Christa Hoeffler

This is a charming, heart-felt essay. I particularly like the tone which is simple, straightforward, and somehow very appropriate for Wordsworth. (I like the picture, too.)

For English-paper purposes you would want to say a bit more about the form of the poem—the fact that it is composed as a dialogue in child-like rhymes. A bit odd that, given that the speaker is no child? To link to the preface, I'd make the argument that Wordsworth is showing us how we might learn "humanity" from conversing with uneducated persons. This poem illustrates the difference, but as you say, in a somewhat elusive way. A least in a way that eludes the narrator.

I'd go after the "simplicity" dimension a bit. I would make a comparison to pastoral, though that is not strictly necessary. But note two possibilities here. On the one hand, the young lady has a childlike perception of things that you could perhaps expand on a bit. On the other, she's also a rural peasant whose thinking might be colored by superstitious beliefs about the dead. The poem is not very clear about these points. Neither is it very clear whether the young lady has a more material or a more imaginative understanding of death than the narrator.

That ambiguity might be intentional for (one could argue) the poem is less about the girl's understanding of death than it is about the speaker's misunderstanding of the girl—which might get us back around to the preface and what Wordsworth thinks we might learn from his poems. Not something about children or peasants per se, but about undiluted human nature. And what, in this case, might that be?

I enjoyed this! Grade: A-

Zander Merle-Smith

This essay could do with more of a focus. I'd go with the use of a the mariner as a character, or else with the use of repetition, or else with the cultivation of a sense of immediacy. There is so much going on in this poem, and so many examples that could be drawn in to illustrate any of these things, that it seems better to work with one in more depth than to try and cover several and leave things rather sketchy. Five pages on the relation of the mariner to the wedding guest seems about right, really: you could work through the passages in which story-telling is an issue, and think about how story-telling in the story illustrates how Coleridge's story is intended to work. If you were to go with repetition, you could easily fill five pages with examples of several patterns at work: the repetition of lines, images, situations, themes—and you could discuss how the patterns vary within and between themselves. There would be lots of detail from which you could develop an argument. Find an argument to develop—a chief point to which the detail in the essay points consistently.

Proof read before submitting. There are ungrammatical sentences here and syntax so torturous that I had to read sentences more than once to make out the meaning. You might get into the habit of reading your papers out loud: where you have difficulty reading, or placing emphasis, that's where revision is called for. Most sentences should be simple in structure, though there's room for more elaborate syntax where you want to create variation, make a particular point, or do something interesting with emphasis. But simpler is usually better. Leave some time between writing and revising so that you can look at an essay with fresh eyes.

What I like about this essay is the sense of wonder at Coleridge's sense of wonder at his own mariner. He certainly does a lot with a little in this hypnotizing poem. Grade: B-

Reece Prothero

This is a great improvement on this last, not least because there is something of an argument here. It's still a little glib though. After all, since the poem is a complaint that Wordsworth's sad feelings are out of harmony with the season, what sense is there in arguing that he "was incredibly in tune with nature and the world of the forest"? You are not necessarily wrong, but this needs to get worked out.

A good way to start might be with the narrator's notion that nature somehow "thinks" (the word is repeated several times). What might that imply? How is nature's "thought" expressed? Through poetry it seems (measure, song, etc.) That creates a basis for comparison between the poet and his subject. Most of the poem is, as you say, "simple," but notice how the syntax becomes distorted and difficult in the last stanza ("If such be of my creed the plan") which is not musical, not in harmony with what comes before. Link the "thoughts" (real or imagined) to their mode of expression, and I think you'll have an argument that will explain how the poet is both "in tune" with nature and "out of tune" with nature. As for the preface, I'd go with some of Wordsworth's comments on habits of thought to set this up. Grade: B

Maegan Stebbins

This is well done: you argue persuasively that the preface and these three poems are all of a piece, and indeed they go to the heart of the program behind the Lyrical Ballads. You select your quotations well, though perhaps you are a little over-generous that way since they lose a little of their force whey they come so quick and fast. But multiplying quotations is surely a necessary business in an essay about repetition!

