Bards of a Feather is an adaptation of a talk given by Dr Timothy Hands, the Headmaster of Winchester College, to accompany an exhibition in the College Treasury commemorating Keats's residence in Winchester in 1819. The talk formed part of the city's contribution to the 2019 National Heritage Open Days.

Dr Hands examines the extent to which the College played a greater part than is usually realised in the creation of the cultural construct we know as Romanticism. He examines the published poetry of the Warton brothers, Thomas and Joseph, the guiding influence of their father, Thomas the Elder, and the generation of poets which the two brothers encouraged as pupils at Winchester and Oxford, especially William Lisle Bowles, a poet much admired by Wordsworth, Coleridge and their circle.

The talk repositions Keats's much loved 'To Autumn', composed two hundred years ago in Winchester, as a poem concerned with poetic tradition and genre as much as with season, revealing it as a work of silent and ingenious adaptation as well as of extraordinary individuality of utterance.

Photo credit: Chris Andrews.

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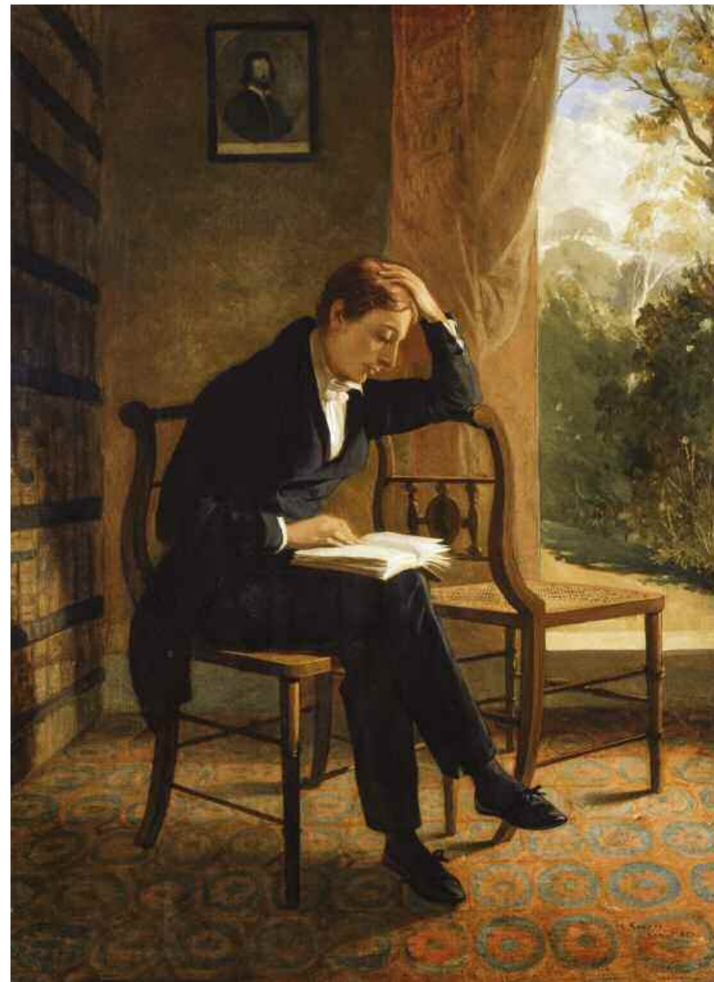
Bards of a Feather

Timothy Hands

Winchester College Treasury

Introduction



Romanticism is generally associated with Wordsworth and the Lakes; Byron and the Isles of Greece; Beethoven and the ramparts of Vienna; David and the Salons of Paris. But two hundred years ago, almost exactly, one of the most celebrated Romantic poets, John Keats, composed one of the best loved poems in our national literary heritage in our own city, on a walk to St Cross. Jane Austen, in *Persuasion*, noted of the character Anne Elliot, that "Her *pleasure* in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn – that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness – that season which has drawn from every poet worthy of being read some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling". Keats called his poem 'To Autumn'.

This talk explores what the Romantic movement and one of its most famous poems might owe to Winchester. It argues that Romanticism partly begins in Winchester and partly ends in Winchester also, and there are seven parts.

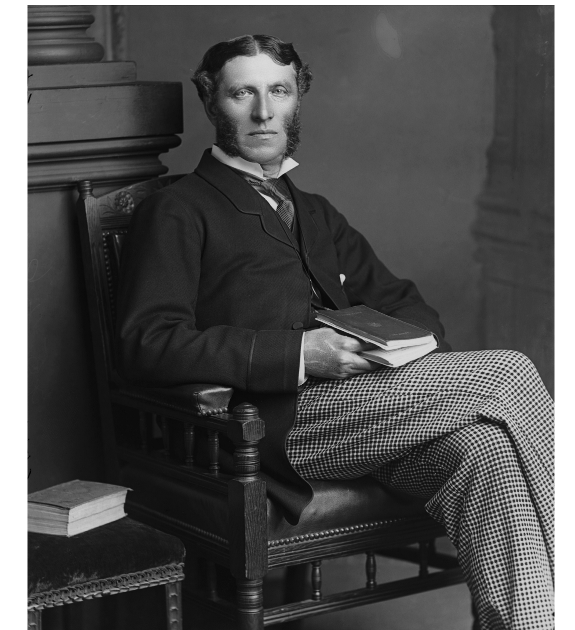
John Keats, by Joseph Severn; © National Portrait Gallery, London.

