

Richard Howitt, Australia and the Power of Poetic Memory

Judith Johnston

Richard Howitt, poet, pharmacist, and smallholding farmer, was born in Heanor, England, in 1799, the younger brother of Willam Howitt, who would become a noted author and editor. The brothers, from a Quaker family, were typical of a newly-educated professional class emerging in the first decades of the Victorian age. Richard Howitt published three volumes of poetry in his lifetime: *Antediluvian Sketches; and Other Poems* (1830), *The Gipsy King and Other Poems* (1840), and *Wasp's Honey; or, Poetic Gold and Gems of Poetic Thought* (1868). His poetry also turns up regularly in various Victorian periodicals such as *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Dearden's Miscellany* and the *Reliquary*, among others. In 1839, with his brother Godfrey and other family members, he emigrated to Australia as a settler but returned to England in 1844, disillusioned. His experiences are recorded in *Impressions of Australia Felix, during Four Years' Residence in that Colony* (1845), a mixture of prose and his own poetry, as well as occasional quotations from other published poets.

Disillusion appears to have beset Richard Howitt in all his endeavours. His various forewords, and his few extant letters, as well as comments in the letters of other family members, reveal a sad and lonely figure whose ambition to be counted among the great poets was never fulfilled. Mary Howitt, his sister-in-law, in a letter to her sister in 1860, wrote of him: "you would find a [something] so indescribably tender and *pathetic* I have written – but that is not the right term – though one feels a deep *pathos* in his spirit. I know nobody likes him" (Howitt Collection Ht/1/1/201). Richard himself, in a letter to Anna Harrison, declared in a rather sad boast that "Wordsworth – Montgomery – Hood – Leigh Hunt – and Tennyson afterwards admitted me to belong to the brotherhood – and if I am only true to myself – although loth – the world will admit it before long" (Howitt Collection Ht/3/2). I suspect he may have solicited these various poets for responses to his work. Revealing a surprising lack of self-awareness, he actually published William Wordsworth's response in his last collection, *Wasp's Honey* (1868). Probably referring to verses Howitt had sent him some time in the past, Wordsworth said, with possibly some irony: "I think my own verses honoured by being interwoven with yours, in a poem treated with such depth of feeling" (v).

Today the poetry of Richard Howitt can seem imitative, pedestrian, and even at times overly-simplistic, but in his own time he, initially at least, saw himself as part of a contemporary poetic movement. Much of his early poetry focuses on rural Nottingham, where he lived most of his life. He was at one stage part of a group known as the Sherwood poets, developing a poetics of place. An excellent example of local poetry from Howitt is "Regrets for Sherwood Forest" published in *Wasp's Honey* (1868) which owes much to Keats's "Robin Hood. To a Friend." While lacking the latter's complexity, the poem constitutes a lament for both a lost forest and open, free spaces. Further, the last two stanzas indicate Howitt's radical and nonconformist politics:

Ye forest-destroyers! Linger and pause,
Good, public and private pursuing;
Oh! War not with Nature's beneficent laws,
Nor blend useless beauty in ruin.

Not useless the beauty of sterile and wild –
Let Time yet some portion inherit!

Where Nature may walk hand in hand with her child,
And nurse him in freedom of spirit. (26-27)

One imagines that part of Australia's appeal to the poet would have been rediscovering what he terms in this poem "primal grandeur" (l.16).

For Victorians with literary ambitions like those of Howitt, the writings of primarily Wordsworth, but also of Scott, Coleridge, Byron, Keats and Shelley, as well as a range of other poets from the early decades of the nineteenth century such as John Clare, Felicia Hemans, Caroline Bowles and "L. E. L." (Letitia Landon), informed all that they wrote, be it poetry or prose. The emergence and development of a poetry which came to be labelled "Romantic" framed and formed Victorian poetic practice. Wordsworth's poetry would have been the subject of much debate during Howitt's early years and Peter Mandler records that all the Howitt brothers "were reared as members of the Society of Friends, countrymen, and book lovers" (Vol. 28, 530). Stephen Gill points out that "professionally the Quaker Howitts worked within the Wordsworthian aura," referring here to William and Mary, but equally appropriate for Richard (117). Moreover, as Jonathan Bate argues:

Wordsworth remains the founding father for a thinking poetry in relation to place, . . . before Wordsworth, the poetry of place tended to be inspired by *occasion* – a patron's request, perhaps, or a historical event or association – whereas with Wordsworth the poetry of place began to be inspired by place itself. (205)

Certainly, place becomes increasingly significant in the expanding empire that, more than any other feature, epitomises the Victorian age. Place is also a key factor in the work of Richard Howitt, especially during his short-lived colonial experience. Australia, a remote and challenging site, becomes a place for Howitt which is impacted by memory, a sense of occasion (*pace* Bate), and the sharpness of exile.