I think you could get a little more out of this by structuring the argument about repetition specifically. It might go something like this: 1) using repetition within poems to establish a tone and develop a thought or insight, 2) repetition among the poems to develop a program for writing poetry, and 3) a discussion of repetition in the preface where WW stresses the importance of "habits of mind" as a way of cultivating perception. Maybe that's not the order, but these would be the topics. Having run quickly through this, I would return to the argument to the magnificent Tintern Abbey to pull it all together as WW uses repetition to think about past, present, and future: it all comes around again, though never in quite the same way. Lot's of patterns at work here! Get a little more "pattern" into your own essay; you have ample insights to fill it out. Grade: A

Ryan Stebbins

You bring it all together this time. I'm not sure that you really need to discuss both poems—it might be better to have more on the preface and just one poem—but you get results. I very much like the way you articulate the theme of imagination, which had not seemed so obvious to me before. What really clinched it for me was your point about how the villagers "imagine" Martha Ray's guilt. Both poems, it seems, turn on guilt, and both on credulous superstition. You could get a little mileage, I suspect, by contrasting the "superstitious" imagination characteristic of characters in the ballads with the "literary" imagination that the poet shares with the reader. The crossing between the two, which are equivalents but not the same, gets to the essence of Wordsworth and could be brought out with some more reflection on what he has to say in the preface.

Unless I'm missing something, isn't it the case that Harry Gill's sense of guilt is never explicitly stated in the poem? I like the way you make sense of it, but I'm not sure that a character like Harry would necessary feel guilty, though he would certainly feel "punished." Wordsworth is so wonderfully vague about such matters, leaving us to fill in the details by means of our own imaginations, which is rather the point: to what extent are our imaginations like those of his characters? Sometimes the characters see, or at least feel, more deeply into things than we do, though they are not a particularly articulate lot. Anyway, I think you've done a fine job with this. Grade: A

Beth Cameron

This is not so bad, and to the extent it is I'd blame myself for choosing a hard poem rather than for what you've said about it. I don't have much to add in terms of content. This seems to be one of WW's protest poems, implicitly about how wartime inflation was driving up the cost of wheat, and therefore bread. The economy is disturbed and marginally successful persons like this farmer, though not involved in international affairs, consequently suffer from remote causes. Not one of WW's deeper poems.

What is interesting about it is the form, which is not so much like the poems we discussed. I think this might be what is going on, anyway:

This is a poem about counting. Shepherds spend a lot of time counting sheep (that's a pastoral dimension) and WW translates this into a poem that is about numbers (appropriate since the subject is political economy). So count! It is a very symmetrical poem of course, five stanzas up and five stanzas down. There are ten stanzas, each with ten lines, creating a poetical "square." This does not have, so far as I can see, any allegorical significance except insofar as the rigid symmetries of the poem underscore the remorselessness of how the economy effects the lives of simple people.

In a sense, it's not about the man's tears, which are just simple pathos. WW doesn't point to any particular emotional depth, but instead to the remorseless effects of the logic of numbers. Unless, that is, one wants to go with the lambs versus children thought, which is a little scary, or the possible allusion to Job, which is possibly encouraging since it suggests a logic of recovery symmetrical to the logic of loss. But that might be pulling at straws. Perhaps the nugget is the fact that the shepherd is distressed about his sheep than his children. Ah, perhaps that is it: sheep produce, children consume, another distressing symmetry.

That's the best I can do with this one—the preface to LB doesn't seem particularly helpful here. "Simplicity" can be hard to deal with. Grade: B

Nick Allen

This is an interesting essay, to me anyway, since I didn't know or had forgotten that this poem was rejected. I like the details you bring to the reading and what you do with the preface. Being a perverse soul, though, I suspect that the essay would be even better were you to explain why the poem was rejected rather than trying to retrieve it. Why not set WW the poet in opposition to WW the critic? He could be a pretty fierce self-critic because he took his work so very seriously. So let's think about what the problems with the poem might be.

