentally discover a recess in the valley where the Wanderer's friend the Solitary lives. They are both attracted by the sound of singing from the vale:

Of the broad vale casting a casual glance,
We saw a throng of people - wherefore met?

Blithe notes of music, suddenly let loose
On the thrill'd ear, did to the question yield
Prompt answer; they proclaim the annual wake
Which the bright season favours.⁶⁹

The merriment of a group of people is an expression of the sense of community among the people and their connection to the vale they inhabit. Everywhere in the Lake District, the poet and his companions are met with hospitality:

... Hospitable fare
Frank conversation, made the evening's treat;
Need a bewildered traveller wish for more?
But more was given; the eye, the mind, the heart.⁷⁰

The same is true of a worthy couple, Jonathan and Betty Yewdale, whom Wordsworth knew (he placed his children under their care after an illness which required change of air) and who became more than mere acquaintances. The visits he paid to the couple afforded him an insight into the characters, habits and lives of these good, humble, but also wise people. The stories of the people living in the Lake District are 'written in' to the places and this explains Wordsworth's idea of poetry as 'memorial inscription' (cf. Wordsworth's poems 'Michael' and 'Poems on the Naming of Places').⁷¹

However, this is not the case with Rousseau's idea of place and the intersubjective relations arising from it. As I have already stated, on the island of St. Pierre Rousseau finds his self-sufficient paradise. The island is a microcosm situated in a beautiful, circular basin and it provided all the basic products necessary to life. It has fields, pastures, orchards, woods, and vineyards. As Jean Starobinski rightly claims, 'the island is an example of plenitude in a restricted area, 'bordered' and limited by nature herself'.⁷² The plenitude of the place is reflected in the subjective plenitude of Rousseau himself, who claims to have found perfect happiness, 'leaving no emptiness to be filled in the soul'.⁷³ The place itself plays a special part in Rousseau's life – something about it gave him 'such deep, tender and lasting regrets' that even fifteen years later he was 'incapable of thinking of this beloved place without being overcome by pangs of longing'.⁷⁴ He would evoke it again in Book XII of the *Confessions* as 'the happy land of sleep' and it becomes an everlasting point of return: 'more than ever did I sigh for that delightful idleness, for that sweet repose of body and spirit' and if he was not to stay on the island, nothing could prevent him from enjoying it in imagination.⁷⁵ As Eugene Stelzig claimed, the Fifth Walk has done much 'to create the romantic image of Rousseau, the lyrical poet of the timeless moment and of the plenitude of being'.⁷⁶

Rousseau must turn away from society and find happiness in a perfect microcosm: he must turn his gaze from the others to his own self (the Wordsworthian 'egotistical sublime' is thus more pertinently felt in Rousseau).⁷⁷ His solitariness, however, is never complete: if the reader is not aware of other persons on the

island, it is because Rousseau opens himself up only to a form of ‘restrained communication’ with others.⁷⁸ He remains the central figure and ‘transforms’ other people into non-entities. For instance, when he visits the farmers of Montmorency instead of members of the French Academia, he is disappointed at their lack of eloquence and learning as they constantly question him instead of having a meaningful conversation with him. A crippled boy incident from the Sixth Walk in the *Reveries* is also indicative of this point. As Rousseau keeps picking up the same way on his walks, he realizes the reason for it: a woman set up a stall in summer to sell fruit, rolls and tisane. She had a little boy who hobbled about on his crutches begging money from passers-by. Every time Rousseau would pass by, the boy would pay him a little compliment and would be given some money, but as soon as Rousseau’s benevolence turned into habit, he no longer felt the same way about the boy:

This pleasure gradually became a habit, and thus was somehow transformed into a sort of duty which I soon began to find irksome, particularly on account of the preamble I was obliged to listen to, in which he never failed to address me as Monsieur Rousseau so as to show that he knew me well, thus making it quite clear to me on the contrary that he knew no more of me than those who had taught him.⁷⁹

In the end, Rousseau starts avoiding this boulevard. Whenever obligation coincides with his desires, it is enough to transform them into reluctance and aversion. Unlike Wordsworth, he regards the habit of virtue as a trap to lure him into something bad (according to Rousseau, when virtue becomes duty it turns to enslavement).