I: Romanticism: What, Whence and When?

Samuel Johnson, by Sir Joshua Reynolds; © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Dr Samuel Johnson, virtuosic critic, essayist, editor, biographer and poet, was an *arbiter elegantiae*, a shaper of literary taste. The finest poems of the 18th century were, in Johnson's opinion, Pope's translations of Homer. Pope's poetry was, in the poet's own words, "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (*An Essay on Criticism,* 1711). It was generally Latinate, Augustan, and frequently imitative. This style was not for all ages.

"Though they may write in verse", wrote Matthew Arnold, briefly a pupil at Winchester, in 1888, "Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose". Romanticism, deeply beloved of Arnold, superseded the 18th century classical style. "I cannot send you my explanation of the word "romantic" because it would be 125 sheets long", wrote Friedrich Schlegel to his brother Wilhelm, in 1793. But for the purpose of what we call Div, there has to be an explanation, and mine goes something like this.



Matthew Arnold, by Alexander Bassano; © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Washington Crossing the Delaware, by Emanuel Leutze; licensed under Creative Commons; photo credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Romanticism is a European cultural movement which explores the importance and rights of the individual. It has three prominent characteristics. First, in philosophical terms, it esteems the imagination as a faculty higher than reason, and transcendentalises religion by taking God or the divine as inherent in people or nature. Second, in political and revolutionary terms, in an era of world war and profound economic change, Romanticism rebels against aristocratic and bourgeois social, political and structural norms. Finally, in terms of aesthetics, Romanticism explores the self, and the relationships of self in particular to nature.

It honours poetry and the arts as the highest human creations, and espouses values and subjects which are individual, often extreme or alternative.

Romanticism is often presented as a sudden and dramatic change – and violent too. Alfred de Vigny argued that the French Romantics had been "conceived between battles, and attended school to the rolling of drums". This talk explores a radically different view. It sees Romanticism as earlier, quieter, and more local – the heritage of Winchester, not Philadelphia, Paris, or Vienna.

II: Romanticism: A Winchester View

Each of these Romantic constituents, Philosophy, Aesthetics and Revolution, play out in Winchester over a long timeframe. The philosopher Anthony Ashley-Cooper (1671-1713), Third Earl of Shaftesbury, attended Winchester between 1683 and 1686. His ideas prefigure several aspects of Romantic philosophy. Shaftesbury connects "seeing beauty" with "acting beautifully": the natural stimulates the moral. Next, his concept of intuition anticipates the Romantic focus on the creative imagination; and finally, his view of human nature anticipates Rousseau: our nature produces spontaneous impulses to be generous, sociable, and helpful. These notions were preoccupying Shaftesbury as early as 1711, when he published his *Characteristics of Men*.

Maurice Ashley-Cooper; Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, by John Closterman; © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Winchester also had a distinctive aesthetic, or, more particularly, a poetic tradition. The College traditionally had a scholarly aspect amongst the seven public schools, as well as a certain reclusiveness, unlike the city locations of Westminster and Charterhouse; the leisured out of town wealth of Harrow; the far removed provincial locations of Shrewsbury and Rugby; or the courtly associations and connections of Eton. A distinctive phase in this poetic tradition commences with the poet Edward Young (1683-1765), who attended Winchester from 1694. Young's *The Complaint, or Night-Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* (1742-45) was for Boswell "the grandest and richest poetry that human genius has ever produced", and led to the so called Graveyard School of poetry. A separate talk could very easily be devoted to it.

Winchester College Mill.

William Collins (1721-59), at Winchester from 1733, published 'Ode on the Political Character' (1746), *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects* (1747), and 'Ode on The Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland' (1749). Johnson fastened on their "peculiar habits of thought": the 1747 Odes, for example, are characterised by strong emotional descriptions, coloured by European war and the Jacobite rising. They exhibit an interest in extremes of emotion and place. Here is Collins in Scotland:

But, O! o'er all, forget not Kilda's race,
On whose bleak rocks, which brave the wasting tides,
Fair Nature's daughter, Virtue, yet abides!
Go, just as they, their blameless manners trace!
Then to my ear transmit some gentle song,
Of those whose lives are yet sincere and plain,
Their bounded walks the rugged cliffs along,
And all their prospect but the wintry main.

Though little noticed at the time, the poems undoubtedly enjoyed an onwards lineage, most notably Wordsworth's solitary Highland Lass, "reaping and singing as she binds the grain".

If revolution never quite came to Winchester, rebellion certainly did, during the Wardenship of Huntingford (1780-1832). Budge Firth, the College's historian of the early 20th century, is unusually forthright on Huntingford's influence: "Huntingford's was the worst influence in high places that we have ever known … The bully to those beneath him was a toady to those above. His motto was "No innovation". Whether it was the French Revolution in his first year of office or the Reform Bill in his last, or the proposal that tea and coffee should be allowed in College, it was all one to Huntingford; all were innovations, none would do".

Portrait by unknown artist, thought to be Warden Huntingford.

In 1793, the Warden's nephew, Thomas Huntingford, wrote that "the summer of that year … filled every country in Europe with rebellious movements, and the boys, in a small way, seemed to imitate the same violent example". The tower was occupied, a red cap of liberty hoisted from the flagpole, and the boys armed themselves with flints from the courtyard.

Agents of revolution: flints.