The poem is certainly about a man condemned to death, probably a murderer, given the convict's consuming guilt, but he might be a thief. The last line of the poem about "plant thee where yet thou might'st blossom again" would refer to diminishing the death sentence to transportation to Australia where convicts were sent in the 1790s. The verb "plant" of course contrasts with the stony imagery of the prison and suggests the possibility of repentance and recovery. WW might be thinking of the visitor as a prison reformer, of which there were a number at the time.

I suspect he rejected this poem because it was too much like the heaps of newspaper verse on similar subjects. "The Convict" is more elegant than those perhaps, but it lacks the "zen" qualities of the other LB poems and might have come to be seen, in the poet's eyes, little more than political rhetoric. Maybe. You don't discuss the central stanza about guilty King George sleeping soundly, which WW might have come to regard as a bit cheap.

The claims of the poem, as you rightly say, turn on what is done with the subject of compassion. In a sense, it is at least as much about the visitor as the convict. We know about murderers (ballad fare), but this visitor is, or should be, unusual. But how can WW put this across? He uses the abstractions "grief" and "conscience" ll. 29-30, which (am I wrong?) apply to the visitor rather than the convict. The visitor is sleepless on account of the convict. Did WW find fault with the expression of this idea, or perhaps with the idea of equivalence in empathy?

I don't suppose we can know, but I very much suspect that WW rejected this poem because it doesn't illustrate the kind of deep reflection on concrete objects he advocates in the preface. It may have served a political purpose, but is ultimately more rhetoric than poetry, and so was rejected.

Given your opening, I think you could get more out of this essay by doing a pro- and con-, pitting the younger Wordsworth against the older Wordsworth. Many readers prefer the poet to the critic, the younger, more politically engaged writer to the elder man. I enjoyed your essay, and enjoyed thinking about this. If you have nothing better to do, maybe you could do the "con" version as a rewrite! Grade: A-

Joon Seo

This is certainly getting there. I like the way you use the preface to set up the poem, which was the chief business here. It works. You get into the details of the imagery which is also a good thing to do. Perhaps, though, you labor your points too much when it would be better to move on and discuss other dimensions of the poem. For example, the extraordinary thing is not that there is one nightingale, which is the norm in poems, but a whole chorus of them. Wow! Nightingales making whoopee. Could you make more of the whoopee? One of the extraordinary things about Coleridge as a poet is his command of rhythm, so it would be a good idea to discuss how he tries to echo in his song the elaborate singing of the birds it describes. (Notice, too that Coleridge is not solitary any more than the birds are.) You could make more of the setting too, I think. While it is night of course, the poem rather turns night into day, an inversion that might click with your argument. You are doing the right things; do more of them and you are there. Listen and watch and reflect on what you see; like Coleridge, be alert to new things rather than simply applying the habits of reading learned before. (That's easy for me to say!) Grade: A-

Andrew Wimbish

You have done some good thinking about Tintern Abbey. Your prose is better on this outing, though it still suffers from some of the same issues as before. Probably best to follow WW's advice and simplify: fewer words and simpler words are generally better. Take out your red pencil and get to work. Your mind seems to be humming too fast for your fingers to keep up. Slow down, correct, revise, wait a day, and repeat. Non-grammatical sentences will not do.

I like the spirited way you engage with the preface, though not the noisy way you go about it. It is important to realize that WW was an elitist. But you imply that he was something of a hypocrite about it, which he was not. He was an elitist pure and simple, and perhaps there's nothing wrong with that—provided he can deliver the goods. He writes about using common language as the basis for his poetry but he nowhere claims to be writing for the common man. He knew better: poems so difficult to write would be poems also difficult to read and, elitist as he was, he was somewhat content with that. It would take time to convert the world to his way of thinking. The remarkable thing is that he more or less succeeded, not with the common man (who reads no poetry) but with the common reader of poetry. He claims that he wanted to elevate our taste and imagination, which is kind of outrageous, but at least he is honest about it.