This preamble has been by way of remarking the complex role of place, and by association memory, both for this poet and his poems. More to the point, I will argue that Howitt's poems generally deal very specifically indeed with the issue of memory. Many of the poems designated "other" in *The Gipsy King and Other Poems*, for instance, are occasional, celebrating a varied range of names, places, and events. The poet records occasions which he deems worth memorialising: his pilgrimage to the poet Robbie Burns's Mausoleum in Dumfries; a walk he took in Colwick Woods; his personal celebration of the publication of Anna Jameson's *Characteristics of Women*, in part because her work in turn celebrates the plays of Shakespeare; or an excursion he undertook to Flawford Churchyard. Each of these poems, mostly in sonnet form, is an epitaph to a specific occasion in this poet's everyday home life, and each engages with the concept of memory and memory's eternal enemy, forgetfulness. The volume also includes a set of poems designated "National Sonnets," extolling English patriotism, liberties, and major poets of the past: these particular sonnets all circulate around the desire to remember and record.

I will also argue that memory and forgetting are brought closely into contest with each other. Howitt is at heart a Romantic, celebrating nature as inspiration, most notably in his occasional sonnets. However, the celebration of nature is disrupted when he asserts that "Nature goes ever calmly on forgetting" in his poem "Flawford Churchyard" (*Gipsy King* 150). The disruption is a reminder that Howitt is in fact a Victorian poet and not a Romantic one. Suddenly the notion of a healing and redeeming Nature collapses in the face of a Nature that calmly survives and thrives where human occupation does not. In "Flawford Church-

yard,” Howitt engages with a profound sense of absence, through the unsettling sight of a few surviving headstones:

Here a few headstones, in a field, decaying,
Stand, of the church, gone long ago, bereft,
Strange sense of mutability displaying;
Nor of the village is there vestige left. (*Gipsy King* 150)

In tone, this poem is similar to “Regrets for Sherwood Forest” even though what is signalled is a very different, even opposing, kind of loss. As Paul Ricoeur argues in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, “memory defines itself . . . as a struggle against forgetting,” and he proposes that memory might have to negotiate with forgetting (413). Howitt, through his published poetry, the poem on the page, negotiates with time and the fragility of stone memorials to provide a counterbalance to that ultimate forgetfulness: oblivion.

Memory, at the time Howitt was publishing *The Gipsy King*, is relevant for another reason. Richard Howitt, as noted earlier, emigrated to the colony of Victoria in late 1839 and it is probable that this particular volume of poetry was being prepared for publication simultaneously with the preparations for departure. It seems almost inevitable that the issues of memory, a sense of occasion, and the crisis engendered by the possibility of being forgotten, would have been on his mind. There is evidence that some of the poems published in the 1840 volume were actually written during the passage out, while others had been previously published in periodicals. I have located, for example, five poems in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* across 1835-36. Despite the widely-varying dates of composition it seems clear that selection for *The Gipsy King and Other Poems* was skewed towards the need to memorialise not only in personal terms but also to express a nationalistic emotion. England is idealised culturally, socially and philosophically.

There is no question that Howitt inculcated Romantic poetry and its philosophies and at times its politics, into his writing practice, and that it empowered that practice. This is poetry that framed and coloured memory and recollection. Contemporary reviews of Howitt’s work always remark on the poetical influences of other popular and well-published poets, but at the same time reviewers appear to accept quite readily such influence as natural, as merely enhancing this further output of poetry “that matters,” to recall Stuart Curran’s phrase (219). Frederick MacKenzie, for instance, reviewing Howitt’s *Antediluvian Sketches, and other Poems* (1830) for the *Athenaeum*, remarks on the influences but does not condemn the poet for that:

The stanzas “To a Marten” have much of the dignity and elegance of Mrs. Hemans; – and in “The Truant” – “The Sexton’s Mare” – “The Careless Sleeper” – and the “Village Tyrant’s Funeral” – we see a good deal of the simple truth of Wordsworth’s lyrics. (758)