Relics of conservatism: cobbles.

Huntingford saw no reason for change. Thomas Arnold (1795-1842) reported from College in 1807 that "school life was harsh, often brutal". "There was much talk of a rebellion", a pupil called Charles Minet recorded 11 years later in his diary for 6 May, "which I thought would come to nothing".

But the flints came up again, and this time more boys were involved. George Moberly (1803-85), later Headmaster of Winchester and Bishop of Salisbury, tells us that "The Warden … directed us to write down our grievances … this was done at once, the list beginning that you are ugly". This time the troops moved in.

The *Morning Chronicle*, in 1818, reported: "On Thursday afternoon last a serious disturbance took place among the boys at Winchester College. … The second master went among them to remonstrate on their conduct. … A Magistrate then came down … and desired the boys in the King's name, to surrender; they, however, stoutly resisted, and locked themselves within the College for the night … where they had piled up a great quantity of stones to throw down upon the persons who might be sent against them. The next morning Dr Gabell, headmaster, informed the boys that they need not take the trouble of confining themselves within the College, as he should throw no impediment in the way to their going where they pleased. … The boys then threw down their club sticks … and walked into town in a peaceable manner, when, upon passing through the Cathedral church-yard, they were met by a body of soldiers, who opposed their passage with fixed bayonets. … Thus, till further steps are taken, out of the total establishment of 230 boys, about 40 only remain at Winchester".

III: Romanticism Prefigured: The Wartons

Rebellion might not have triumphed in Winchester, but a new aesthetic was undoubtedly already in place. Joseph Warton (1722-1800) was appointed Headmaster in 1766. Educated at Winchester and Oriel College, Oxford, he published 'The Enthusiast' (1744), and *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746), becoming Second Master in 1755, and serving as Headmaster until 1793.

Joseph both inherited and begat a poetic heritage. The son of a poet, he was also an influential poet and critic himself. His father, Thomas Warton the Elder (c.1688-1745), was Oxford Professor of Poetry from 1718 to 1728: his *Poems on Several Occasions* were posthumously published, under Joseph's supervision, in 1748. Joseph's brother, Thomas Warton the Younger (1728-90), was perhaps also educated at Winchester, followed by Trinity College, Oxford, in 1744. Thereafter his home was Trinity College in term time, and Winchester College, with his brother, in the holidays, fairly frequently acting as a Lord of Misrule. He served as Professor of Poetry from 1756 to 1766, and published his *History of English Poetry* from 1744 to 1781. Appointed Poet Laureate in 1785, he became Camden Professor of History in the same year. His influential *Essays on Gothic Architecture* were published in 1802.

Joseph Warton, by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Thomas Warton the Younger, by Charles Howard Hodges, after Sir Joshua Reynolds; © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Both brothers were well connected and influential. Thomas became a member of Johnson's dining circle, The Club, though when Warton's poems were published in 1777, Johnson described them as:

Phrase that Time has flung away,
Uncouth words in disarray,
Trick'd in Antique Ruff and Bonnet
Ode and Elegy and sonnet.

Both brothers rebelled against conventional poetic theories. A Romantic before his time, Joseph worked to supplant the "School of Pope" and re-establish a native line of English poetry, running: Chaucer/Spenser/Shakespeare/early Milton. "The author … is convinced that the fashion of moralising in verse has been carried too far", he wrote in the advertisement to *Odes on Various Subjects*. "He looks upon invention and imagination to be the chief faculties of a poet", he argued in his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756). "The most solid observations on human life, expressed with the utmost elegance and brevity, are morality, and not poetry … it is a creative and glowing imagination, and that alone, that can stamp a writer." Joseph had a distinctive view of English literature. Aged 17, he started a notebook entitled *Essay on Romantic Poetry*. Essentially, he can be credited with the invention of the word Romantic.

If Joseph produced a distinctive critical voice, Thomas the Younger produced what has been termed as the most influential sonnet of the century:

A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds's, by D. George Thompson; © National Portrait Gallery, London.

'To the River Loddon'
AH! what a weary race my feet have run,
Since first I trod thy banks with alders crown'd,
And thought my way was all through fairy ground,
Beneath thy azure sky, and golden sun:
Where first my Muse to lisp her notes begun!
While pensive Memory traces back the round,
Which fills the varied interval between;
Much pleasure, more of sorrow, marks the scene.
Sweet native stream! those skies and suns so pure
No more return, to cheer my evening road!
Yet still one, joy remains: that nor obscure,
Nor useless all my vacant days have flow'd,
From youth's gay dawn to manhood's prime mature;
Nor with the Muse's laurel unbestow'd.

This sonnet was to prove a source to be joined by multiple tributaries.

IV: Romanticism Inspired: William Lisle Bowles

William Lisle Bowles, by William Humphrys;
© National Portrait Gallery, London.

The Warton brothers were formidable teachers, and unsurprisingly inspired many of their pupils to published poetic expression. Pupils of Joseph included the poets John Codrington Bampfylde (1754-97), Francis Noel Clarke Mundy (1739-1815), and Thomas Russell (1762-88). Pupils of Thomas at Trinity included Henry Kett (1761-1825), William Benwell (1765-96), Edward Gardner (1752-1823), Henry Headley (1765-88), and George Richards (1767-1837). The most famous poet of these, William Lisle Bowles (1762-1850), had the good fortune to be a pupil of both brothers – of Joseph at Winchester from 1776, and Thomas the Younger, at Trinity, from 1781.

