

The Construction of “the Spirit of the Place” in Wordsworth’s Travel

Poems Memorials of a Tour in Italy

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Abstract

Despite his established identity as a “Lake Poet”, William Wordsworth travelled constantly throughout his life both within Britain and abroad. *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837*¹, which records Wordsworth’s tour in Italy in 1837, was first published in 1842 as a part of *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*. Adopting a perspective from literary geography, this paper examines how Wordsworth experienced and represented Italy in his later years, with particular attention to the construction of “the spirit of the place” in his travel poetry. It begins by tracing the pre-existing cultural image of Italy within the British context prior to his journey, and then analyzes how the poet transcends immediate sensory perceptions of physical space, integrating personal memory, historical consciousness, and ethical reflection into his poetic composition, thereby constructing a multilayered poetic place. This study argues that both travel and poetry function as modes of spiritual and intellectual navigation for the later Wordsworth. *Memorials* is not merely a record of travel, but a profound meditation on how human beings dwell in place and how place shapes human beings through poetic imagination and reflection.

Keywords: Wordsworth, travel poems, the spirit of the place, *Memorials of a Tour in Italy*

The British Romantic poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850) is often labeled a “nature poet” or a representative of the Lake School. Yet a review of his life reveals that he was also an extensive traveler, journeying not only across England and Scotland, but also to regions such as the Isle of Man and Ireland, as well as to continental Europe, including France, Switzerland, and Italy. Based on this, he produced substantial travel-themed poem sequences

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¹ Hereafter referred to as *Memorials*.

during his middle and later periods, including *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820* and *Sonnets Composed or Suggested during a tour in Scotland, in the Summer of 1833*. Since the nineteenth century, Wordsworth criticism has tended to focus primarily on his early and middle-period works. Some scholars have argued that “from 1807 onward Wordsworth’s poetic powers entered a slow but irreversible decline, producing fewer works of high quality” (Wang, 2018, p. 134), and have confined the period of his poetic flourishing to the so-called “great decade” from 1797 to 1807. From the late twentieth century onward, scholars have increasingly emphasized Wordsworth’s travel experiences. For example, John Wyatt (1999) characterizes Wordsworth as “the mature traveller” (p. 1), and Robin Jarvis (2001) describes him as “a writer so remorselessly addicted to travel” (p. 321), and Jared Curtis (2009) refers to him as “the poet-traveler” (p. 7), which affirms Wordsworth’s identity as a traveler. Nevertheless, the substantial travel-themed poem sequences produced during his middle and later periods have not received sufficient attention and research.

1. The Perspective of Literary Geography and “the Spirit of the Place”

Wordsworth travelled to Italy in March 1837 and when he got back to Rydal Mount, he wrote *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837* in the next several years. The sequence includes the opening long poem of 372 lines, “Musings near Aquapendente”, along with twenty-five sonnets and three additional poems of varying lengths. As a representative work of Wordsworth’s later period, these poems reflect his mature mode of perceiving place. Adopting the theoretical perspective of literary geography, this paper draws on Yi-Fu Tuan’s distinction between “space” and “place” within the context of literary studies to examine how place is imagined, experienced, and represented in Wordsworth’s sequence, as well as the process through which “the spirit of the place” is constructed. Here, literary geography is not understood as a closed theoretical system, but rather as an interdisciplinary approach widely applied in both geographical and literary studies. Within the development of human geography, scholars

frequently turn to literary texts to interpret spatial experience and the meaning of place, thereby enriching geographical critique. By contrast, such research in literary studies often incorporates key concepts from human geography in order to deepen interpretations of spatial representation and the construction of place in literary texts. The present study is grounded in the latter direction.

Yi-Fu Tuan's distinction between "space" and "place" in his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, together with his account of the function of perception, memory and thought in the construction of place, provides a powerful conceptual framework for understanding how Wordsworth constructs "the spirit of the place" through travel and poetry in the *Memorials*. Tuan differentiates "space" from "place", arguing that space and place are not objective opposites, but experiential states closely connected with the subject's experience, as "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value." (Tuan, 1977, p. 6). Prior to the intervention of individual experience, cognition and emotion, space appears as open, free, indeterminate, and even potentially threatening. When individuals intersect with the space through movement, perception and reflection, it is "possible for location to be transformed into place" (Tuan, 1977, p. 6) which is characterized by stability, a sense of security and meaningful orientation.

