Wordsworth and discovery: A romantic approach to composing

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"WORDSORTH AND DISCOVERY:"

A ROMANTIC APPROACH TO COMPOSING

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Susan C. Critchfield
June 1985
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ABSTRACT

The Romantic revolution in English literature redefined writing theory, carrying it from its emphasis on conscious controls to an allowance for inspiration, insight, and imagination. William Wordsworth exemplified Romanticism's basic tenets in his poetic theory, his own composing practice, and his poetry; throughout, he combined the conscious and unconscious powers, relegating them to a temporal order in a process.

More recently, the diverse literature on writing as a process of discovery echoes Wordsworth's approach to composing, signaling changes in current writing theory similar to the reforms brought about by the Romantics. A modern Wordsworthian definition of discovery refines the phenomenon according to four distinguishing marks: expectation, early insight, memory, and writer-based prose. As refined, such discovery can be encouraged through teaching.

Thus the creative tension that inspired the Romantic revolution is creating a new Romanticism today, one that effectively synthesizes the writer's many powers.
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Introduction

The neo-classicist Samuel Johnson once said, "A man may write at any time if he will set himself doggedly to it." Several years later, the Romantic Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote, "A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.'" Both writers epitomize their respective eras, their attitudes reflecting a radical change in writing theory. This change, born in the eighteenth century and reaching maturity in the nineteenth, is the revolution from neo-classicism to Romanticism in English literature, a movement that redefined both the poet and the poetic process. Its effects are sweeping, remaining a part of current writing theory and enjoying yet another revival as we find new ways of describing and explaining the "mysteries" of Romantic insight.

The neo-classicists saw the poet as an artful interpreter. Ideas were located in the external world, and the task of the writer was to present them, or interpret them, in a way that would appeal to an audience, thus binding the writer to a largely rhetorical approach. Various prescribed models and means were available to the writer, and imitation or use of those prescriptions provided the writer with, supposedly, all available options for presenting a subject. The particularly skillful writer was marked by
an aptitude for finding different ways of presenting accepted material, or for recovering material that no one else had thought to present. The substitutes for invention and imagination were judgment and art—qualities of deliberation, not inspiration. Art remained imitation, a mirror of the usual in nature.

The Romantics saw nature differently, to say the least. For them, nature was unusual, a source of pleasure, terror, and moral instruction. Human nature also received their attention as the center of genius and poetic inspiration.

Once the stress had shifted from the external world to the individual poet, the way was opened up for the introduction of a new orientation in the theory of art. According to M. H. Abrams, movement was more and more to the poet's natural genius, creative imagination, and emotional spontaneity, at the expense of the opposing attributes of judgment, learning, and artful restraints. As a result the audience gradually receded into the background, giving place to the poet himself, and his own mental powers and emotional needs, as the predominant cause and even the end and test of art. (21)

Eventually, then, the poet became not an interpreter, manipulating external facts, but instead the source of
ideas and the creative illuminator of nature. Whereas the prerogative to create had once belonged to God alone, and the poet's role was simply to imitate God's products, the poet of Romanticism rises in stature, able to perform the artist's own acts of creation, analogous to God's creative acts (Perkins, Writers 19).

A key element in Romantic theory is its emphasis on spontaneity. Whereas in the neo-classical interpretation, the cultivation of a conducive state of feeling was just one of the artful means a writer could employ, in Romanticism, a spontaneous surge of feeling was a necessary condition for initiating poetry (Abrams 72). The writer's own emotional state had become more important in the creative act than the prospect of affecting an audience. Abrams points to this change—from spontaneity as a subordinate part of poetic theory to its position as the central principle—as the signal of neo-classicism's demise. This change also coincides with the shift from the sweeping epic and the universal tragedy to the more personal, emotional lyric as the poetic norm (84).

In keeping with the Romantics' celebration of primitive, natural humanity, the belief spread that although poetry had developed into "an art of managing elaborate means for achieving deliberate ends," poetry, at its most primitive and natural, had been an "entirely
instinctive outburst of feeling" (Abrams 82). Spontaneity, besides meaning that the emotions and the capability to allow their overflow lie within the writer, also suggests that such emotions and such an overflow may not be within the poet's deliberate control.

Similarly, the Romantics believed that the poet is inspired—not necessarily in the Platonic image of a human suddenly possessed by and speaking the words of a god—but inspired, nonetheless. To embrace inspiration means to believe that poetry is at least somewhat involuntary; there is something involved that is far beyond sheer human will. Inspiration, according to Perkins, was regarded by the Romantics either as "an invasion of the conscious mind from the unconscious or, more frequently, as a peculiarly rapid and total mental functioning" (Writers 19).

As the Romantic movement took hold, even the more traditional poets began to admit that they had experienced unpremeditated verse. Sir Walter Scott, using a language that has been repeated by other writers in the decades after him, wrote in a letter in 1817:

Nobody knows, that has not tried the feverish trade of poetry, how much it depends upon mood or whim . . . in sober reality, writing good verse seems to depend upon something separate
from the volition of the author. I sometimes think my fingers set up for themselves, independent of my head. (quoted in Abrams, 214)

Every successful revolution has its voice, and the Romantics found theirs in William Wordsworth. In 1800, Wordsworth first published his landmark "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," defining for the first time the specific characteristics of Romanticism. Wordsworth's conceptions of nature, the origin of poetry, the language and subject matter of verse, and the person of the poet became the touchstone for an entire movement. In subsequent prose works, as well as within his poetry, Wordsworth continued to redefine the basic assumptions of writing theory.

Just as the Romantic revolution dawned upon a world of deliberation and conscious labor, so, I believe, are some recent glimmerings in writing theory bringing their light to a discipline caught up in models, goals, and outlines. Most adults now living have been schooled in an approach to writing that demands conscious application at every turn, an approach that values the final product while devaluing the person and the process that brought it into being. Writing is, in this neo-neo-classic sense, manipulation—an artful means to
an end.