Bowles was a Wykehamist through and through, the great-nephew of a Fellow who tried to redesign Meads, and in his own right Sen Co Prae, or Senior Prefect. Even when composing a sonnet about Ostend, Bowles manages to mention Winchester. He won the Chancellor's Medal for Latin Verse at Oxford, and published, in 1789, *Fourteen Sonnets.* The volume was an immediate success. The sonnets have common features: a riparian setting, skill in variation of the sonnet form, a poetic persona of youthful sensibility, with particular focus on personal development and poetic inspiration, and a tripartite structural form involving scenes which are left, revisited, and recollected, in an overall process of healing, solace and recovery.

Robert Southey, by Peter Vandyke;
© National Portrait Gallery, London.

William Wordsworth, by Henry Edridge,
courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, by Peter Vandyke;
© National Portrait Gallery, London.

Here is Bowles at Winchester:

'To the River Itchin'
Itchin! when I behold thy banks again,
Thy crumbling margin, and thy silver breast,
On which the self-same tints still seem to rest,
Why feels my heart a shivering sense of pain!
Is it, that many a summer's day has past
Since, in life's morn, I carolled on thy side!
Is it, that oft since then my heart has sighed,
As Youth, and Hope's delusive gleams, flew fast!
Is it, that those who gathered on thy shore,
Companions of my youth, now meet no more!
Whate'er the cause, upon thy banks I bend,
Sorrowing; yet feel such solace at my heart,
As at the meeting of some long-lost friend,
From whom, in happier hours, we wept to part.

Success of this volume, published in the explosive year of 1789, was immediate and lasting. "For 40 years", Southey confessed, he took "the sweet and artless style of Bowles for a model". Coleridge went further: "These are the poems, which we can lay up in our hearts, and our soul, and repeat them when we walk by the way, and when we lie down, and when we rise up". They were soon "a part of our identity", he felt, and displayed "marked superiority over all other sonnets". He copied the volume out 40 times by hand, and, in 1796, edited a small collection of sonnets by himself and his friends to be bound up with those of Bowles. Like Southey, Coleridge was soon imitating the style:

'To the River Otter'
Dear native brook! wild streamlet of the West!
How many various-fated years have passed,
What happy and what mournful hours, since last
I skimmed the smooth thin stone along thy breast,
Numbering its light leaps! Yet so deep impressed
Sink the sweet scenes of childhood, that mine eyes
I never shut amid the sunny ray,
But straight with all their tints thy waters rise,
Thy crossing plank, thy marge with willows grey,
And bedded sand that, veined with various dyes,
Gleamed through thy bright transparence! On my way,
Visions of childhood! oft have ye beguiled
Lone manhood's cares, yet waking fondest sighs:
Ah! that once more I were a careless child!

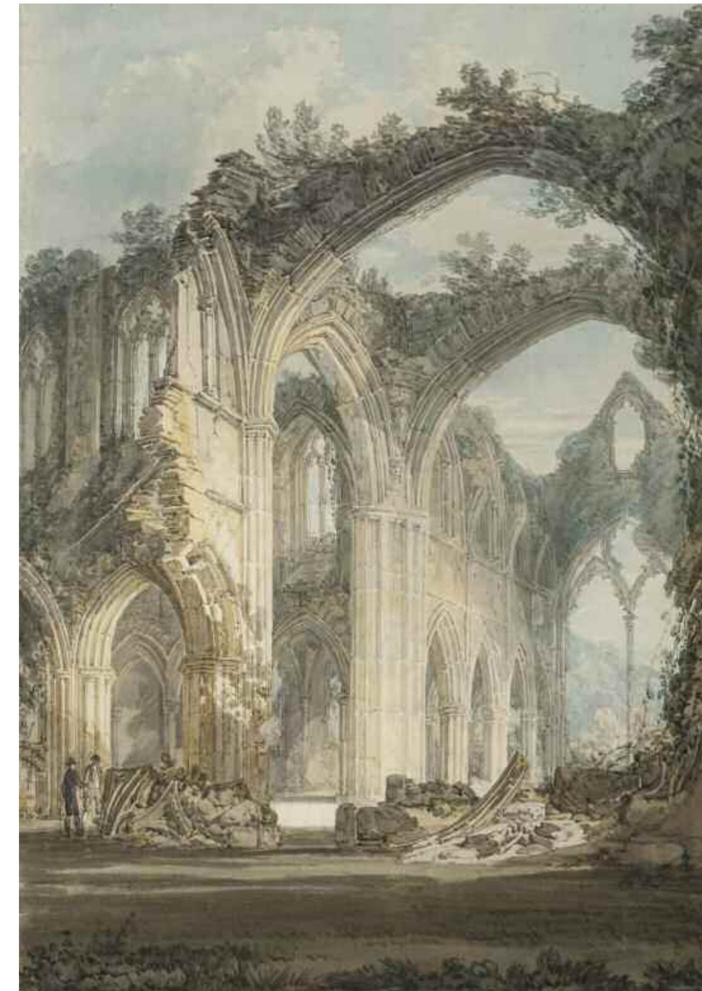
Other examples of the archetype include Coleridge's sonnet 'On Quitting School', and 'Ode on Quitting School for Jesus College', but traces of the genre can be found in the more famous conversation poems 'To the Nightingale', and 'Frost at Midnight'. And finally, in *The Brook*, a sonnet sequence never completed, Coleridge left a paradoxical masterpiece of the genre in which he specialised, the genre of the planned but never produced.