I think your reading of the preface and the poem might benefit from a little more emphasis on the "art" as opposed to "nature" side of things. WW argues that "organic" sensibility is a necessary but not sufficient condition for poetry and heightened perception. These are the work of time and labor, and while in Tintern Abbey he seems pretty optimistic about the growth process the gyrations the poem works through suggest that insights gained are no ordinary matter. Yah, he was an egoist who had the temerity to believe that he was speaking for the human race, nay, for nature itself. But does he make a persuasive case? Discuss. Grade: B+

Amelia Speirs

You do a very respectable job with this tricky poem, which is all the more gratifying since you say some things that suggest that you are not very familiar with poetry. While ostensibly about a place, this is more a poem about time, and you get that.

The business about the preface does not work so well. Wordsworth says that he is writing in the common language, not that he is writing for the common man—a rather important distinction. He will handle common subjects in a very uncommon way, and rightly suspects that most readers will not get his "experiment." The language in Tintern Abbey is not particularly simple or common (though it is plain), so I'm thinking a better bet would be to turn to a different passage in the preface, the one where he talks about the education of a poet, "spontaneous emotion recollected in tranquility" etc., which pretty much lays out the program for Tintern Abbey, a poem that tries to illustrate the argument made in the preface.

In the preface WW writes about cultivating "habits" of feeling which is what he is writing about in Tintern Abbey. You could start with your observation that the verse paragraphs mark divisions in time, and then work through them in sequence looking for repetitions that would indicate "habits." As you point out, things are different every time, so the next step would be to look for developments in the patterns as the poem works from past to present to future.

This is a pretty hard poem really, not written for the common man (who is not likely to read much poetry anyway). But from what you've said about it, I think you could draw links to the preface that would address some of its challenges and make for a pretty fine little essay. You are on the right track—now go for the patterns! Grade: B+

Samantha Freeman

You do a pretty good job with this, finding a passage in the preface and applying it to the poem. You get the poem right, but I think you need to address head-on the seeming contradiction that WW in the poem is pointedly not exercising severe thought on the best models of composition.

What to do with this? Well, you could point out that in the passage in the preface WW is talking about reading poetry as opposed to writing it. Or you could develop the notion that the poem is in fact about "reading," just not the kind of reading that Matthew has in mind. But I think the best thing would be to draw more widely on the preface, taking in what WW has to say about the education of the poet more generally, the discussion of how one goes about forming "habits of mind," that enable ideas to happen "spontaneously." That seems more directly applicable to what you are talking about—though the notion of severity certainly applies in this context since the poems are about "study" and WW is claiming that in his leisurely way he is working as hard a Matthew is, if not harder.

You are writing good clear prose, just the thing for explicating our "simple" friend Wordsworth! Grade: A-

Angela Romine

You are your eloquent self here, and much better on the personal dimension of the poem than I was—imagining the little girl's situation like this is a good way into the poem. You also select the proper passage in the preface to set things up.

Apart from patting you on the back, what more is there to say? Like you, I find that this seemingly simple poem changes on repeated readings. The more I think about the child's notion of death, the stranger it becomes. Is she a materialist, is she a spiritualist? It seems as though she rejects or doesn't understand the body-soul dualism. Possibly she identifies the persons of her dead brother and sister with their physical remains, which are closer than the bodies of her siblings abroad. Or is it that, credulous peasant as she probably was, she imagines them as immaterial ghosts haunting the places where they lived? It is hard to say exactly what she believed, and perhaps the point is that she simply hadn't given the matter any thought. But WW had, plainly, which is why this seems like such a haunting poem.

I enjoyed this much! Grade: A

Brayden Burleigh

You do a pretty creditable job with this. It is a good move to zero in on the character of the sailor like this. Your task is a little tricky since this is a Coleridge poem and not a Wordsworth poem, and Wordsworth doesn't have a lot to say about the supernatural since that was Coleridge's department. But the "incidents of common life" passage is the right one to choose.