A shift began in the 1960's, similar in importance to the initial Romantic shift from external location of ideas to their origin within the poet. This modern shift is one of definition: writing, once considered primarily a product, has become defined as a process. Thus, instead of an emphasis on the goodness or badness of a particular essay, for example, the focus of the writer or teacher is on the way in which that essay was created. As in the Romantic shift, emphasis has moved from something external to the internal workings of the writer's own mind.

A result of this relatively new interest in and study of writing as a process has been the recognition of writing as a process of discovery. The notion that the individual writer can make unpremeditated discoveries and recover forgotten truths is a Romantic one. Even the words used in the current literature on discovery are echoes from Romanticism—"insight," "imagination," "memory," "surprise"—words used and defined by Wordsworth.

We can see Wordsworth's mark in the new Romanticism. Even more, it seems to me, a careful, informed application of Wordsworth's composing theory to the current views of discovery can lend some shape to those views, refining and authenticating them. Thus we
turn first to Wordsworth, for a grounding in his Romantic process of composing, and then to discovery, the modern practice of Romanticism.
As a very young poet, Wordsworth started with the then-common assumption that the associational power of Fancy is characteristic of youth and of lyric poetry. He further assumed that reliance on the Fancy would eventually fall away and be replaced in maturity by the conscious processes of reason. At age seventeen, when leaving Hawkshead school for the university, indeed he presented himself as one who had made the transition, as one who now relied for his poetic powers on the fully conscious mind (Sheats 37, 39-40). Once he began, however, to rely on his personal visions, the mystic revelations of God in nature, he was faced with the task of reconciling such unconscious events within the confines of reason. This necessary reconciliation, it seems to me, provides the basis, and indeed, the working example, of a theory of the composing process.

Wordsworth set forth and, over time, refined his critical theories in his prose writings, most notably in his prefaces. Within these essays we find the tenets of his Romantic theory: the role of nature, the necessity of spontaneity, and the cooperation of the various faculties.
Central to Wordsworth's theories regarding poetry and the composing process are his definitions of Imagination and Fancy. In the "Preface of 1815," he distinguishes between Fancy, as dependent for its material on the physical, temporal world, and Imagination, as transcendent, moving beyond time and sensory impressions. "Fancy," Wordsworth says, "is given to quicken and beguile the temporal part of our nature, Imagination to incite and to support the eternal" (PrW III 37). Both faculties function by association, but they function under different "laws," according to Wordsworth. Fancy does not change the materials associated, or does so only slightly, while Imagination deals expressly in the maleable: "the images invariably modify each other" (PrW III 36). Thus the imaginative mind works upon the thing perceived, which the senses have already "half-created."

Wordsworth ultimately stands convinced of the superiority of the Imagination, with its associational yet transcendent powers. Throughout his poetry, Wordsworth gives examples and further explanation of its workings. In The Prelude, he claims that, when relying on the Imagination, minds

\[
\text{build up greatest things} \\
\text{From least suggestions; ever on the watch,} \\
\text{Willing to work and to be wrought upon,}
\]
They need not extraordinary calls
To rouse them; in a world of life they live,
By sensible impressions not enthralled,
But by their quickening impulse made more prompt
To hold fit converse with the spiritual world.

(XIV 101-108)

Closely related to Wordsworth's theories regarding Imagination and Fancy is his treatment of surprise in composing, a phenomenon often associated with Fancy. In Wordsworth's poetry, surprise occurs when the poet's (or a character's) attention is focused wholly on a particular scene or object. A sense of expectation accompanies such concentration. Once the attention begins to relax, a completely different object enters the poet's perception; this unexpected intrusion shocks the perceiver, making a strong impression on senses already aroused in heightened expectation. Because surprise powerfully unifies the perceiver and the object perceived, without regard for time, it can be a means of transport, removing the perceiver from temporal existence. Thus surprise qualifies as a "mystical" experience, and may represent a first step in the process of Imagination.

Wordsworth relied heavily in his own practice on mysticism, the "spots of time" that for him transformed
the temporal world into the eternal. The "spots of time" were involuntary responses to natural occurrences; Wordsworth did not will the huge black peak to "stride after" him and "move slowly through the mind" for days after the Stolen Boat episode in *The Prelude* (I 357-400), an episode prompted by an ordinary observation of and encounter with nature. Thus, unlike Blake before him, Wordsworth does not see realism and imagination as opposites, but rather allows natural objects to spur his imagination, making his a mysticism firmly "grounded in the senses." Yet the Imagination's transformative powers lift to another realm objects perceived by the senses. This natural mysticism becomes a central part of his poetic theory.

The mystical experience, though, is not according to Wordsworth the appropriate atmosphere in which to compose. The writer's spontaneity comes into play on two separate occasions in the creation of a poem: first, the poet responds spontaneously to a natural object; then, only later, the poet recollects that sensory experience, thus spurring a second "spontaneous overflow of feelings" which itself creates the actual poem.

Most remarkable about Wordsworth's theory concerning these two spontaneous occurrences is his belief (or attempted explanation) regarding what happens
within the poet's mind in the intervening time, a testimony to the power of memory. The original experience, he says repeatedly, is not fully interpreted at the time, but is saved in the memory for later, when it will appear transformed. In "Tintern Abbey," he credits the remembrance of "beauteous forms" for his "tranquil restoration" in other times and places. In The Prelude, he claims, "Yet to the memory something cleaves at last, / Whence profit may be drawn in times to come" (II 630-31).

The poet, being powerfully impressed by an experience, forgets the experience consciously, but still in the unconscious mind the remembrance of the experience combines with other remembrances. Then later, when the emotion of that original experience is "recollected in tranquility," the original experience has been transformed. The resulting poem, according to Wordsworth, has prepared itself in that intervening time, and the immediate task of the poet is merely to put the poem into words (Perkins, Wordsworth 69). Wordsworth admits that he did not always have a "distinct purpose formally conceived" when he would begin to compose, but instead he trusted that the connections within his mind had already been made, and that the poem he wrote would result from those connections (Perkins, Wordsworth 72-73). While at first
glance Wordsworth's notion of a poem preparing itself in the writer's unconscious mind might appear to imply inactivity, Wordsworth himself suggests that precisely the opposite is true: the writer, whether or not consciously controlling the thoughts, has a mind that actively links and connects (Perkins, Wordsworth 65).