Extracts from critical reviews of *The Gipsy King and Other Poems* were reprinted in his third and final volume of poetry *Wasp’s Honey* (1868) as “Literary Notices,” along with those solicited comments from various poets noted earlier. These reviews also demonstrate the operation of Romantic influence, and the power to be conjured in the very name “Wordsworth” who was at that date (1840) soon to be made Poet Laureate. Matthew Arnold noted that “Wordsworth has never . . . been so accepted and popular . . . as he was between the years of 1830 and 1840,” basing his achievement on the *Lyrical Ballads and Poems, in Two Volumes* (qtd. Jones 19 & 20). One anonymous reviewer wrote of Howitt’s *The Gipsy King*:

This writer aims to make poetry not the mere slave of pride or pleasure, but a minister of good. With Wordsworth's baldness, abruptness, and sometimes even with his affected simplicity, he has much of his sustained elevation of mind, and of his inspiring philosophy. He loves nature, not merely because nature is beautiful, but because its contemplation is calculated to fill the mind with thoughts profound, and to bring man into solemn communion with the mysterious Power of the universe. *London Saturday Journal* 1840. (qtd. Howitt, *Wasp's Honey* v)

This review offers us an excellent description of how Romantic poetry changed the way in which English countryside in particular was viewed, a change that eventually overlaid countryside and landscape descriptions of locales not only within the British Isles but also others remote indeed from England's shores. Romantic poetics as articulated by Wordsworth and his admirers begins with creativity outdoors in the landscape itself, poetry in motion, coupled to a specific lexicon which Wordsworth's "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads* famously defined as "language really used by men" ("Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)" 264). Moreover, this is poetry tightly linked to the emotion engendered by memory and recollection, again as famously defined by Wordsworth in the 1802 "Preface": "emotion recollected in tranquillity" (273). Howitt, like other Victorian poets of his time, embraced Wordsworthian poetic practices. More importantly, in his emigration to Australia, the belief in landscape-inspired reflections reinforced by the tenets of Wordsworth remains the predominant mode in which he expresses his encounters with the Antipodean landscape, regardless of whether prose or poetry is the medium of expression.

In his essay, "Mr. Wordsworth," published in *The Spirit of the Age* in 1825, William Hazlitt said of Wordsworth's style and practice:

He gathers manna in the wilderness; he strikes the barren rock for the gushing moisture. He elevates the mean by the strength of his own aspirations; he clothes the naked with beauty and grandeur from the stores of his own recollections. No cypress grove loads his verse with funeral pomp: but his imagination lends 'a sense of joy

"To the bare trees and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field'" (349)

This description sounds uncannily like colonial projections of the picturesque onto the Australian landscape. And the "green field" (the lines are from Wordsworth's "To My Sister") is resonant too of John Clare's "green language" as the phrase was coined by Raymond Williams (1911-82). However, the Romantic poet in early colonial Australia could not call on such stores of memory, of recollections, noted here by Hazlitt, if he or she was to develop a fitting poetic vision for the new world. Journalist Henry Chorley, with firm Victorian conviction, said of Richard Howitt's *Impressions of Australia Felix* that, as a colonist, "the poet must look to the future and not to the past," and warned that such a poet should be "less ready to turn pensively back with Richard Howitt" (286). Pensively looking back neatly describes Richard Howitt's reflections on Australian colonial experience in which his homeland takes on idyllic qualities.

Jeffrey C. Robinson in *The Walk. Notes on a Romantic Image* observes that for the nineteenth-century essayists, Thoreau and Emerson, forgetting liberates the mind, enabling a "fresh encounter with the new and the wild" (63). Forgetting, in terms of the poetics carefully developed in Wordsworth's 1802 "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*, is anathema to the poet. This fact is especially pertinent to the sheer power of Wordsworth's own continuing in-

fluence in the early formative decades of the nineteenth century. Although *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) was poorly received at the time, by 1820 Thomas Talfourd was arguing that Wordsworth was a genius and claimed rightly that “Innumerable essays, sermons, speeches, poems . . . are tinged by his fancy and adorned by his expressions” (qtd. Jones 79). Howitt’s response to Wordsworth’s final home, near Ambleside, his “Sonnet, on Visiting Rydal Mount,” published in *The Gipsy King*, reveals something of the poet’s much-noted fame:

Long sought, and late discovered, rapt is he
Who stands where springs the Niger or the Nile;
And I, like wearily, who many a mile
Have voyaged and have travelled, proudly see,
Of this famed Mount, the living Castalie (87)

The excessive figurative language of exploration and discovery is Howitt’s attempt to make of himself something more than the usual enthusiastic devotee. Not surprisingly, like a poetic talisman, a memory trigger, Wordsworth’s name recurs again and again in his poetry and prose, both directly and indirectly.