To conclude, Rousseau seems to be enveloped in his imaginary worlds more often than involved with the place itself. Therefore, Rousseau’s sensibility for place depends much less on his perceptive powers than on his ability to enrich the real with the imaginary. Since he often charges places with personal feelings, the place for him represents an inner space – his emotional and imaginative flights at certain places memorialize for generations events occurring there. Rousseau’s enthusiasm for nature in the presence of Madame de Warens, and his passion for botany and rowing on the island of St. Pierre, managed to create a place of pilgrimage for future generations. Paradoxically enough, by praising landscape beauty and by showing respect for the traditions and the history of a certain place (all being integral to the identity of a place), this severe critic of the newly emerging consumerist society, would unknowingly attract hordes of pilgrims. In 1816, Shelley and Byron would visit Lake Lemán and sail to Vevey where *La Nouvelle Héloïse* had been conceived. Their goal was to experience what Shelley called the divine beauty of Rousseau’s imagination. His ‘Hymn to Intellectual Beauty’ composed during this trip was an act of homage to Rousseau.⁸⁰

Wordsworth’s conception of place is linked to the idea that human identity is tied to location in a reciprocal way: the characters of *The Excursion* influence their surroundings and vice versa. Their identities are therefore place-bound as the

very possibility of the appearance of the self and the other happens within the all-embracing compass of place.⁸¹

Wordsworth also memorialized his love for the native place and its people in his well-known *Guide to the Lakes*.⁸² This book remains one of the best tourist guides to that part of England because it was written for walkers like himself and the true lovers of nature finding pleasure in natural detail. Curiously enough Wordsworth's Lake District receives today 12 million visitors each year and abounds in gift-shops, restaurants and hotels bearing Wordsworth's name or the names of his famous poems and images from the poems that have become emblematic of this part of England. So the natural beauties are sold to tourists as if they were household commodities, something Wordsworth himself was concerned about.

Both Rousseau and Wordsworth pay special attention to the importance of place, as it becomes part of their identity. The self cannot be understood as some substance that underlies mental states, but is constituted through the complex unity of actions and attitudes, and through their relation to objects and persons in the world – to have a sense of one's own identity is to be aware of one's particular place within the world.⁸³ These two writers return to the past in order to regain time, but they accomplish it through the 'localization' of memory: in this recovery of time in place, their lives are recovered as well.