Still withal, Wordsworth calls the poet's state of mind one of "wise passiveness," an aware receptivity, waiting for the unconscious to bear its fruit in the conscious mind. The poet thus still is not exempt from the rigor of deliberate thought; the passiveness is a "wise passiveness," the result of wisdom gained through preparation of the mind. The spontaneous overflow then becomes the reward for having "thought long and deeply." According to Abrams, Wordsworth thus "refined the key assumption of aesthetic primitivism into the conception of a spontaneity which is the reward of intelligent application and hard-won skills" (113).

For all of its primitivistic leanings, Romanticism was actually a movement of the learned and the intellectual. There is therefore no discrepancy in Wordsworth's insistence that the poet be at once instinctive yet intelligent, spontaneous yet sophisticated, openly receptive yet deeply pensive, passive yet wisely and actively so. Wordsworth was not anti-intellectual; instead, he reconciled and
synthesized two divergent ways of thinking about writing and creativity by placing the conscious and unconscious processes in a temporal order.

In his relegation of the conscious and the unconscious to different times in the composing process, Wordsworth prefigures modern definitions of the writing process. According to his scheme, the deliberate, artful, conscious actions take place only after the actual composition of the poem. The moment of composition itself is completely spontaneous, natural, imaginative, free of conscious strictures, a moment that would be destroyed by critical intrusion.

As the herald of a movement that celebrates the unpremeditated rush of feeling, Wordsworth's balance of the old and the new, the conscious and the unconscious, in both theory and, as we shall see, in his own practice, provides a practical, reproducible approach to composing. In later years, an older Wordsworth writes, "The logical faculty has infinitely more to do with poetry than the young and the inexperienced, whether writer or critic, ever dreams of . . . a discernment which emotion is so far from bestowing that at first it is ever in the way of it" (quoted in Havens, 128), an observation that seems at first uncharacteristic of the inspired Romantic, until we realize that such logical discernment was a part of his composing process all
along.
Chapter I, Part II

Wordsworth--Practice

In his own composing practice, Wordsworth displayed the mix of conscious and unconscious processes evident in his theory, apparently relegating them to a chronological order which called for different processes, in turn. For him, the initial moment of insight played a large part in composing—a part so crucial that, once his own experiences of mysticism ceased, he was hard pressed, as a poet, to endure their loss.

According to Perkins' thorough account of Wordsworth's writing process, Wordsworth composed aloud, his first draft usually coming rapidly even as he shaped and re-shaped it to his satisfaction before setting it down on paper. For some reason, he experienced "all kinds of bodily uneasiness" when holding a pen (Wordsworth 68). For Wordsworth, it seems, the naturalness of spoken language provided the flow and spontaneity essential to his poetic practice. In a composing session, he most often produced a whole poem or an independent block of a larger poem, thus relying on the hope of actually completing something as an impetus to produce (Wordsworth 68).
While Wordsworth was careful to avoid the intrusion of critical consciousness in the spontaneous moment of composition, he did, in his own practice, reserve it for later. Once a poem had freely come into being, he revised it "slowly, laboriously, and in agony" (Perkins, Wordsworth 68). It was only at this point that the logical faculties became relevant to the poet's task. Poetry thus became the marriage of nature and art.

The moment of insight became, for Wordsworth, the inspiration for poetic composition. His moments of transcendence most often arose as surprises when his unusually expectant senses were shocked by the presence of an impressive natural phenomenon. These special circumstances, followed by time, followed by their recollection in tranquility, provided the basis for Wordsworth's poetry.

Yet he never mentions these experiences in letters or conversations and, presumably, he ceased to have them after 1804, when the crossing the Alps episode in The Prelude probably occurred (Havens 174-175). So essential was the flash of insight to Wordsworth, that Sheats speculates, "The central drama of his career lies in his struggle to perpetuate this revelation, and . . . to survive its loss" (41). Or, in Wordsworth's own anguished words, from "Intimations of Immortality": "Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now,
the glory and the dream?" (56-57)
In his poetry, Wordsworth deals with "all shades of consciousness" and all the processes of imagination those "shades" imply. Within the following excerpt alone, he reiterates the main points of his poetic theory: the visual image, the "creation of the eye"; the transformative combinatory, energetic power of Imagination; the strong impressions left by nature on the mind; the experience of re-vision, resulting from the power of memory, which recalls the original impressions to "yet a second and a second life." The poetic description of consciousness was, in a real sense, the business of Wordsworth's verse:

There is a creation in the eye
Nor less in all the other senses; powers
They are that colour, model, and combine
The things perceived with such an absolute
Essential energy that we may say
That those most godlike faculties of ours
At one and the same moment are the mind
And the mind's minister. In many a walk
At evening by moonlight, or reclined
At midday upon beds of forest moss,
Have we to Nature and her impulses
Of our whole being made free gift, and when
Our trance has left us, oft have we, by aid
Of the impressions which it left behind,
Looked inward on ourselves, and learned, perhaps,
Something of what we are. Nor in those hours
Did we destroy
The original impression of delight
But by such retrospect it was recalled
To yet a second and a second life,
While in this excitation of the mind
A vivid pulse of sentiment and thought
Beat palpably within us, and all shades
Of consciousness were ours. (PW V 342)

Sheats, in his examination of Wordsworth's early poetry, finds an artist in transition, discovering those things that would eventually carry his work into the realm of Romanticism. Wordsworth was apparently acquainted with the associational power of the Fancy, which may, as we saw earlier, serve as a first step in transporting the poet's mind from the immediate to the invisible. According to Sheats, Wordsworth early "takes for granted the extreme subjectivity of lyric poetry and devotes his attention to the technical problem of describing consciousness," which he does at that point
by adapting existing means to express his own personal experience (12).