What of Wordsworth? Crossing London Bridge, he was so struck by the Bowles sonnets that he delayed his friends whilst he sat down in a niche of the bridge and read the volume from cover to cover. Composing sonnets at picturesque spots, especially with ruins, is subsequently commonplace in his work, and probably owes its origin to Bowles more than to anyone else. Examples include 'There is a Little Unpretending Rill' (1801-02), 'Brook! Whose Society The Poet Seeks' (prior to 1804), 'To the River Derwent' (1802), and *To the River Duddon* (first published in 1807, and completed in 1820). But above all the pattern may be discerned in 'Tintern Abbey' (1798), with its abbey ruins, riparian setting, and inter-minglings of time:

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur. – Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliff …

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food.

With its clear structure of past, present, and future, the poem shows the influence of the genre, if also providing a touchstone for Bowles's inferiority.



Tintern Abbey: The Crossing and Chancel, Looking towards the East Window, by JMW Turner, 1794.
Photo © Tate; licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported).

There had to be a naysayer, and in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), Byron stylishly supplied:

Hail, Sympathy! thy soft idea brings
A thousand visions of a thousand things,
And shows, still whimpering thro' threescore of years,
The maudlin prince of mournful sonneteers.
And art thou not their prince, harmonious Bowles!
Thou first, great oracle of tender souls?
Whether thou sing'st with equal ease, and grief,
The fall of empires, or a yellow leaf;
Whether thy muse most lamentably tells
What merry sounds proceed from Oxford bells,
Or, still in bells delighting, finds a friend
In every chime that jingled from Ostend;
Ah! how much juster were thy Muse's hap,
If to thy bells thou would'st but add a cap!
Delightful Bowles! still blessing and still blest,
All love thy strain, but children like it best.

V: Winchester and John Keats

St John's House and The Broadway, by George Shepherd.

St Michael's Church from Culver Close, by George Shepherd.

John Keats, a member of the second generation of the Romantics, displayed sympathies for the Wartonian side. In his early 'Sleep and Poetry' (1816) he denigrated the school of Pope, thus unfortunately attracting the animosity of Byron. 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' (composed the same year) is thought to be indebted to Bowles, with what one critic has called its "performative play of historical perspectives that mediate between the past, the present, and the future".

In 1818, Keats had nursed his brother Tom until his death on 1st December. The poet's own health was good until September 1818. The first symptoms of TB appeared that autumn, and, as a qualified physician, he could not fail to recognise them. His sore throats were indications of the tuberculosis which were to take away his two brothers, his mother, and his uncle.

His health deteriorating, Keats arrived in Winchester in August 1819. He lodged either in the High Street or at a junction of Colebrook Street and Paternoster Row. His Winchester surroundings were "beautifully wooded"; the air was worth "sixpence a pint", and the city altogether represented "the pleasantest town I ever was in".

In his 'Journal' letter to George and Georgiana Keats, written in September 1819, Keats described his daily routine:

"Now the time is beautiful. I take a walk every day for an hour before dinner and this is generally my walk – I go out at the back gate across one street, into the Cathedral yard, which is always interesting; then I pass under the trees along a paved path, pass the beautiful front of the Cathedral, turn to the left under a stone door way – then I am on the other side of the building – which leaving behind me I pass on through two college-like squares seemingly built for the dwelling place of Deans and Prebendaries – garnished with grass and shaded with trees. Then I pass through one of the old city gates and then you are in one College-Street through which I pass and at the end thereof crossing some meadows and at last a country alley of gardens I arrive, that is, my worship arrives at the foundation of Saint Cross, which is a very interesting old place, both for its gothic tower and alms-square and for the appropriation of its rich rents to a relation of the Bishop of Winchester – Then I pass across St Cross meadows till you come to the most beautifully clear river."

Kingsgate, by George Shepherd.

Winchester Cathedral, engraving by B. Winkles after H. Browne.

The Square, by George Shepherd.

John Keats, by William Hilton, after Joseph Severn;
© National Portrait Gallery, London.

To John Hamilton Reynolds he wrote, on 22 September 1819, with more detail:

"How beautiful the season is now – how fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it … I never liked stubble fields so much as now … Somehow a stubble field looks warm in the same way that some pictures look warm. This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it".

The resulting poem is 'To Autumn'.

Keats Listening to a Nightingale on Hampstead Heath, Joseph Severn;
photo credit: City of London Corporation, licensed under CC BY-NC-ND.

VI: 'To Autumn'

'To Autumn'

**Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.**

**Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.**

**Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, –
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.**

'To Autumn' has been variously interpreted as, inter alia, a meditation on death, an allegory of artistic creation, a response to the Peterloo Massacre (which took place that year), an expression of nationalist sentiment, a reflection on the weather and climate change, or a farewell to the artistic life – and indeed life altogether. A further interpretation is surely possible. Here was Keats, in Winchester, the city of the Warton brothers; passing daily Joseph's monument, and the College, nursery of poets and scene of a Peterloo-style demonstration in 1808, before proceeding alongside a river beloved by Bowles. Surely Keats noted the footsteps?