Of course, there is nothing very common about what happens in the poem. The point to make, which you do, as that this is an uneducated person describing what he sees, not necessarily understanding things the way we would. So far so good.

Your approach works to a degree, but there's no explaining away all the supernatural here. And more to the point, I don't think we *should*, since the idea is that such "common persons" have insights of value lost on the rest of us. But here is where things get difficult: what are supposed to learn from all of this?

There are various ways of going at this, morally, theologically, and naturalistically. But the way to start would be by thinking seriously about "what does this man know?" Something about guilt, and something about story-telling. You might start with that, do something with mirrors and patterns, and conclude by looping back to the preface on the subject of "poems with a purpose." Grade: B+

Ben Welch

I like how you rip into the preface here: that's the way, let's talk about ideas! I also like the way you concentrate on the notion of simplicity, a rather tricky subject and worth investigating. I think you do a pretty creditable job with it, though of course, professor-like, I can't just let simplicity be simple.

Wordsworth's poems are about as subtle and elusive as those of Spenser or Donne, no? They call forth thought and require close readings since small details matter a lot. How are they different from Spenser and Donne? In their language, since as you point out they avoid poetic diction. They also avoid elaborately patterned syntax and verbal figures of speech. Wherein then, does the complexity arise? In the thought, in the relation of poet to object, or in this case, the relation between the two speakers.

Maybe you start with that, the misunderstanding that arises between the two. That would set up your discussion of the word "simplicity" (how astute of you to seize on it!). Explain the two meanings of the term and connect them to the two speakers. For the narrator, the word would imply something like "ignorance" or "silliness"—it has a gently negative connotation. But the word can also mean, and for WW presumably does mean, "pure" or "unadulterated." Note that while WW is not using the word metaphorically or as a pun, he *is* putting two senses in play, and that this gets complicated (nothing simple about the word "simple").

This is not like Spenser's allegory or Donne's puns, and yet the double meanings and ambiguities in We are Seven are really quite complex. Just in a different way. Get at that, and you will nail the essay. As it is, you are off to a fine start. Grade: A-

Kendall Pace

Oh, well done! You connect the preface to the poem and write very eloquently about it. A fine response to the assignment. I think it could possibly be a tad better were you to condense and maybe get into the weirdness of what the girl believes. Having just read several discussions of this little poem, I'm more than ever aware of how ambiguously slippery this becomes. It's not clear, for example, that the girl believes that her dead siblings are in heaven, or that she's even familiar with the concept. It's not clear whether her understanding of death is more spiritual or material—she says some pretty odd things, things that become the odder the more one thinks about it. In that sense, she is a good double for the poet, making the "common things of everyday life" seem strange and wonderful. This is a fine essay. Grade: A

Jay Laiche

This is the idea: you quote the preface and work through your topics. Along the way you make some good points; I like the idea that WW is imitating the back-and-forth of a conversation with a stubborn child. Another way to think of it would be as a kind of learning-your-numbers game ("how many fingers am I holding up" etc.) I don't think that you've quite got to the strangeness of the poem, though. The idea is that the girl, if she hasn't got the count right to conventional ways of thinking, is nonetheless expressing something which is "true" about human passions (as the preface argues). What is it exactly that the poem is trying to convey about death which the young lady understands and her interrogator (one of us corrupted city types) fails to understand? Why is it that her brother and sister who are dead seem to be closer to her than those who are dwelling somewhere else? What is her notion of death, anyway? She does say some pretty strange things. I think you could improve on you essay by compressing it (there's too much padding anyway) and using the space to speculate on what the girl is saying and why the narrator in the poem doesn't get it. As for the poetical dimension, the thing to notice is how WW is expressing some pretty deep ideas without using the usual literary devices he criticizes in the preface: without puns, metaphors, and allegory he is able to express some pretty deep ideas in very simple language. Explain how that works, and you are there. Grade: B

Jacqueline Bailey

It seems to me that this essay gets better as it goes along—as if, the more you think about the poem and open yourself up to it, the more things come to come into view. That's been my experience reading these essays. I thought I knew We are Seven, and yet everybody seems to discover something new or different that others, including me, hadn't noticed. There is more ambiguity than the poem's "simplicity" would suggest.