For all of his eloquence, the mature Wordsworth often included irrelevant, inelegant details and expressions in his poetry. Havens believes these lapses in eloquence to be the results of Wordsworth's trying to represent his observations exactly, as well as to give an appearance of spontaneity (17). They may also be the natural product of someone who composes aloud, as Wordsworth did, and, in any case, they are in keeping with (or at least an approximation of) his belief, expressed in the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads,*" that the poet should use the natural, rustic language of real people.

There can be no doubt, when reading Wordsworth's poetry, that he knew transcendent experiences when logical faculties failed and another "shade" of consciousness took over. In "Tintern Abbey," he speaks of instances when we are

... laid asleep
In body and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.
It is this moment of transcendent vision that brings poetry into being.

21
For Wordsworth, the transcendent vision is a glimpse of the afterlife, yet his own belief system regarding the eternal need not determine the content of any other writer's moments of insight. In "Intimations of Immortality," Wordsworth describes the transcendent vision as "those shadowy recollections" of another life before—and after—the conscious, physical life we know. The poet sees the glimmerings of that other world and takes them as "the fountain-light of all our day." Such an experience of illumination from a life outside our material world is authentically Platonic and intensely Romantic.

Contact with eternity, however, may be redefined within the confines of memory; whatever has been perceived but not understood at the moment of perception can later, through the power of memory, emerge with new meaning. The poet, as in Wordsworth's more mystical belief, remembers what others have forgotten, a remembrance that illuminates all of life, and allows the writer to "see into the life of things."

Vision is the recurring sensory image in the moments of insight, yet it is the experience of re-vision, seeing again, that brings recognition and significance to the original perception. In the earliest experience of this re-vision, described in The Prelude, Wordsworth says "that bodily eyes / Were
utterly forgotten, and what I saw / Appeared like something in myself" (II 349-51). Throughout The Prelude, in the several instances when Wordsworth describes further "spots of time," he returns to the visual and the illuminative. In the well-known passage following his realization that he had crossed the Alps, he writes of an incident that he knew was a great moment at the time, but that only later takes on a truer meaning and glory. In these lines, he combines all the characteristics of the imaginative experience; in terms of light and sight, he speaks pointedly of the conscious and its "usurpation" by the welling up of the unconscious, and of communion with eternity:

But to my conscious soul I now can say--
"I recognise thy glory:" in such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours whether we be young or old.
Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be. (VI 598-608)
Wordsworth was an explorer, searching the human mind and memory, and describing what he found. In Havens' words:

He was exploring the deep well of the unconscious and he sought to tell all that he saw, or all that seemed significant. He explained it as best he could; what baffled him and what he understood only in part he at least put down; what he felt dimly but could not express he tried to suggest, convinced that

... the soul

Remembering how she felt, but what she felt Remembering not, retains an obscure sense Of possible sublimity, whereto With growing faculties she doth aspire (The Prelude, II 315-319). (6-7)
Chapter II, Part I

Writing as Discovery

The testimony of practicing writers in describing their own creative processes resonates with examples of insight similar to the moments described by Wordsworth. Over and over again, writers admit that they, like Wordsworth, do not know exactly what they will say on paper until the sheet is actually before them and the words appear on it. And then, they say, they write more than they actually know. Charles Simic writes, "You never know when you begin a poem what it has in store for you." Edward Albee says, "Writing has got to be an act of discovery. . . . I write to find out what I'm thinking about." And Robert Frost, who might here be a modern interpreter of Wordsworth, claims, "For me the initial delight is in the surprise of remembering something I didn't know I knew. . . . I have never started a poem yet whose end I knew. Writing a poem is discovering." 1

Discovery. The word and the idea recur in writers' testimonies and researchers' reports. The notion that "something more" is occurring in the act of writing runs like a sub-current through much of the literature on composing. Yet the term "discovery" has been applied
loosely, assuming a variety of possible definitions:

- Discovery is another word for invention.

- Discovery is contained in a moment. It is a flash of insight, an epiphany, one of Wordsworth's "spots of time."

- Discovery is what happens in planning, when the writer explores the possibilities for a piece of writing.

- Discovery is the experience of having a thought "take over" and lead the writer through the writing (like Faulkner following after his characters, recording what they do and say).

- Discovery is bound to the text; it is the happy association of words and meanings that occurs while writing, possible at any stage of the process.

- Discovery is an unconscious act.

- Discovery is the recalling of meanings already known to the writer through experience.

- Discovery is the creation of new meanings.

Such disparate meanings point to a general notion, but do not define a useful term. Yet if we apply Wordsworth's theory of composing to these modern descriptions, certain essential distinctions emerge, suggesting a workable definition of discovery.

First, the writer expects insight to occur. "Expectation and desire" and heightened senses invite the surprise of insight. Like Wordsworth, who knew that initial insight resulted from his own moments of surprise, the writer can prepare the mind to receive
such inspiration. Second, the insight which inspires writing occurs early in the writing process. Wordsworth experienced his moment of insight always as a prelude to composing, a prelude sometimes separated by a long span of time from the actual composition of a piece of writing. Early insight initiates writing, and even though additional perceptions continue to guide the process, these later perceptions are of a different substance, what Wordsworth might instead attribute to the faculty of Reflection, rather than Imagination.

Third, the memory is an active organism—working, linking, composing—not a mere storage bin. Wordsworth attributes power to memory, crediting it with the transformation that eventually makes an initial perception into a poem. Fourth, a piece of writing, at least in its early drafts, reflects the process of thought that created it. Lawrence Osgood calls a writer's works "maps of the country" the writer has explored. Wordsworth's own drafts bear the marks of his mind's working. If we are to accept his view that the actual composing of the poem is an occasion of unconscious process, then we must expect such evidence from the mind to be visible in the writing itself.