Keats's poem is distinctive. Its form, the ode, is one of those detested by Johnson – 'Ode and Elegy and Sonnet'. The diction too is Wartonian, which is to say non-Miltonic. "*Paradise Lost* is a corruption of our language", Keats was to argue. "Chatterton is the purest writer in the English language", he continued, "Tis genuine English idiom in English words. … I somehow always associate Chatterton with Autumn". Thatch, moss, kernel, clammy, reap, swathe, brook, hook, sallows, bleat, croft, swallows. These are indubitably sturdy old words which Keats would have associated with Chatterton's English.

All of Bowles's themes and images reproduce themselves in 'To Autumn': love of nature and the picturesque; an emphasis on its mildly melancholy aspects; a fondness for solitude and pensive contemplation; and a ternary timescale of past, present, future, accompanied by intrinsic recognition of interconnectedness. But the school of Warton and Bowles also involves topography, Gothic, churches, and ruins; an autobiographical narrator presence; and an

interest in poetic inspiration, as the poet grows and matures (frequently expressed by the riverbank setting). All these critically appear to be missing in 'To Autumn', but on closer examination this starts to appear mistaken.

Winchester is for Keats an ecclesiastical city: he called it "Abbotine". "This Winchester is a place tolerably well suited to me", he told George and Georgiana Keats in September 1819, "there is a fine Cathedral, a College, a Roman-Catholic Chapel, a Methodist ditto, an independent ditto … There are a number of rich Catholics in the place. It is a respectable, ancient aristocratical place – and moreover it contains a nunnery." Keats's aesthetic views were likewise distinctive. Two chief principles emerge from the letters. The first is Negative Capability, Keats told George and Tom Keats in December 1817, "that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". Second was an opposition to blatant messaging: "We hate poetry that has *palpable designs* upon us", Keats wrote to Reynolds on 3 February the following year. "The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to *make up one's mind about nothing*", he told George and Georgiana Keats in the 'Journal' letter of 17-27 September 1819, "to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts".

These principles have in common a propensity to hide the obvious, thus challenging the critic to identify the hidden. This challenge, perhaps unsurprisingly, results in the discovery of the distinctive Wartonian trilogy of topography, poetic persona, and aesthetics.

Bowles's sonnets were topographical: they featured a particular place, or a particular river. 'To Autumn', though written in a significant place, lacks specificity of location. The Wartons gave us rivers; Bowles, Coleridge and Wordsworth gave us ruins. 'Tintern Abbey' was a poem Keats knew and greatly admired, but its influence on 'To Autumn' has generally escaped recognition. As Jonathan Bate has recently explained, Wordsworth's poem avoids Tintern Abbey's riverside setting and ruins; these were the clichés of earlier texts inspired by this *locus classicus* of a poetic site. 'To Autumn' is a poem conceived on a walk along a river towards an ecclesiastical edifice of historic distinction, yet it mentions neither. This river walk is almost exclusively concerned with land. The need is not for the songs of spring but the irrigations of winter. What a field day Vivaldi would have had. It is as though there is no irrigation, only fruitfulness, a fruitfulness that can only self-destruct. A gleaner crosses a brook, but the emphasis is on carrying a load, not crossing a river. Save for three mentions ("steady thy laden head across a brook", "hilly bourn" and the "river sallows") what we are conscious of is the fruitfulness of the land and the maturation of the sun. The river is noticeably absent.

The City from St Giles Hill at Sunset, by George Shepherd.

Warton and Bowles stressed the development of the narrating poetic persona. In Keats, the narrator and his development have disappeared. The classic romantic recipe (nature inspires poet, who produces poem) is also discarded. Teasingly there is a personification only in stanza two. The figure appears only to disappear. There is no poetic persona. There is, indeed, almost not even a poet.

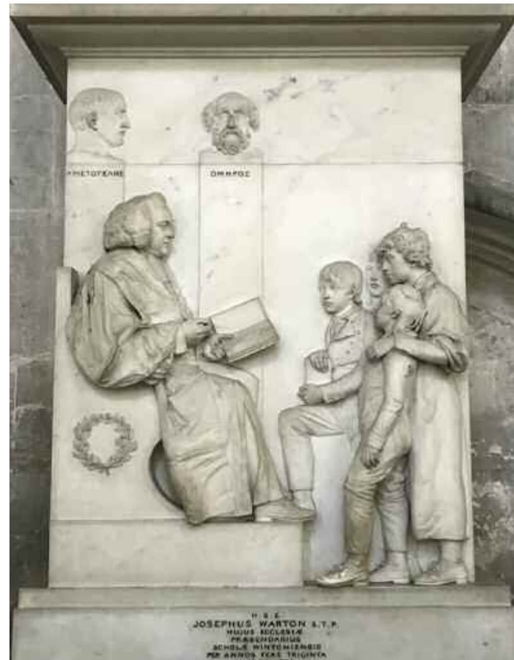
The tripartite time structure derives from Warton and Bowles, but Keats is significantly more sophisticated. Time becomes as teasing as place: simultaneously fluent and static. There is progress, yet no progress. Every stanza is about autumn, but autumn is three seasons in one: early autumn, mid-autumn, and the heralding of winter. This is comparable to the progression through a day: morning, afternoon, and dusk; and a comparable shift from tactile, visual, and aural.