As Hazlitt so astutely points out, Wordsworth’s poetry epitomizes “habit,” “familiarity,” “attachment,” “association”: this is a lexicon synonymous with memory and recollection. Indeed, for Wordsworth, says Hazlitt, “nature is a kind of home” (350). That nature, however, for the *Victorian* Romantic, is a learned one, a part of childhood, of education, enshrined in memory and in sentimental recollections that have come second-hand as it were from the press. For these reasons the Victorian colonial poet faces a dilemma: to succeed as a coloniser the past must be abandoned, as Chorley had intimated in his review of Howitt’s book. Robinson expresses this issue succinctly: “encountering the new,” he writes, the poet must “willingly [forget] the old” (67). Richard Howitt was neither willing nor able to forget his stores of English countryside recollections, nor to abandon his sense of alienation. Negotiation, as defined by Ricoeur and noted earlier, appears to have been out of the question for Howitt. Niall Ferguson claims that towards the end of the Victorian age “the expatriate’s memories of home became increasingly at odds with the reality. Theirs was a nostalgic, romantic vision of an unchanging rural England” (206). I would argue that in fact this nostalgic or sentimental vision was already manifest, indeed comprehensively established, in print and in art, quite early in the Victorian era, and continued to be reflected in Richard Howitt’s work of 1845. Moreover, this nostalgia applies not only to expatriates, and not merely expatriate memory: rather, it is a nostalgic vision which impacted on and influenced many educated and stay-at-home Victorians across the era as well.

The dominant lexicon of the poems by Richard Howitt reveals the degree to which his practice seems obviously informed by those various tenets Wordsworth set down in the 1802 “Preface” that the language of rural life allows the poet’s feelings to be conveyed “in simple and unelaborated expressions” (265) and that such a language is “a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language” (265). Moreover, the object was “to choose incidents and situations from common life” (264) and “to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way” (264). Habits of meditation and past feelings too are a poet’s tools. At the same time each poem, writes Wordsworth, must have a “worthy purpose” (265). These tenets held good for many Victorian poets, but particularly those practising in the 1830s and 1840s.

Some of Howitt’s poetry published prior to his departure for Australia uncannily predicts the unexpected venturing forth of this Nottingham poet. I am thinking in particular of an untitled

Sonnet, No. X in *Antediluvian Sketches*, which perhaps suggests, even at the early date of 1830, either a restlessness in him, or perhaps a more general restlessness in the population itself, where an expanding empire, particularly Canada and Australia, and the lure of the United States, was drawing away thousands upon thousands of British citizens. According to Ferguson, 600,000 people left Britain between 1815 and 1850, eighty percent of whom went to the United States (112).

“Sonnet X.”

Men, with adventurous keels through unknown seas,
 Have found their perilous way; and, unconfined,
 Roved through strange lands, and dared the deadly breeze
 Of deserts, – adding to the stores of mind.
 They have sought deep into the earth, have sought
 To rend all mystery from the earth and sky;
 Making far worlds familiar unto thought . . . (130)

While the poem itself owes some little debt to the meditation on fame in Shelley’s “Ozymandias,” line seven, “Making far worlds familiar unto thought,” is revelatory in expressing the sheer power of Romanticism in the Victorian age especially as far as colonialism, nationalism and empire are concerned. What we discover here is a paean to the age of Enlightenment, a celebration of the expansion of knowledge and the opening up of the world to the Europeans. At the same time this sonnet is a more generalised literary evocation of a current social, cultural and historical shift which emerges in the words “adding to the stores of mind.” Not only is the actual explorer celebrated, we are also offered insight into a new phenomenon, where travel experience is an armchair one.