The term "the spirit of the place" recurs throughout William Wordsworth's poetry across different periods. The paper will draw on Yi-Fu Tuan's account of the transformation from space to place to examine how the spirit of the place is generated through travel, perception, and poetic reflection.

by **rules of mimic art** transferr'd

To things above all art: but more, —for this,

Although a strong infection of the age,

Was never much my habit—giving way

To a comparison of scene with scene,
Bent overmuch on superficial things,
Pampering myself with **meagre novelties**
Of colour or proportion, to the moods
Of time or season, to the moral power,
The affections, and **the spirit of the place**

Less sensible. (Wordsworth, 2011, Book XI, ll. 154–164; 1805 version)

One of the earliest articulations of “the spirit of the place” in Wordsworth’s work can be found in Book XI “Imagination, How Impaired and Restored” of the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, rather than Book XII of the 1850 version. According to the textual evidence presented in the Cornell Wordsworth editions edited by Jared Curtis, this passage was composed between 1799 and 1806, and may therefore be read as an early formulation of the concept. In Book XI, Wordsworth offers a theoretical reflection on the impairment of imagination and taste and on the failure to apprehend “the spirit of the place”. He identifies two principal causes. The first lies in the dominance of neoclassical habits of perception, which apply the “rules of mimic Art” (l. 154) to the natural world and reduce aesthetic experience to a patterned state. The second is the tyranny of the eye, through which the observer becomes preoccupied with surface phenomena, indulging in comparisons of scene with scene and in “meagre novelties / Of colour and proportion” (ll. 160–161). Together, these tendencies produce what Wordsworth calls a “taste / Less spiritual” (2009, Book XII, ll. 90–91), resulting in an insensibility to “the moods / Of time and season, to the moral power, / The affections, and the spirit of the place” (ll. 161–163). At this stage, “the spirit of the place” functions not as a reference to a particular location, but as an aesthetic and perceptual category. The repeated invocation of terms such as “spiritual” “soul” and “spirit” signals a movement beyond visual apprehension toward a more integrated mode of perception. Wordsworth’s apostrophe to the “Soul of Nature” (l. 138; l. 146) further

suggests a relational model in which nature is not merely an object of observation but a co-present and responsive force. In this sense, “the spirit of the place” denotes a dimension of experience that combines moral significance, emotional resonance and imaginative engagement, all of which remain inaccessible to a mode of perception dominated by visual surface.

Wordsworth’s engagement with “the spirit of the place” runs through his entire career, namely from Book XI of *The Prelude*, where the spirit of the place transcends the merely visual landscape, to the two sonnets titled “Oxford, May 30, 1820” in which the poet feels the dynamic spirit of place based on his perception of both natural and cultural scenery, and finally to “Furness Abbey” (1845), where railway workers are moved by the spirit embedded in the abbey ruins. Through such poetic writing, Wordsworth gradually builds the concept of “the spirit of the place”. In this study, “the spirit of the place” is not treated as a self-sufficient explanatory framework, but rather as a poetic notion that requires further theoretical clarification. While the term itself captures the qualitative atmosphere and value associated with a place, it does not fully account for the process through which such meaning is generated. In this regard, Yi-Fu Tuan’s distinction between “space” and “place” provides a crucial conceptual framework. Tuan understands place as space endowed with value through lived experience, memory and reflection. From this perspective, the “spirit of the place” in Wordsworth’s poetry can be understood as the value-laden dimension of place, rather than the place itself or the transformation process.

Within the prior reading experience and cultural background, Italy initially exists in Wordsworth’s cognition as an open and foreign space. Italy was a travel destination widely desired by the British at that time, and the poet learned about it primarily through diverse books, friends’ accounts and cultural imagination before his own journey. At this phase, Wordsworth had no chance to get intimate personal experience neither from the sensational perception nor

from the genuine feeling. It was through the Italian tour of 1837 that Wordsworth was able to enter this space as a traveler. In the course of movement, observation and pause, he accumulated his own experience of the space through multiple senses, recalling memory and his reflective contemplation. In the subsequent years, Wordsworth filtrated and reorganized these experiences according to his own preference in his poetic composition. In this case, Italy ceases to be merely a foreign geographical space, and is instead constructed as a place that carries personal memory, emotional experience, and value judgment, thus building “the spirit of the place”.