While current researchers and theorists have called nearly everything that happens in writing "discovery," Wordsworth offers a more refined view of what happens in
different stages of the writing process. Authentic discovery, in Wordsworthian terms, would seem to find its definition according to the four guidelines above. Strictly rhetorical approaches, and models that use "discovery" to mean goals and goal-setting, may at this point be considered neo-classic in spirit and contrary to the essence of discovery. Current thought on writing as discovery, examined within the context of the four points, should sharpen and support such a Wordsworthian approach.

EXPECTATION

A sense of expectation, accompanied by a heightened sensitivity, is, for Wordsworth, the necessary circumstance for surprise. The writer expects something to happen, and then is pleasurably surprised by whatever does occur—whether or not that occurrence fits the writer's original expectations. Writers can choose to invite surprise of the sort Wordsworth describes; Donald Murray calls such invitation an attitude of "purposeful unknowing," the same attitude Wordsworth would call "wise passiveness."

In his article "Writing and Teaching for Surprise," Murray defines surprise far more broadly than Wordsworth would. Still, Murray is speaking of surprise as initial insight when he names expectation as one of the six elements that foster surprise in writing:
The wonderful thing about surprise is that the more you experience surprise the easier it becomes to experience it. Surprise breeds surprise. And you can learn to be patient at your desk waiting for surprise to land. (3)

Other current researchers on the writing process agree. Mimi Schwartz, in her case study of discovery, "Two Journeys Through the Writing Process," identifies discovery as a conscious choice, at least at the outset. The writer, she says, chooses one of two directions, either discovery or restatement (or as the Romantics might say, creation or imitation). No matter the mode, the writer's expectation that the writing will be a means of discovery is crucial for its being so. Other researchers, too, stress the necessity of expectation—Janet Emig; Murray, in various articles; even the empiricists Flower and Hayes.

Since, paradoxically, surprise proceeds from expectation, the cooperative roles of expectation and surprise in discovery warrant further examination. For Wordsworth, surprise occurred when attention and expectation were focused on one matter, and another intruded, thus creating two contexts demanding attention and meaning. A possible explanation of surprise as conflicting contexts comes from Piaget and his studies of children. In Thought and Language, Lev Vygotsky
notes that Piaget had detected a flurry of egocentric speech in children who were presented with a disruption or problem during an ongoing task (16). Vygotsky theorizes that such egocentric speech is a direct reflection of thought, stimulated into activity by an intrusion.

Arthur Koestler develops the idea of conflicting contexts fully in his book, *Insight and Outlook*. According to Koestler, two fields of awareness may operate at one time in the mind. Insight occurs at the intersection of the two fields, when an idea that "makes sense" in one field or context also "makes sense" in the other (a simple example would be a pun, which makes sense in two different contexts). Koestler says of creativity, "The moments of inspiration are those when the train of thought returns from its excursions into one field or the other to the line of intersection" (340).

Jerome Bruner, in his book *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand*, ventures a similar explanation for metaphor, occurring on the line of intersection between contexts:

Metaphor joins dissimilar experiences by finding the image or symbol that unites them at some deeper emotional level of meaning. Its effect depends upon its capacity for
getting past the literal mode of connecting, and the unsuccessful metaphor is one that either fails in finding the image or gets caught in the meshes of literalness. (63)

The implications for such insight, based on a surprise invited by intentionally conflicting contexts, are rich: the mind that can intentionally choose its contexts may fulfill well-warranted expectations. Similarly, a teacher can create various contexts within essay topic assignments, readings, and other class activities that will enable student writers to move within different fields, finding insight at the points of intersection.

EARLY INSIGHT

For Wordsworth, the moment of insight comes early in the writing process; as we saw, the initial transcendent inspiration is the impetus for his poetry. The position of discovery at the beginning, rather than as a recurring phenomenon, runs counter to many uses of the term in the current literature on composing. Certain researchers apply "discovery" loosely, as something that happens in revision just as surely as it happens in an inspiration before pen meets paper. Wordsworth sees the initial surprise, the "spot of time," as the crucial incident of discovery, providing material for the memory to do its work. Subsequent work of the memory is a "re-cognition" of earlier events, an
altogether different process from the original impression of insight.

Murray, in his article on surprise, calls surprise "the starting point for the effective writer" (3). In another article, Murray names a series of "signals" that tell the writer when it is time to write, one of the signals being a visual image in the mind, reminiscent of the visual in Wordsworth's theories ("Write Before Writing" 177).

Yet even Murray is not stringent in relegating discovery to a place early in the process. Indeed, in "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery," he argues that the entire writing process is a way of "using language to discover meaning in experience and to communicate it" (86). Such a use of the word "discover" refers to a function of the mind rather different from the moment of insight Wordsworth attributes to the Imagination. Murray here deals with events that take place only after the first draft is completed. Wordsworth would call these events the result of Reflection or Reason, the most sophisticated faculty that effectively combines inspiration and deliberation in that later moment when he can say, "I recognize thy glory." Still, though, the work of Reflection is not the work of discovery.

Schwartz makes what may be a useful distinction in
her treatment of revision. She says to view rewriting still as a "creative act," a time when the writer is still "discovering meaning" (198). But she herself puts "discovering meaning" in quotation marks, perhaps indicating that what happens in revision is, technically, something other than discovery. Both Schwartz and Murray specify the discovery of meaning as the province of revision, perhaps, by exclusion, assuming that all other discoveries are made earlier in the process.

One specific method for inviting early insight is the result of Gabriele Lusser Rico's application to writing of research into brain hemisphericity, set forth in her book, Writing the Natural Way. The technique is "clustering," a strongly associative way of evoking thoughts and images. The activity is done in a less-than-conscious state, the writer allowing the brain to move, as Wordsworth would say, "readily, and with a kind of eagerness" among associated ideas. Clustering, as Rico directs, always occurs before actual composing, as a way to discover those past perceptions that will provide the substance and impetus for writing.