Just nine years later, in 1839, Richard Howitt set out for Australia. His experiences, as previously noted, are recorded retrospectively in *Impressions of Australia Felix*, an engaging mix of prose and poetry. Howitt intersperses passages of prose with poems of his own, but the prose itself is supported by quotations from various popular poets, dominated by Wordsworth. His practice demonstrates the degree to which Howitt’s embracing of Romantic poetics produced his particular response to the Antipodes. Not only are poems and poetic extracts intermixed with the prose throughout the early part of the narrative, but there is also a separate section titled “Australian Poems” gathered together at the very centre of the work. As previously remarked, journalist Henry Chorley reviewed *Impressions of Australia Felix* and made two very particular and insightful observations:

But Mr. Howitt, we suspect, early lost heart and hope. Possibly, too, he was employed more to his liking in exploring the fine scenery of the New World, than in fighting with hardships and discouragements. At all events his “Walk towards the Australian Alps” is his pleasantest chapter . . . There is Poetry everywhere; and every condition of life – if its blessed influence be healthily courted and honestly turned to account – is sweetened by its aid and presence. But to thrive in Australia, the poet must look to the future and not to the past. (286, 287)

Richard Howitt’s account is retrospective, as all such accounts naturally are. But his retrospectivity is of a different and more intense kind, as Chorley observes. Right at the outset of *Impressions of Australia Felix* Howitt provides a warning note:

Here let me warn persons of a sanguine temperament . . . not to wander much about, seeking out the most delicious spots in their native land, if they are about to emigrate,

especially in the spring and autumn; at which time England is a paradise; but to shut their eyes and ears, and dash right off for the port. Merry England is studded all over with old ruined castles, on breezy eminences; many throned amongst rocks of savage sublimity and amongst hoary woods. (3)

His version of “Merry England” as described here is idyllic, and imaginary, in Roger Ebbatson’s sense of the term. Ebbatson argues that there are seminal moments in England’s history when writing, and poetry in particular, attempts “to reconstitute and define an England of the imaginary in a dialectical process that paradoxically discovers national identity through its other – moving outwards to imperial margins” (1). The migratory restlessness of the 1830s and 1840s brought about by the failure of England to provide for the working-class mass of its population is, I would suggest, just such a seminal moment that saw both working-class, and middle-class families like the Howitts seek to improve their prospects through emigration. Moreover, this is the decade in which Wordsworth’s influence reaches his zenith.

Howitt’s early poems in *Australia Felix* look back constantly to England’s shores. The very first, “Stanzas” (7), contains none of the excitement or hopefulness one might expect, but rather the prospect of the emigrant’s lot is dominated by terms like “lonely,” “sad,” “woeful,” and the poem ends bemoaning the fact that few will be able to return to be put to rest in the graveyards of their forefathers. A later poem is titled “Patriotic Exultation” (15) which demonstrates Ebbatson’s claim that the defining of imaginary England “discovers national identity” (1). The discovery is, inevitably, also a Romantic one. Howitt’s retrospective prose account of Christmas Day in England is indebted to Felicia Hemans’s “Homes of England” (1827), with its references to sweet peasant cottages and “our glorious national literature”:

We have lived in England . . . We see a graceful, orderly, and intelligent people, stirred by one impulse, flocking to innumerable churches . . . Thankful am I to Providence that I was born and grew to manhood in England. Many of its most living pictures of life and manners thus become to us an ennobling and perpetual property. What is more refreshing than the recollection of many a peasant’s cottage, especially at Christmas time? The breeziness, the sunshine cold but bright on the white-sanded floor; the windows, green and vermilion, with mistletoe and shining holly berries; . . . whilst the redbreast hops in and out, turning his wild timid bright black eye sidelong up at you. God’s blessing on the clean, sweet, rural cottage of the British peasant! Nor do I forget homes where our glorious national literature entering makes them Paradise. Nay, Literature will enter where Fortune will not; and Song having birth there, will imparadise the humblest dwelling. (*Australia Felix* 53)

As was his practice, Howitt collated complimentary quotations from reviewers of his earlier works which appear on the flyleaf of *Australia Felix*. Frederick MacKenzie, reviewing Howitt’s *Antediluvian Sketches* (1830) for the *Athenaeum*, writes that the poet “has a fine taste for nature in all her simplicity” which Howitt duly included (757). Then Howitt adds to the quotation from MacKenzie a statement that does not actually appear in his review: “We recommend his book to the million of readers who study nature in books, if not in the fields. He is healthfully English in his compositions” (iv). This latter statement highlights the point I made earlier of a learned nature (“nature in books”) and emphasizes Howitt’s Englishness. That he chose to insert this after the failure of his colonial enterprise is significant.