2. Italy as a Culturally Imagined Space before Travel

From the first century BCE to the fifth century CE, towns, military installations and other structures constructed during the Roman occupation of Britain have become a permanent part of the country’s historical and cultural heritage, while the influence of the Greco-Roman tradition has continued to endure, with Italy serving as a major site for the preservation and transmission of this legacy. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Italy was no longer a pristine and unmediated geographical entity for the British, but a highly symbolized space embedded within layers of cultural discourse. Before Wordsworth first set foot on the Apennine Peninsula in 1837, he had already referred to Italian places on multiple occasions in his poetry, suggesting that he possessed a pre-existing imaginative conception of the region. The construction of “the spirit of the place” in the *Memorials* is thus grounded in this conceptualized image of Italy. Therefore, before turning to the analysis of the sequence itself, it is necessary to examine the impressions of Italy held by the poet at the age of sixty-seven prior to his tour.

Since the Renaissance, Italy has been regarded within the European cultural imagination as the very center of European civilization, as Christopher Thorpe (2024) observes that “representations of Italy as Europe’s most learned and civilised nation formed the context in which travel to Italy, the importing of Italian texts and cultural practices, and the clamour

for Italian culture were established” (p. 212). This status became especially pronounced in the tradition of the Grand Tour which grew increasingly prevalent in England from the sixteenth century onward, and Italy occupied an irreplaceable position in the tradition. Particularly in the eighteenth century, when Wordsworth was born, the Grand Tour had become an essential rite of passage for the British upper classes and intellectual elites. Within this travel itinerary, Italy was not only a favored destination for health and leisure, but also the ultimate site of cultural pilgrimage. Jeremy Black (1985) notes that “The Grand Tour involved essentially a trip to Paris and a tour of the principal Italian cities: Rome, Venice, Florence and Naples, in order of importance.” (p. 4). Italy thus bore multiple layers of significance. On the one hand, it was the cradle of classical Western civilization and the sacred ground of Renaissance art and humanism, representing a shared cultural origin and aesthetic ideal for Europe. On the other hand, for Protestant England, Italy’s Catholic atmosphere, along with its political fragmentation and perceived decline, often rendered it a moral “other”, appearing as a space simultaneously associated with sensual temptation and political corruption, while also serving as a warning about the fragility of civilization. Consequently, in the British collective imagination, Italy emerged as a complex cultural space that was at once a classroom of history and aesthetics and a testing ground for moral and religious reflection. Wordsworth grew up and remained deeply immersed in this cultural milieu, and the pre-existing image of Italy in his mind was naturally shaped by this collective memory in which longing and estrangement coexisted.

Educated in the classical curriculum at Cambridge, Wordsworth was thoroughly familiar with Latin poetry and the traditions of Roman history. Although Wordsworth later expressed dissatisfaction with his Cambridge education, retrospective accounts tend to underplay the extent of his engagement with prescribed texts. In fact, he “read in moral philosophy, in Euclid, and Newton, and kept fresh the enjoyment of the Classics as living literature, which had been awakened at Hawkshead, by translation and free imitation poetic

exercises of his own” (Gill, 1990, p. 41). Moreover, Stephen Gill (1990) notes that “Italian lessons with Agostino Isola directed him to the pleasures of Tasso and Ariosto and stimulated a lifelong interest in Italian literature and history, evidenced later in translations and the record in poetry of his tour.” (p. 41) Before the education at Cambridge, Wordsworth did very well at Hawkshead “in both the classical and the modern parts of the curriculum. ... The literary curriculum was of course in Greek and Latin, included the standard authors (Anacreon, Homer, Ovid, Virgil), and moved smartly along from linguistic to literary training, as translating led to ‘imitating’ the classics in both English and the original language, a popular genre throughout the eighteenth century” (Johnston, 1998, p. 71). Actually, he tried to translate Virgil’s *Aeneid* and referred to Virgil many times in his own works.