'To Autumn' is full of uncertainties. It lacks any palpable design. Its title suggests it is about autumn, but in the poem, time is poised and does not move, unlike any river, or unlike any crumbling ecclesiastical edifice. Keats portrays no specific riparian path, rather he creates a "thoroughfare for all thoughts". The poem is an achievement of Keats's ideals, and heralds a change of occupation as well as of mood. Summer, with its Nightingale and Grecian Urn, was behind him. This was the end of poetry as far as Keats was concerned. A path involves a progress, especially in Bowles or Warton. Yet this poem envisages none. Keats must reconcile himself not only to leaving a poetic career, but to leaving life altogether.

As Keats walked, two hundred years ago today, beside a river towards St Cross, he knew that his path was blocked by two enormous elephants. The path of the Wartons and of Bowles had reached a terminus. Keats's capability was negative.

Views along the River Itchen. Photos credit: Chris Andrews.

VII: Towards a Victorian Winter



H.S.E.
JOSEPHUS WARTON S.T.P.
HUJUS ECCLESIAE
PRAEBENDARIUS
SCHOLAE WINTONIENSIS
PER ANNOS FERE TRICINTA
INFORMATOR
POETA FERVIDUS FACILIS EXPOLITUS
CRITICUS ERUDITUS PERSPICAX ELECANS
OBIIT XXIII FEB. MDCCC
AETAT LXXVIII

How did it all end? When Thomas the Younger died in 1790, an anonymous poet in the *Gentleman's Magazine* was heartbroken: "Oh Warton, if in heart I bear not thee/It spouts, its feelings lost".

Joseph retired in 1793 but lived on until 1800. Bowles immediately published a 'Monody on the Death of Dr Warton': "And thou/Friend of my muse, in thy death-bed art cold". There is a less leaden-footed monument, in the south aisle of Winchester Cathedral, inscribed as follows:

Here lies Joseph Warton, Professor of Sacred Theology, Prebendary of this Cathedral, Headmaster of Winchester College for almost 30 years, A poet – passionate, fluent, polished, A critic – erudite, perceptive, elegant, died 23 February 1800 aged 78. This monument, whatever its quality, has been raised out of piety to the best and most greatly missed teacher by his Wykehamists.

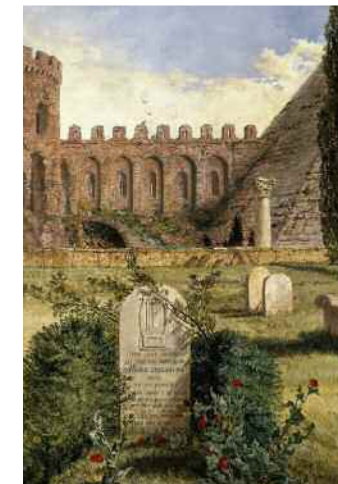
The iconography is impassioned, yet subtle. Warton has an open book, his pupils have a closed one. They want to listen, not follow: friendliness, attentiveness, affection and intimacy abound. The teacher may be on a dais, but a pupil has one foot on the plinth.

Memorial to Joseph Warton, South Aisle of Winchester Cathedral.
Photo credit: Dean and Chapter, Winchester Cathedral.

On 3 February 1820, Keats coughed up blood: "I know the colour of that blood! It is arterial blood. I cannot be deceived in that colour. That drop of blood is my death warrant. I must die". He left England for Rome on 18 September 1820, where he died on 23 February 1821.

Keats's gravestone is in the English Cemetery in Rome. Both Warton and Keats are commemorated by the image of the lyre. But in Keats's grave the strings of the lyre are broken. "Weep for Adonais, he is gone", wrote Shelley.

"Lost Echo sits amid the voiceless mountains,
And feeds her grief with his remember'd lay."



Keats's Grave, by William Bell Scott, WA1893.3.
Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

Keats on his deathbed, by Joseph Severn.
© Keats-Shelley Memorial Association and Keats-Shelley House in Rome.

Keats's grave is still much visited today, reminding us, in Matthew Arnold's words, that "He is; he is with Shakespeare". Shelley died next, drowned at sea in 1822. Byron and others cremated him on the beach. He was still at this time bickering with Bowles – and soon thereafter fighting in Greece, where he too died, on 19 April 1824. "Byron is dead", the young Tennyson went out to scratch on the Lincolnshire sandstone. "Tennyson: we cannot live in art", he was soon to be told at Cambridge. English literature was destined to change, like English society. Poets were no longer the unacknowledged legislators of mankind, and Poet Power was over.

The new social emphasis and the new literary theme was social reform. This would require the main literary genre to be the novel, and Keats's path to St Cross therefore became another Winchester College story – Trollope's path to *The Warden*.

Three poets lived on, even if with significant weakening of their output: Coleridge until 1834; Bowles, loyal Wykehamist that he was, published a life of Bishop Ken in two volumes in 1830-31, but died on 7 April 1850, just over a fortnight before Wordsworth.