But what should we make of the Australian poems in *Australia Felix*? The date of composition occurs on some. The first I wish to explore in detail is “To the Daisy, on finding one

unexpectedly in Australia, July 30th, 1840” (171-73). The poem reveals Howitt’s obvious familiarity with the various poems Wordsworth addressed to the daisy, of which there are at least four variants titled identically for the most part: “To the Daisy” which begins “In youth from rock to rock I went”; “To the Daisy” which begins “With little here to do or see”; “To the Same Flower,” which begins “Bright flower! whose home is everywhere”; and lastly, “To the Daisy” which begins “Sweet Flower! belike one day to have / A place upon thy Poet’s grave.” This last is in memory of Wordsworth’s brother who died at sea and explains its elegiac quality. The first three appear in *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807), all four in *Poems* (1815), and two variants in *Poetical Works* (1837). It is no wonder then that Howitt’s poem expresses over and over his delight in encountering an English daisy, “this fairy from my native land” (l. 3). The daisy has Wordsworth’s imprimatur, and is nature both in books and in the field. Discovering the flower in Australia is a “glad surprise” (l.4) but then the second stanza reveals the extent to which memory is an issue for him:

Daily I meet some shape or hue
That brings old times before me new:
Some token of life’s brightest hours,
In streams and trees, and birds and flowers:
The past is by such spells unbound:
But never, until now, have found
What made me feel on English ground. (172)

Howitt’s verse suggests how Romantic associations for his Victorian readers can readily be, to use Rey Chow’s terms from another context, “packaged in a predictable refrain” (107-08), “In streams and trees, in birds and flowers” (l.11), the mere listing sufficient to evoke a proper, informed response from his readership. And just in case his feelings are not clear, the daisy itself is declared to have a long and illustrious literary history:

Flower of the dawn, and dawn of song!
O, well may grace to thee belong!
By ancient bards how blazoned wide –
And how by Wordsworth glorified!
And seen by Burns he could not choose
But crown thee with unfading hues –
Thou – loved of every sylvan muse! (ll.43-49)

Incidentally, Burns’s poem is “To a Mountain Daisy” (1786) which describes the flower in the standard lexis used by both Howitt and Wordsworth: “modest,” “unseen,” “unassuming,” “humble.”

Howitt’s poetic practice is very obviously informed by those other all-too-familiar tenets Wordsworth set down in the 1802 “Preface,” but the “Preface” written for *Poems* (1815) may also have come under Howitt’s notice. Here Wordsworth offers somewhat contradictory advice to the poet:

The powers requisite for the production of poetry are, first, those of observation and description, i.e. the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are . . . and with fidelity to describe them, unmodified by any passion or feeling . . . whether the things depicted be actually present . . . or have a place only in the memory. 2ndly, Sensibility, – . . . to observe objects, both as they exist in themselves and as re-acted

upon by [a Poet's] own mind. . . . 4thly, – Imagination and Fancy, – to modify, create, and associate. (*Poems by William Wordsworth* viii-ix)

The daisy is the object upon which the process of Wordsworth's imagination is worked. Issues of memory are also readily located in Wordsworth's daisy poems. For instance, in the first "To the Daisy," the flower has a "sweet power" that aids memory and the flower is assured that "Thy long-lost praise thou shalt regain" (*Poems* 1815, I, 325-29), which Wordsworth explains in a footnote: "See, in Chaucer and the elder Poets, the honours formerly paid to this flower" (*Poems* 1815, I, 239). In the second poem the flower's importance rests in its ability to conjure thought and reverie in the poet (*Poems* 1815, I, 263-65). The third "To the Same Flower" regrets that the flower does "little on his memory rest," arguing that much can be learned by Man from its humble, meek bearing (*Poems* 1815, I, 266-67). Wordsworth's flower poems had considerable *cachet* in the early Victorian period, given the evidence of contemporaries like Elizabeth Gaskell who records in 1836 that she has "brought Coleridge with me, and am *doing* him and Wordsworth – *fit place for the latter!* I sat in a shady corner of a field gay with bright spring flowers – daisies, primroses, wild anemones, and the 'lesser celandine'" (emphases Gaskell's, qtd. Gill 119). Incidentally, there are a number of Wordsworth poems addressed to the Celandine in the 1807 and 1815 editions.