MEMORY

Like Wordsworth, the educator Bruner sees the memory as active, constantly combining and transforming, reaching new understandings. In writing about the
importance of children "discovering" ideas for
themselves, Bruner offers a definition of that process
that sheds light on writing as a way of discovering
ideas for ourselves:

Discovery, like surprise, favors the
well-prepared mind. . . . [It] is in its
essence a matter of rearranging or
transforming evidence in such a way that one
is enabled to go beyond the evidence so
reassembled to new insights. It may well be
that an additional fact or shred of evidence
makes this larger transformation possible.
But it is often not even dependent on new
information. (82-83)

According to Wordsworth, the mind continues to work
during the intervening time from initial surprise to
"recollection in tranquility." The faculties of the
mind, he says, include the Fancy and the Imagination,
two faculties very similar to ones described by
Vygotsky, the twentieth-century cognitive psychologist.
Although not dealing with discovery specifically in his
book, Thought and Language, Vygotsky attempts to
describe the nature of the relationship between language
and thought. His development of the concept of "inner
speech," as articulated in the egocentric speech of
children (as studied by Piaget) and the ongoing verbal
thought of adults, suggests that thought can be represented directly in language.

Most important is Vygotsky's theory of concept and complex formation. He describes more basic, child-like thought as "complex" thinking, wherein complexes are formed based on relations between concrete objects. The relations may range from direct association of particular elements to vague impressions that two things might have something in common (64-65). This "complex" thinking appears strikingly similar to Wordsworth's definition of Fancy, wherein associations are made based on resemblances within the natural world. According to Vygotsky, more sophisticated "concept" thinking leaves concrete associations, however tenuous, behind. Instead, traits are abstracted and synthesized to form controlling thoughts or concepts (78). Wordsworth describes the Imagination as a faculty that bases its associations on resemblances with transcendent realms, stripped of corporeality. Such constant activity of the mind, described by both Wordsworth and Vygotsky, suggests a view of memory as an active organism, seemingly passive, yet on an unconscious level carrying on its intricate work.

In his article "Write Before Writing," Donald Murray speaks of the "delay" between the initial idea and the actual writing. He calls "resistance to
writing" a natural, productive phase in pre-writing. "Even the most productive writers are expert dawdlers," according to Murray. In this intervening time, writers try not to think of their idea consciously, instead letting it develop in the active memory (171). The delay is finally broken by one of two internal or two external circumstances: increasing information or concern regarding the subject, or a waiting audience or approaching deadline (171-172). The two internal signals—mounting information or concern—signify a readiness that indicates the memory has completed its work; the poem has formed itself in the mind, and the writer is ready to write. In another article, Murray tells of that moment of transition:

I used to force writing, to try to make mashed potatoes pass through a keyhole. But it didn't work. If I am prepared then the writing will flow. If I'm not prepared I'd better return to that reflective state where I may play with language, connecting and disconnecting, listening for voice, fooling around, staring out the window, letting my pen, the blind man's cane, tell me where I'm going. ("Surprise" 4)

Dorothea Brande, writing teacher and author of the 1934 book *Becoming a Writer*, stands as an intermediary
between the Romantics and the current process researchers. She insists that conscious faculties be relegated to particular functions in the writing process, and that the unconscious be allowed its role as well, the writer functioning with "now one, now another, in the ascendent" (58). Wordsworth and Brande agree, too, on the active memory. Wordsworth postulates that an incident, forgotten in the conscious mind, combines with other thoughts in the unconscious mind, and forms itself into a poem. The poet, he believes, should not attempt to compose until this passive work can take place. Brande advises writers similarly:

Don't plan to use the material at once, for you may get only the brittle, factual little items of the journalist if you do not wait for the unconscious mind to work its miracles of assimilation and accretion on them. (114-115)

Linda Flower, in her article "Writer-Based Prose," hypothesizes that there are two kinds of memory: semantic memory, which stores abstracted ideas, and episodic memory, which stores autobiographical events (288). Often, she says, ideas or images are stored with the episode that first produced the idea or image, so often the whole package--episode plus idea--must be recalled. Thus, writing may necessitate "reprocessing an earlier thinking experience as a way to recover what
one knows" (289). This explanation is reminiscent of Wordsworth's "spots of time" recollected in tranquility, recollections formed by association and infused with meaning.

Yet Flower stops short of attributing any active power to the memory. Both in her own work and in her cognitive research with John Hayes, the memory is represented as a storage area; the mind retrieves pieces of "stored knowledge" and manipulates them for prescribed purposes. Wordsworth's "actively linking" memory is here lost.

Flower and Hayes have, in their process research, focused to some extent on what they call "discovery." In their 1980 article, "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem," they begin with a statement of the perplexing problem of discovery and an elaborated attempt at definition. They first see the "myth" of discovery—that is, that miraculous insight lies hidden somewhere—as a passive, self-defeating idea that "leads the poor writer to give up too soon and the fluent writer to be satisfied with too little" (21-22). They then define discovery as a metaphor for a wide range of creative processes; the definition itself is a problem because the metaphor encompasses so much. Adding to the perplexity are, as Flower and Hayes see them, mistaken notions about discovery as recovery; they
believe that such a notion circumvents what is to them the real business of discovery—that is, the making of new meanings rather than the reformulation of old ones found within the writer's own experience.

In this same study, Flower and Hayes approach writing as a problem-solving process, and indeed equate problem-solving with discovery. They find that, in a given writing assignment or project, individual writers represent the rhetorical problem differently, and thus set about solving different problems and setting different goals for themselves. The process of accomplishing the goals may vary from writer to writer, and may even include such strategies as daydreaming and freewriting, but, say Flower and Hayes, "it is important to remember that this process is not a creative accident" (22). (In contrast, Murray says, "Writers seek what they do not expect to find. Writers are, like all artists, rationalizers of accident" ["Surprise" 1].) Indeed, Flower and Hayes point to problem-finding and exploration through goals as teachable discovery.