Notes

- 1 William Hazlitt, 'On the Character of Rousseau', in William Hazlitt, *The Table Talk*, accessed March 15, 2010 <http://www.blupete.com/Literature/Essays/Hazlitt/RoundTable/Rousseau.htm>
- 2 In Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), Hartman states that there had been no real body of criticism on *The Excursion*. The poem was largely neglected due to the fact that it was considered to be a second-rate work. Hartman himself says that *The Excursion* is much weaker than *The Prelude* because it offers us no vision and the reader is always brought close to some substantial drama but never allowed to see it. However, in David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), Simpson said that it was impossible to talk about Wordsworth's poetry without taking into account this very work.
- 3 William Wordsworth, preface to *The Excursion* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co.; Windemere: J. Garnett, 1856), 1. All references to *The Excursion* are to this edition.
- 4 Ibid. ll. 62–8.
- 5 From the introduction by Peter France to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, translated and with an introduction by Peter France (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2004), 12. All references to *Reveries* are to this edition.
- 6 In M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism – Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971, 28–32), the author contends that the meaning of this culminating marriage must not be underestimated, it is the solution to Wordsworth's contemporary, but also our own, 'age of anxiety'. The individual has become fragmented, dissociated, and estranged in three different ways: within himself, from other men and from his environment. The marriage of man and nature is the road to his reintegration and the final feeling of unity with himself and his community. The romantic age thus first saw and felt the predicament of a divided and alienated man. He shows on the example of Hölderlin and Novalis that Wordsworth's holy marriage was not so unique in European Romanticism. It was rather a common period-metaphor which served a number of major writers of the period to convey complex ideas about the history and destiny of man and the bardic vocation of a poet.
- 7 M. H. Abrams, 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric', in *Romanticism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, eds. Michael O'Neill and Mark Sandy (New York: Routledge, 2006), 220.
- 8 *The Excursion*, Book VII, ll. 28–30.
- 9 Cf. Paul de Man, 'Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 137.
- 10 Wordsworth, preface to *The Excursion*, ll. 40–1; Cf. M. H. Abrams, 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric', 198. The phrase 'despotism of the eye' comes from *The Prelude* (book XI) where the eye is 'in every stage of life / The most despotic of our senses' (ll. 171–4).
- 11 Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 37.
- 12 Laurence Coupe claims that critical theory committed a sin against Wordsworth's poetry, assuming that because mountains and waters are human at the point of delivery, they exist only as signified within human culture. See Laurence Coupe, ed., *The Green Studies Reader – from Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.
- 13 Cf. Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814*, 299.

- 14 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Allan Bloom (USA: Basic Books, 1979), 52.
- 15 In *The Prelude* 'spots of time' are recurrent illuminations issuing from the states of personal crises. As Wordsworth states in Book XII 'there are in our existence spots of time / That with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating virtue whence / . . . our minds / Are nourished and invisibly repaired' (208–12). Thus, 'spots of time' become symbolic of both the literal place the writer had visited and the symbolic place in his own psyche, where memory plays an important part.
- 16 Cf. Eugene Stelzig, *All Shades of Consciousness: Wordsworth's poetry and the self in time* (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1975), 58.
- 17 Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place – Toward a New Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 15.
- 18 *Tintern Abbey*, l. 140.
- 19 'This is Memory, which is as it were the Store-house of our Ideas. For the narrow Mind of Man, not being capable of having many Ideas under View and Consideration at once, it was necessary to have a Repository, to lay up those Ideas, which at another time it might have use of. But our Ideas being nothing, but actual Perceptions in the Mind, which cease to be anything, when there is no perception of them, this laying up of our Ideas in the Repository of the Memory, signifies no more but this, that the Mind has a Power, in many cases, to revive Perceptions, which it has once had, with this additional Perception annexed to them, that it has had them before'. (John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London & Vermont: Everyman's Library, 1977, 69). Memory conceived as a container, a closed place encompassing retained ideas and pictures is also common in the Middle Ages. St. Augustine constantly refers to memory as 'fields and spacious halls of memory', 'storehouse', 'hidden recess', 'secret cell', 'the vast cave of memory with its numerous and mysterious recesses', 'that huge hall of my memory' in book X, chapter VIII of St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. J. G. Pilkington (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1943).
- 20 See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 69.
- 21 J. E. Malpas, 'The Remembrance of Place', accessed July 4, 2014, <http://jeffmalpas.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/The-Remembrance-of-Place.pdf>.
- 22 For Edward S. Casey, the intimate relationship between memory and place is realized through the lived body, so body becomes an important instance of remembering. See his chapter 'Place Memory' in Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).
- 23 We cannot, however, say that the cityscape does not play a positive role in the works of these two writers. Wordsworth of the *Excursion* and the London sections of *The Prelude* (Book VII) feels disorientation at the multiplicity of urban sights. Seen from the outside, London appears to him like 'a monstrous ant-hill' and the visitors to the St. Bartholomew's Fair resemble a thousand-headed hydra. On the contrary in his sonnet 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge', Wordsworth compares the city to nature and at its morning revelation feels a combination of deep excitement and calm. Rousseau, in his turn, expresses disgust at the city of Paris in book IV of the *Confessions*. Yet, we know how much he cherished the city of Geneva.
- 24 Jean-Jacques, *The Confessions*, translated and with an introduction by J.M. Cohen (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965), Book IV, 154.
- 25 Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 1.