Gaskell's celebratory statement confirms a shift away from the wider landscape to focus on the meadows and hedgerows and native flowers that would become sentimentally symbolic of British countryside. The flower poems in particular support this shift, despite Gaskell doubtless being well aware, in company with the Howitts, of the earlier denunciatory periodical reviews and the vigorous debates over the poems. For instance, Francis Jeffrey, criticising *Poems*, in *Two Volumes* for the *Edinburgh Review*, was scathing about "To the Daisy," writing:

The first [of the contents] is a kind of ode "to the Daisy," – very flat, feeble, and affected, and in a diction as artificial and as much encumbered with heavy expletives, as the theme of an unpractised schoolboy . . . The scope of the piece is to say, that the flower is found every where; and that it has suggested many pleasant thoughts to the author – . . . It ends with this unmeaning prophecy:

Thou long the Poet's praise shalt gain;
Thou wilt be more belov'd by men
In times to come; thou not in vain
Art Nature's Favourite. (qtd. Jones 39-40)

Intriguingly, this prophecy actually comes about with Howitt's poem. Thomas Talfourd, by 1820, is providing a very different assessment which is to become the standard Victorian one: "Touched by him, the hills, the rocks, the little hedgerows, and the humblest flowers – all the grandeurs and tendernesses of creation – shine in a magic lustre," adding "The common forms of life assume a new venerableness when he touches them" (qtd. Jones 76-77). Wordsworth's famous ode, "Intimations of Immortality," first published in the 1807 collection, ends with a reference that would include the daisy:

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. (ll. 203-04)

These are, in fact, the very lines quoted by Hazlitt in his 1825 essay “Mr. Wordsworth” which he prefaces with the statement that there “is no image so insignificant that it has not in some mood or other found the way into his heart: no sound that does not awaken the memory of other years . . . The daisy looks up to him with sparkling eye as an old acquaintance” (350). Given its freight of literary associations, one can see why this daisy in Australia takes on such importance for Richard Howitt. In terms of technical poetic practice, then, it is worth noting that Howitt’s 7-line rhyme scheme, aa/ bb/ ccc, is made complex by the surprise of the ccc lines at the end of each stanza, perhaps suggesting the surprise at encountering this English flower in the Australian bush. For the most part, the poem’s lexis is predominantly monosyllabic (as with Wordsworth), as if reflecting the simplicity of the English flower. In the lines quoted previously recording the daisy’s poetic lineage, there is a recurrence of exclamation points, far outnumbering their use anywhere else in the poem, so that its Wordsworthian heritage is given a very particular, even pointed, emphasis by Howitt.

Howitt’s purpose is clear. Despite the daisy’s lowly status in England, “A common thing in common sight” (l. 53), a status confirmed by Wordsworth, in Australia the flower as mere object, via Howitt’s poetic imagination, takes on an entirely new meaning, not just triggering memories, but invoking intense feelings of isolation and loss. Howitt can neither “prize nor scorn” Australian flowers (l.57). They have no meaning for him because he never gathered them nor knew them as a child. They appear neither in the books nor in the fields of his memory. Australian flowers therefore have “No life-long memory, homely power” (l. 69). This poem was written in the first few months after Howitt’s arrival in Australia and so no doubt reflects very natural homesickness.

In a later poem titled “To a Small Australian Flower,” written in August 1843 and published in *Hogg’s Weekly Instructor* in 1847-48, Howitt implies that only the regard of the white man can comprehend this unknown flower’s “worth and grace,” although he cannot name it and the flower remains a “noteless thing” (8-9). In the last three of the twenty-stanza-long poem, Howitt contemplates transporting the Australian flower back to England:

Long thy light was from me hidden –
 Soon, will be no longer seen,
 By the solid globe divided
 As we heretofore have been.

Still for thy pure look benignant,
 And for hours which thou dost cheer,
 I, in that far land of beauty,
 Fain would see thee, and revere.

Yet to see thee chill’d and drooping –
 Hard return for solace given –
 Were unmeet, and more so stooping,
 Where the skylark sings to heaven. (9)

In these last four lines Howitt imagines the flower feeling the pains of exile just as he does and that it will be out of place in the land of the skylark.

Like his poet hero, however, Howitt wrote a further daisy poem: “To the Daisy. On again finding one in Australia, Sept. 12, 1843.” Interestingly, the two poems mark the beginning and end of his exile. Just four months later he will be preparing to “quit this far-away country

– this wrong side of the world” (*Australia Felix* 334). In this second poem Howitt is already seeing in his mind’s eye the imaginary England of his recollections, that England which Ferguson describes as a “nostalgic, romantic vision of an unchanging rural England” (206). Howitt’s second daisy is “Made by hallowing memories sweet” (l. 12) as in the following sentimental lines:

Thou dost bring as from the dead
Visions of our English lark,
Warbling blithely overhead;
And the bird that cheers the dark:
In those seasons of delight,
When thou wert in daily sight.