The importance of goals in guiding discovery recurs in the 1981 Flower and Hayes article "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing." Here they describe writing as a goal-directed process, in which writers set up goals—both large and small, both process and content-oriented—which then guide the writing process
They see goals as being constantly recreated, hierarchically arranged, fulfilled and forgotten as the writer writes. Even though these cognitive models of the writing process attempt to account for the paradoxical nature of composing, they still ignore the Wordsworthian definitions of insight and memory, and rely heavily on rhetorical, conscious processes.

**WRITER-BASED PROSE**

Wordsworth's earliest drafts would fit the definition of what is now called "writer-based prose," reflecting his reconstruction of episodic memory, by which he discovers the thought processes that led to his insight. Linda Flower, who creates the term, draws on Vygotsky in her article "Writer-Based Prose." She sees certain non-audience-aware writing as being close to egocentric inner speech. Such prose wears evidence of discovery—here defined as recovery—on its surface, and while it may be inadequate as communication, it is a useful transcription of the writer's thought. Flower slights the value of writer-based prose, however, presenting it as an elementary form to be abandoned as soon as possible. In her book, *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing*, she urges the writer to move immediately toward a more rhetorical stance and gives advice for translating writer-based into reader-based prose (144-167). On the other hand, Mina Shaughnessy,
in *Errors and Expectations*, notes that basic writers are generally unaware of their own thought processes. Such observations lead us to conclude that perhaps teachers of writing short-circuit writer-based prose, thus preventing students from finding their own ways of thinking. For these students, the move to reader-based writing occurs too early.

Again, the testimony of writers themselves supports the value of writer-based prose as a way of recording thought. Emig quotes Gertrude Stein's advice to writers, presenting it as sounder advice than the structured, rhetorical rules found in most guides to writing. Stein here shows a deep involvement with the same processes of thought and memory that Wordsworth knew:

You will write . . . if you will write without thinking of the result in terms of a result, but think of the writing in terms of discovery, which is to say the creation must take place between the pen and the paper, not before in a thought, or afterwards in a recasting. Yes, before in a thought, but not in careful thinking. It will come if it is there and if you will let it come, and if you have anything you will get a sudden creative recognition. You won't know how it was, even
what it is, but it will be creation if it came out of the pen and out of you and not out of an architectural drawing of the thing you are doing. Of course you have a little more control over your writing than that; you have to know what you want to get; but when you know that, let it take you and if it seems to take you off the track don't hold back, because that is perhaps where instinctively you want to be and if you hold back and try to be always where you have been before, you will go dry. (21-22)

Donald Murray approximates this approach in his two stages of revision: Internal Revision, which is "everything writers do to discover and develop what they have to say," a writer-based approach; and External Revision, whatever is done to communicate to another audience ("Revision" 91). A two-step process, one part allowing the thought to develop and the other consciously shaping it for an audience, is true to Wordsworth's theory and practice, and is gaining in popularity now.

Peter Elbow is the current champion of such an approach, "a rambling process with lots of writing and lots of throwing away." In his book, Writing Without Teachers, Elbow echoes Gertrude Stein, as he presents
his rationale:

Instead of a two-step transaction of meaning-into-language, think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning--before you know your meaning at all--and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve. Only at the end will you know what you want to say or the words you want to say it with. You should expect yourself to end up somewhere different from where you started. Meaning is not what you start out with but what you end up with. Control, coherence, and knowing your mind are not what you start out with but what you end up with. Think of writing then not as a way to transmit a message but as a way to grow and cook a message. Writing is a way to end up thinking something you couldn't have started out thinking. Writing is, in fact, a transaction with words whereby you free yourself from what you presently think, feel, and perceive. You make available to yourself something better than what you'd be stuck with if you'd actually succeeded in making your meaning clear at the start. What looks inefficient--a rambling process with
lots of writing and lots of throwing away—is really efficient since it's the best way you can work up to what you really want to say and how to say it. The real inefficiency is to beat your head against the brick wall of trying to say what you mean or trying to say it well before you are ready. (15-16)

Our understanding of discovery may be refined, then, in Wordsworthian terms. Discovery can occur at different stages, but not every occasion of insight or disclosure of meaning can be called by this name. Throughout, discovery is a distinctly unconscious activity: expectation is fulfilled by unpremeditated surprise; early insight introduces unthought-of perceptions; the memory carries on its work without conscious intervention; the words on paper reflect thought, as yet unshaped. The Wordsworthian marks of discovery suggest a way of writing that allows the writer to enter into the creative process, to make discoveries, and to emerge again, bearing the treasures of the journey.
Chapter II, Part II
Discovery in the Classroom

Is discovery a teachable skill? Apparently, discovery can be learned or developed or acquired, but this does not necessarily make it something teachable, at least as an explicit procedure or a series of discrete steps. While it may be impossible to manufacture moments of insight in the classroom, certain conditions can exist and certain strategies can be taught that provide fertile ground for discovery to flourish.

An expectation that discovery can and will occur can be instilled by the teacher. Emig, in her pioneering study of the writing process, The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders, articulates the importance of the teacher's attitude by suggesting that writing teachers, in order to be successful, must themselves be writers. Otherwise, she reasons, they cannot know the struggle and exhilaration of discovery, nor can they, with authority, pass this experience on to their students (98).

Murray similarly places responsibility on the teacher as a writer among writers, advising teachers to share their own writing experiences with the class.
Attitude and expectation can create a climate for discovery, according to Murray:

You can also project surprise onto your students. If you are a writing teacher who writes—who lures and captures surprise—then it becomes easier for you to expect your students to achieve surprise themselves. And once a few students experience surprise in their writing and share it with their peers surprise becomes epidemic in the classroom.

The more you become knowledgeable about surprise through your own writing and teaching experience the more you will learn how to create an environment that will attract and make use of surprise. And your belief that your students can capture surprise on the page will be reinforced. ("Surprise" 3)

Writers can learn to invite and recognize surprise; indeed, such recognition is essential if students are to learn to exploit the insights they do have. Murray often quotes Denise Levertov's words, "You can smell the poem before you can see it." That creative recognition, the knowledge that something good is on the way, coupled with the desire and skill to allow its creation, may, after all, be developed in the classroom.