- 26 Ibid., 1–2.
- 27 Ibid., 35. The same thought is repeated by Saint-Preux in a letter he writes to Julie on his arrival to Paris: ‘With a secret horror I enter into this vast wilderness of society. This chaos offers me only a frightful solitude where gloomy silence reigns. My soul in the crowd looks to expand and finds itself constricted from all sides’ (231). Quoting from Cicero, he continues ‘I am never less alone than when I am with myself’ (231). This idea, found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1997), is reiterated a number of times in Rousseau’s writing.
- 28 The idea comes from Diderot’s work *Le fils naturel, Bastard son*, which Rousseau interpreted as a direct criticism of his move from Paris. The work can be read as a *roman à clef* in which the character Clairville is Diderot, and Dorval is Rousseau, i.e. the bastard son is Rousseau so he had every reason to be enraged. In Rousseau’s thinking self-love (*amour-propre*), the principle of all wickedness, is revived and thrives in society, which caused it to be born and where one is forced to compare oneself to others at each instant. It languishes and dies for want of nourishment in solitude. Whoever suffices to himself does not want to harm anyone at all.
- 29 Rousseau, *Confessions*, Book XII, 591. The same idea is repeated by Saint-Preux in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. He would dedicate an entire letter to the critique of the society of spectacles and appearances.
- 30 See Peter France, *Rousseau: Confessions*. Landmarks of World Literature (Cambridge, London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 68.
- 31 See Eugene Stelzig, ‘“Sur les ailes de l’imagination” – Rousseau’s Mnemotherapeutic Romantic Prospects’, *Orbis Litterarum* 69, no. 2 (2014): 82–93.
- 32 Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 86.
- 33 Ibid., *The Confessions*, Book XII, 555.
- 34 Ibid., *The Confessions*, Book IV, 157.
- 35 Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book I, ll. 504–9; 512–5; 518–20.
- 36 Ibid., *The Excursion*, Book I, ll. 946–52.
- 37 Ibid., *The Excursion*, Book II, 123.
- 38 See Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1994 [1958]), 31.
- 39 Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book IV, ll. 598–600.
- 40 Ibid., 602.
- 41 J. E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31. This line of thinking also appears in the work of Martin Heidegger.
- 42 I am here referring to the ecological readings of Wordsworth’s poetry by Jonathan Bate, Karl Kroeber, and Laurence Coupe.
- 43 Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 37–8.
- 44 Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 108.
- 45 Ibid., 118–9.
- 46 Cf. E. S. Burt, ‘The Topography of Memory in Rousseau’s Second and Seventh Promenades’, *Yale French Studies*, no. 74 (1988): 234.
- 47 See William Hazlitt, ‘My First Acquaintance with Poets’, in *Twenty-two Essays of William Hazlitt*, selected by Arthur Beatty (London, Bombay and Sydney: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1920), 16.
- 48 Thomas De Quincey, *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*, ed. David Wright (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin, 1970), 135, as cited in Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 49.