When a bowery village lane,
Copse, or dell, or chiming brook,
Homely, well could entertain,
As an ever-open book;
Fancy, feeling, thoughts which grew,
Hourly, fed with wonders new.

All an exile’s sadness seems,
Round thee, lonely flower, to brood:
As if food of far-off dreams
Sole sustained this solitude:
As a nature far apart
From home-happiness and heart. (182-83)

Growing beside the daisy is what Howitt inappropriately terms an “alien flower,” that is, an Australian one. If only, Howitt contemplates, it was a cowslip or a Celandine, “What old greetings would there run” (l. 41).

The sadness of the exile is the predominant tone throughout *Australia Felix*. In sharp homesickness, the fifth stanza of a poem titled “Old Impressions” complains:

I’m tired of woods for ever green:
I pine to see the leaves decay:
To see them, as our own are seen,
Turn crimson, orange, russet, grey. (177)

Moreover, the second half of *Australia Felix* is made up of a series of short essays, possibly designed originally for publication in periodicals. In the essay titled “Glimpse of the Bush” we discover Howitt chiding himself for making comparisons with England (273). Nevertheless he expresses pity for the children of English parents who will never know his England, using the, by then, very familiar line from Wordsworth’s “She dwelt among the untrodden ways” and misquoting a line from John Keats’s *Hyperion, Book I*, “Those green-robed senators of mighty woods” (l. 73):

You see a bandicoot run, rat-like, before you to its rabbit-like hole in the ground; a hare would be the more graceful object. Near you stands an old gum-tree . . . massy, gigantic, gnarled, and fantastically branched as the English oak; but, “O the difference to me!” not so venerable a tree, not “the grave senator of mighty woods.” A most

stately, a most superb tree, august in the rich depth of its leafiness, is that adorning and defender of Britain. (273-74)

The discussion continues in strictly Romantic terms and signals the degree to which Howitt's homesickness now dominates his thinking, and an idyllic England emerges directly from the poetry in which he is schooled:

I ask myself what kind of boyhood must that man's have been? He never saw the blue gleam of hedge-sparrow eggs in the fresh budding garden-hedge. What kind of flowers were his daisies and buttercups? Only to think that he never saw a cowslip or primrose; never wandered in a sweet English meadow; nor ever saw a bank of violets. . . . What idea can he have of a green rural English lane; or of a country village, . . . How utterly are lost to him the green freshness of small homesteads, with their shrubby line of flowery hedge-rows, and the deep rich shadowing of *umbrageous* trees. His native trees are scarcely worthy of the term. (emphasis Howitt's, 274)

Despite the failure of Australian flowers to move him, Howitt's poem titled simply "Sonnet," published in the separate collected poems in *Australia Felix*, proves an interesting, even elegant, response to antipodean flora – even while his sense of alienation remains predominant: the flowers turn their gaze upon him, as if aware that he is out of place, and they are resistant to any attempt to transform them:

Themes for Australian poets, loveliest flowers
 Fix sweet regards upon me: some with eye
 Serious and thoughtful; others archly sly.
 Amongst them do I spend delightful hours,
 And marvel how unwearied Nature dowers
 With grace these alien wilds. Blue as the sky
 One gleams, all beauty: one, of fiery dye,
 Outflames the sunset, and the sight o'erpowers.
 Others of lowlier aspect, look demure:
 Some calm as contemplation, and eve's star:
 Others, as infancy, are bright and pure:
 Many, more brisk, wear looks of Love, or War.
 Even like the world of Men the many are –
 Vain, grave and dull, conspicuous, or obscure. (179)

Notably the themes of memory and recollection are absent here in what is essentially a poem of place. If he failed to forget, failed to negotiate a balance between memory and forgetting, and failed as a colonist, nevertheless this is one of Howitt's better productions in a Romantically-dominated *oeuvre* that is often trite or overly-conventional. The power of memory, so often triggered by poetic recollections, ultimately defeated this Nottingham poet's colonialist ambitions. Memory, in the shape of an idyllic and imaginary England, drew him back to his homeland. He returned to Nottingham to live out his days in comparative obscurity. He continued to write poetry and to publish in a range of short-run journals but never achieved the fame or acclaim he yearned for.

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