He also developed an interest in painting and architecture, which would later inform his responses to continental art. The interest was further strengthened in 1803 through his friendship with Sir George Beaumont, who “was a connoisseur and collector of paintings and ... encouraged the poet’s interest in the visual arts throughout their long friendship” (Powell, 2026, p. xiii). During his journey to London in 1836, Wordsworth became acquainted with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and “they talked about Alfieri’s life and poetry, Shakespeare, Spenser, Chaucer, Dante” (Gill, 1990, p. 393). Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) and Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803), respectively representing the epic and tragic traditions of Italian literature, together signal the historical depth and cultural authority of Italy within the European literary imagination. These formed part of the wider intellectual and poetic horizon within which Wordsworth operated.

Beyond the framework of the Classical tradition and the Grand Tour, recent scholarship has begun to reconsider Wordsworth’s engagement with Italy from broader cultural and poetic perspectives. Nicole Ariana Seary, for instance, traces Wordsworth’s sustained interaction with Italian literary traditions, highlighting both his early engagement with Italian texts and his later

immersion in Italian culture during the 1837 journey. Similarly, Viona Au Yeung examines *Memorials of a Tour in Italy* in relation to Wordsworth's sources of poetic inspiration, emphasizing how the poet negotiates the experience of foreignness through religious and cultural mediation. As she observes, Wordsworth "seems to be creating a safe environment for writing, when his surrounds look and feel foreign. He cultivates a feeling of familiarity through tangible things such as religious relics, architecture, and music, and the Christian history of the places" (Au Yeung, 2014, p. ii).

These facts suggest that, well before his tour in 1837, Wordsworth had already formed an imaginative engagement with Italy through textual and cultural mediation, which found expression in his poetry. In the poem "Perhaps some needful service of the State" composed before his Italy tour, Wordsworth constructs an imagined Italian scene through Italian city names such as Bologna and the Arno. Here, Italy emerges not from firsthand observation but from a culturally mediated imagination shaped by literary and historical knowledge. When he was eventually confronted with the landscape south of the Alps, what he "saw" was inevitably overlaid with the verses of Virgil, accounts of ruins conveyed by friends, and narratives of historical rise and decline. Accordingly, he described the land he traversed as the "ground / Chosen by Rome's legendary Bards" (Wordsworth, 2009, p. 532 / ll. 270–271). His actual sensory perception of Italy was thus, from the outset, inextricably entangled with a dense pre-existing textual and cultural framework.

Prior to his journey in 1837, Italy functioned for Wordsworth primarily as an abstract, conceptualized cultural space, characterized by "nature's loveliest forms, / art's noblest remains, and history's rich bequest" (2009, p. 527 / ll. 95–96). It existed within his intellectual horizon and imaginative longing, yet had not been deeply integrated into his personal trajectory, his emotional memory, or his everyday sensory experience. In the terms of Yi-Fu Tuan, this was a culturally coded "space" that had yet to be transformed into a "place" grounded in intimate and

sustained experience. It was precisely the Italian journey of 1837 that provided the poet with an opportunity to re-encounter and reconfigure this abstract space. Rather than erasing prior cultural knowledge, his direct encounters reactivated and reorganized it, thereby initiating a dynamic process of perceiving and constructing the spirit of the place.

3. Constructing the Spirit of the Place through Poetry

From March to August 1837, Wordsworth and Henry Crabb Robinson embarked on a long-planned journey to Italy. Although they had originally intended to visit both Rome and Naples, an outbreak of cholera in Naples led them to omit that destination. After leaving Rome, they instead traveled to Florence, Bologna, Milan, Venice, Vallombrosa and other locations. Over the following four years, Wordsworth composed the *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837* on the basis of this journey, which was published in 1842 as part of *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*. Given the physical strain of travel and his own bodily limitations, Wordsworth typically began composing poetry only after the journey had concluded. Accordingly, the vast majority of poems in this sequence were written retrospectively, with the sole exception of “The Cuckoo at Ravenna”, which was “the ‘first attempt at composition’ during the tour; it was also the last” (Moorman, 1965, p. 525). This mode of composition accords closely with Wordsworth’s well-known poetic principle in the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* that “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind” (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 2013, p. 111). No matter how intense his feelings or how strong his impulse to express himself during the journey, the poet deferred their articulation, reserving them for reflective reworking in poetic composition after his return. As Tuan argues, “[a]n object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses

as well as with the active and reflective mind” (Tuan, 1977, p. 18). In this sense, Wordsworth’s retrospective mode of composition can be understood as a process through which sensory experience is deepened through reflection. The poems centered on this Italian tour thus derive from sensory experiences preserved in the poet’s memory.