You find the right passage in the preface to set things up. It's not clear whether the important thing about the girl is whether she is "country" or whether she is "childish," or both. The important thing is that she is "simple" in contrast with the speaker. He's not the poet, plainly; it might be worthwhile to try and imagine who he is and what he represents. As you note, this is a dialogue. Can you find things in the preface to help us to imagine what sort of fellow he is? A sort of "Matthew" character?

WW grew up in the country and knew country people. He isn't trying to give us a "realistic" treatment of them, but a kind of selective, transformational, poetical treatment of them. The young lady is no ordinary person, it seems to me—she says strange things that are not typical of children or country persons. What are we to make of that? It also seems a little odd that while the narrator has little grasp of how children think, he speaks in the limited vocabulary of a child, or a nursery rhyme. Hello, what's going on here?

I think you've take this essay just to the point where things begin to get interesting. It might be worthwhile for a re-write if you felt so inclined—if you wanted to spend another hour staring at this little masterpiece, exploring its paradoxical and ambiguous depths. Possibly an essay on the possible meanings of "simplicity"? Grade: B+

Connor Fowler

I enjoyed this. I have a bit of a quibble with the thesis though. The fact that WW is writing about common passions in common language doesn't imply that he is writing for the common man. Rather the contrary, right? WW expects that most readers, even readers of poetry (which would not include most folks) would misunderstand what he was trying to do—and that proved to be the case. To be sure, the words he uses are readily comprehensible, but the sense and purpose not so much. Yah, we get the idea that as we grow older we perceive the world in different ways. The issue, though, has to do with the particular differences WW is talking about in his own case, the case of a poet given to "severe thought" and so forth. I would quote from the preface on "habits of feeling" and the education of a poet, which should get us more into the hidden depths of the poem.

But of course you are right that WW's poems do have a broad appeal, even though the poet himself was a thorough-going elitist. That might be a good thing to try and explain in your essay. How is it possible to write profound poetry without being "poetical"? WW *is* being poetical of course, just not in the expected ways. So you might pull out a passage or passages to illustrate, discussing how this "poetry of thought" works. Just how is it that childhood experiences color the mature writer's view of the world? How does the mind of a poet work, according to Wordsworth? Once you have the thought worked out, loop back and look at the words and syntax used to express the thought or feeling (what is the relation of thought to feeling in this poem, anyway?) and see if you can't explain how common words are being used to express uncommon ideas which, nonetheless, once understood do seem to illuminate what WW means by common humanity. Quote another passage or two from the preface, work out an example in more detail to illustrate the slipperiness of "common," and you're there. It's great to see you taking on this poem! Grade: B+

Jonathan Wolfe

I appreciate the attention to detail here and your response to the rhetorical appeal of the poem. I'm not finding much of an argument, though, and I don't find the "many levels" and "logical reasoning" you refer to in the closing paragraph. It all seems—simple.

To set about analyzing the poem, as opposed to just describing and paraphrasing it, it would be useful to take a serious look at the preface, especially since that's the object of this assignment. The passage you select is a good one, but perhaps not the best for your particular poem. A bit farther down he discusses the education of a poet—the business about forming habits of feeling—and since the subject of your poem is education, it might be more to the point.

Wordsworth avoids verbal figures and even figures of thought; the personifications you discuss are hardly personifications beyond the use of a pronoun. The language is very direct and simple, but the thinking behind it is anything but simple. Taken literally much of the poem approaches nonsense ("let nature be your teacher," the wisdom of birdsong, etc.: what does it mean?) The literary program described in the preface can be quite helpful when it comes to discerning meaning in WW's pretty rhymes, and, conversely, the poem is helpful for explicating the preface. So treat them both together, using one to illustrate the other. Grade: B