Many students believe they must produce a perfect
text on their first try; the researchers overwhelmingly agree that such an attitude inhibits severely the writer's opportunities for discovery. In order for associations, complexes, and concepts to form, for the memory, the Fancy, and the Imagination to do their work, the writer must refrain from editing thoughts prematurely and instead allow them to spill out, to be shaped later.

The recent emphasis on pre-writing techniques and on pre-writing itself as a valid and important part of the writing process is a healthy move, one that is true to Wordsworth's theory and practice. A number of methods have proliferated, many similar to Rico's "clustering." In nearly every case, pre-writing is presented as a time to find ideas and to work with them in a non-critical way. A teacher must be sensitive, however, to the combination of processes students are asked to accomplish in pre-writing: assignments that call for both a description of an event and a discussion of the event's significance demand two very different thought processes—processes that, Wordsworth contends, are separated widely by time.

Just as pre-writing activities may be effective means of uncritical exploration, Elbow's "freewriting" and Flower's writer-based prose are useful pedagogical strategies for discovery. Flower, in her book, says
that writer-based prose may be the best entrance into a
subject for some writers, especially inexperienced ones.
By learning one's own thoughts in the act of writing
them down, the writer lays groundwork for another, more
audience-aware, piece of writing (149). Still, though,
Flower hastens on to strategies for teaching
writer-based prose. Her hurry is typical of most
teaching approaches, slighting the formation of thought
in their rush toward the rhetorical.

Teachers dedicated to encouraging discovery must
allow adequate time. Those who allow time only for
first-draft writing will be doomed to receive
first-draft writing that tries impossibly to be perfect.
It takes time to discover the process by which the
writer is led to surprise, to allow the memory to do its
work, to form associations in the mind, to play with
words and ideas, and to write more than one draft.
Teachers who recognize this time factor can allow for
discovery's occurrence and for its full exploitation
throughout the process.

Finally, Schwartz offers a helpful catchall list of
suggestions for inviting discovery. These suggestions
bear resemblances to the testimony and directives of
numerous writers and theorists: Elbow, Stein, and
Flower on writing freely; Koestler on using rhythm and
sound association as another contextual field;
Wordsworth himself on "thinking long and deeply"; Murray on the writer's productive delay. Schwartz's suggestions are:

- freely listing words and phrases until a unifying theme occurs;
- using rhythms as well as images as a way to begin;
- overwriting until meanings fuse and non-essentials are dropped;
- following an afterthought to see where it takes you;
- building a stockpile of language and forms, by reading, conversation, and listening to other writings;
- applying a set of aesthetic questions to one's work: is it too much? too little? too trite? too many beats?
- keeping the flexibility to drop and rearrange lines;
- letting the work sit for a day or even a month to gain distance and energy for new insights;
- using outside response for work in progress.

Surely, any teacher who passes these strategies on to students is providing a rich context for discovery.

Discovery, once the mysterious trade secret of working writers, can now enter the classroom. Teachers who have experienced discovery in their own writing can, through attitude and understanding of the process, bring a similar experience to other writers—their students. Such teaching writers and their students will feel a
strong recognition of the paradoxes Donald Murray articulates, paradoxes strangely reminiscent of the duality recognized by the Romantic poets nearly two centuries ago:

To be ready for surprise you have to have both discipline and freedom, compulsion and forgiveness, awareness and receptivity, energy and passivity, a strong sense of purpose and a disciplined purposelessness. ("Surprise" 5)
Conclusion

The paradoxes and tensions that brought about the first Romantic revolution are again active, creating a rich variety of modern approaches to composing. The chief tension in modern theory, corresponding to the tension between neo-classicism and Romanticism itself, lies in the disparity between pragmatic, rhetorical, problem-solving approaches and those that are associative, less structured, discovery-oriented. Yet proponents of each approach attempt to account for the other, leading, perhaps, to a synthesis—or at least to a reconciliation.

The pragmatists explain discovery as one means to an end. According to Flower and Hayes, "Behind the most freewheeling act of 'discovery' is a writer who has recognized the heuristic value of free exploration or 'just writing it out' and has chosen to do so" ("Theory" 380). Actually, defining discovery as a choice made by the writer early in the process is not far from the notion that expectation is an essential condition of discovery, a notion historically Romantic.

Similarly, the modern proponents of discovery, like the Romantics themselves, recognize the value of labor. As Perkins points out, the ability to do conscious work
is within everyone's capability, it can be taught, and it can improve even the spontaneous poetry of a good poet (Wordsworth 71).

Indeed, an interplay of these very different powers has occurred, as we have noted, for writers throughout the centuries:

The fact is attested by the creative poets of all ages who, in various idioms, assert that they write according to prior plan and as the result of skills acquired by laborious practice, but that on occasion the central idea takes control and evolves itself in a way contrary to their original intention, and even to their express desire; yet retrospect shows that they have written better than they knew. (Abrams 123)

The whole tradition of English literature—and Wordsworth in particular—suggests that something more can, and does, happen when people write.

Thus the tension that initiated Romanticism and that still exists in writing theory today is a creative tension, a positive paradox that brings to composing a host of powers, both conscious and unconscious. Wordsworth, perhaps better than any other, recognized this essential tension and developed an approach that exploits it. In its truest sense, Romanticism not only
revolutionizes, but reconciles.

Wordsworth's approach is again being realized as writers call upon their fullest powers, relegating individual powers to points in a process that allows the best to happen. The writing process, as described by Wordsworth and as practiced today, invites an effective synthesis of art and nature: of the conscious and the unconscious, the voluntary and the involuntary, the premeditated and the spontaneous, the manipulative and the creative. This is the new Romanticism.
Note

1 In his article "Internal Revision," Donald Murray deals with the testimony of modern writers regarding their own processes of discovery. Murray includes forty-seven short quotations on the subject as an appendix, from which the brief testimonies in this chapter are drawn.
Works Cited