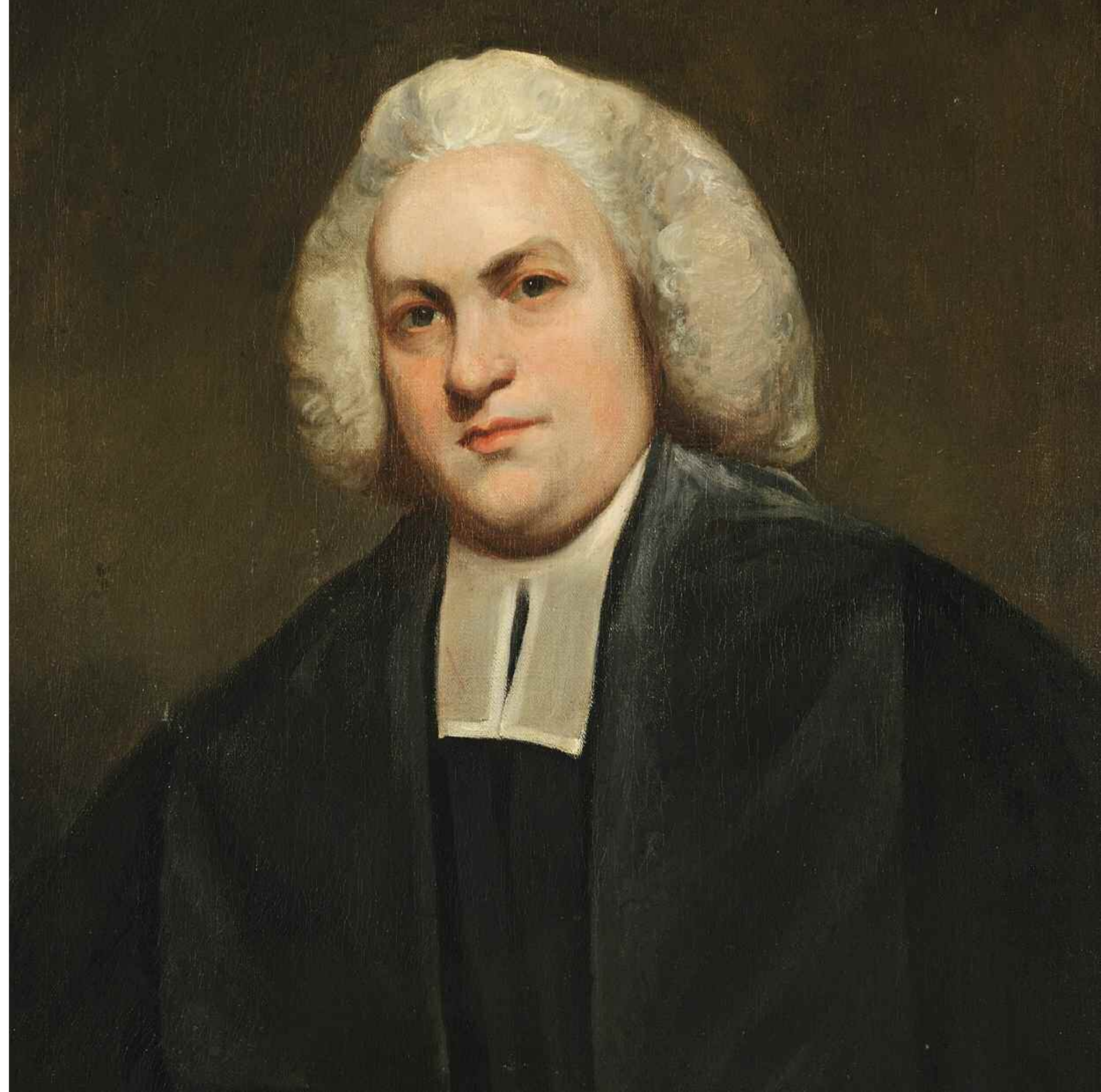
As for Wordsworth, one of Thomas Warton's successors as Poet Laureate, the argument that the last 40 years of Wordsworth's life produced few poems of quality overlooks one of his finest. In 1820 Wordsworth published a sequence of 33 sonnets, entitled *The River Duddon*. The last is magnificently in the Bowles tradition, a tribute to the effect of nature in forming the moral character:

'To the River Duddon'
I Thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
As being pass'd away – Vain sympathies!
For, backward, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;
The Form remains, the Function never dies;
While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish; – be it so!
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know.

Wordsworth has abandoned the purely nostalgic longing for childhood innocence to Coleridge and Southey, substituting a tribute to the effect of nature informing the moral character. Neither Warton nor Bowles could ever have written the last and most Wordsworthian of *The River Duddon* sonnets, but it may not be too much to claim the sequence as the last product of the tradition inaugurated by Warton and popularised by Bowles. Johnson may have been defeated, but Romanticism was over too, and with Wordsworth the last of the English romantics had gone. John Codrington Bampfylde hymned the change, and the death of his quondam Headmaster, quietly:

'To Mr Warton'
Tis not for Muse like mine, in rude essay,
To paint the beauties of thy Classic Page;
Which ay deserve far other patronage
Than the small meed sincere she fain would pay
Of Verse, grave Eulogy, or Distich gay:
For that thou deign'st inform this sapient age,
What 'ere was whilom told by tuneful Sage,
Or harp'd in hall, or bow'r, on solemn day;
But more for that thy skill, the minstrel throng,
Forbids in cold Oblivion's arms to lie.
Dear long-lost masters of the British Song,
They shall requite thee better far than I;
And other climes, and other shades among,
Weave thee a Laureate Wreath that ne'er shall die.

Do the Wartons still possess those laureate wreaths? If so, the bicentenary of the composition of 'To Autumn' provides a serendipitous opportunity to celebrate them further.



Joseph Warton, by Sir Joshua Reynolds.