- 49 Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book VIII, ll. 154–6, italics mine.
- 50 Ibid., ll. 109–19.
- 51 Ibid., 178.
- 52 Ibid., 176.
- 53 Ibid., 188.
- 54 See Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book III: ‘He fled; but, compass’d round by pleasure, sigh’d / For independent happiness; craving peace, / The central feeling of all happiness’ (ll. 385–7).
- 55 Casey, *Remembering: a Phenomenological Study*, 147.
- 56 Ibid., 180.
- 57 It is interesting that the parts of body involved in the activities of memory were always connected to digestion. The monastic custom of reading during meals has to do with the ability to consume a book as one consumes a meal. See Mary J. Carruthers, ‘From the Book of Memory-A Study in Medieval Culture’, in M. Rossington and Anne Whitehead, eds., *Theories of Memory, a Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 50–8. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke speaks about memory as the power depending on the body: ‘The pictures drawn in our Minds, are laid in fading Colours; and if not sometimes refreshed, vanish and disappear. How much the Constitution of our Bodies, and the make of our animal Spirits, are concerned in this; and whether the Temper of the Brain make this difference, that in some it retains the Characters drawn on it like Marble, in others like Free-stone, and in others little better than Sand, I shall not here enquire, though it may seem probable, that the Constitution of the Body does sometimes influence the Memory; since we oftentimes find a Disease quite strip the Mind of all its Ideas, and the flames of a Fever, in a few days, calcine all those Images to dust and confusion, which seem’d to be as lasting, as if grav’d in Marble’ (71).
- 58 Casey points out that there has been no sustained recognition of body memory from Plato to Kant. See his chapter ‘Body Memory’ in his own *Remembering: a Phenomenological Study*.
- 59 See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 5 and 88.
- 60 See Casey, *Remembering: a Phenomenological Study*, 182.
- 61 Cf. Jean Starobinski, *Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 233.
- 62 Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787–1814*, 296.
- 63 Wordsworth is also known to have written a series of *Essays Upon Epitaphs*.
- 64 See Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 7.
- 65 Ibid., 8.
- 66 Cf. Yu Xiao, ‘Habit and Moral Enhancement in “The Old Cumberland Beggar”’, in Richard Gravil, ed., *Grasmere 2008: Selected Papers from the Wordsworth Summer Conference* (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2009), 60.
- 67 Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book V, ll. 596–604.
- 68 ‘Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language’. From Wordsworth’s preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), in William Wordsworth, *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 447.
- 69 Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book II, ll. 122–7.

- 70 Ibid., Book V, ll. 786–9.
- 71 A good article on the subject of Wordsworthian ‘spots of time’ as memorial inscriptions is Lis Möller’s ‘The Metaphor of Memory in Wordsworth’s Spots of Time’, *Orbis Litterarum* 69, no. 2 (2014): 94–107.
- 72 Jean Starobinski, ‘Rousseau’s Happy Days’, trans. Annette Tomarken, *New Literary History* 11, no. 1 (1979): 147.
- 73 Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (Fifth Walk), 88.
- 74 Ibid., 87.
- 75 Rousseau, *The Confessions*, 591 and 600.
- 76 See Eugene Stelzig, *The Romantic Subject in Autobiography – Rousseau and Goethe* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 106.
- 77 Cf. See Eugene Stelzig, ‘“Sur les ailes de l’imagination” – Rousseau’s Mnemotherapeutic Romantic Prospects’, 84.
- 78 This is Tzvetan Todorov’s term and he recognizes four different types of ‘restrained communication’ in Rousseau’s oeuvre: the first one is *writing* as he remains in contact with others without having to see them or talk to them, the second one is *imagination* as it is an escape from the real world, the third one is *nature* as a substitute for human relations, and the last one is *depersonalization* of others in order to elevate himself. See Tzvetan Todorov, ‘Frêle bonheur’, in *Textes du XXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1985), 48.
- 79 Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 93.
- 80 See Simon Schama, ‘The seat of virtue’, in *Landscape and Memory* (USA: Vintage Books, 1995), 481.
- 81 Cf. Malpas, *Place and Experience – A Philosophical Topography*, 14.
- 82 Jonathan Bate notes that in 1835 his *Guide* was Wordsworth’s most sold out book and it went through five further editions between 1842 and 1859. Matthew Arnold’s story about meeting a cleric who admired the *Guide* and asked if its author had written anything else is not entirely frivolous. He also shows that Wordsworth’s book was unlike earlier guides in two respects: firstly, it was not made exclusively for tourists and as such it invited all kinds of uses and secondly, Wordsworth wanted to show what it meant to dwell there. (Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, 44).
- 83 Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 152–3.

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