3.1 Sensory Experience: The Wellspring of the Spirit of the Place

Ye Apennines! with all your fertile vales
Deeply embosomed, and your winding shores
Of either sea, an Islander by birth,
A Mountaineer by habit, would resound
Your praise, in meet accordance with your claims
Bestowed by Nature, or from man’s great deeds
Inherited: — **presumptuous thought!** — it fled
Like vapour, like a towering cloud dissolved. (Wordsworth, 2009, ll. 1-8)

The opening poem of the sequence, “Musings Near Aquapendente”, begins with the poet confronting the grandeur of the Apennine landscape. This scene evokes his earlier, expansive imaginings of Italy, prompting him to respond with a lofty hymn of praise. However, he quickly recognizes that this impulse is a “presumptuous thought”. Turning away from such grand abstraction, he redirects his attention to immediate natural details: the “Yon snow-white torrent-fall” “the fresh verdure of this lawn / Strewn with grey rocks” “through glimmering haze, / Unquestionably kenned, that cone-shaped hill / With fractured summit”. Through the poetic writing of these visual particulars, including colors, forms and circumstances, the poet reactivates his travel experience, and describes his own state as “passive yet pleased” (l. 26). The turn from elevated praise to attentive observation of concrete detail resonates with the empiricist claim that “all knowledge is produced from the ‘impressions’ drawn in through our five senses” (Buzard, 2002, p. 37), grounding the emergence of the spirit of the place in lived

sensory experience rather than inherited imaginative frameworks. As Yi-Fu Tuan observes in the chapter “Experiential Perspective”, experience is “a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality. These modes range from the more direct and passive senses of smell, taste, and touch, to active visual perception and the indirect mode of symbolization.” (Tuan, 1977, p. 8) Wordsworth’s attentive observation of visual details thus constitutes a form of lived experience, through which the initially abstract space of the Italian landscape begins to acquire concreteness, preparing the ground for the emergence of place.

Passive yet pleased. What! with this Broom in flower

Close at my side. **She bids me fly to greet**

Her sisters, soon like her to be attired

With golden blossoms opening at the feet

Of my own Fairfield. The glad greeting given,

Given with a voice and by a look returned

Of old companionship, Time counts not minutes

Ere, from accustomed paths, familiar fields,

The local Genius hurries me aloft,

Transported over that cloud-wooing hill,

Seat Sandal, a fond suitor of the clouds,

With dream-like smoothness, to **Helvellyn**’s top (Wordsworth, 2009, ll. 26–37)

In Wordsworth’s poetry, the construction of the spirit of the place is grounded in the sensuous reality of concrete geographical space, yet ultimately transcends mere visual appearance. The blooming broom flower in the poem constitutes a crucial turning point. The poet personifies it, describing that “she bids me fly to greet / Her sisters... Of my own Fairfield”, and the use of “bid” signals an active association of his mind triggered by sensory perception. Subsequently, “the local Genius” leads the poet across geographical boundaries in an instant,

transporting him from Aquapendente in Italy to Helvellyn and other sites in the English Lake District. This movement marks an elevation of perception from passive sensory reception as “passive yet pleased” (l. 26) to an active and transcendent mode of spiritual wandering. This imaginative wandering remains subject to the poet’s rational control. Conscious of his physical presence in Italy, he resolves to restrain its excess, deciding to “let it pass, / The simple rapture” (ll. 53–54). The peculiar pleasure of being abroad while imaginatively returning home leads him to think of Walter Scott (1771–1832), who travelled to Italy in 1831 for recuperation due to ill health. Both poets shared a deep attachment to and celebration of the British landscape, and Wordsworth thus suggests that Scott could have the emotional resonance and share the profound emotion recollected in tranquillity in a foreign setting. This trans-spatial movement of the mind does not negate immediate experience. Rather, through the process of “reflection”, it connects sensory impressions with inner memory and feeling, thereby presenting Wordsworth’s creative experience and poetic representation of the Italian landscape within a broader poetic horizon. As the poet writes, “let me guard / Those seeds of expectation which the fruit / Already gathered in this favoured Land [Italy] / Enfolds within its core” (ll. 103–106). Here, the metaphor of fruit signifies the experiential harvest of the Italian journey, while the seeds represent its enduring effects. This suggests that the geographical space functions as a generative ground for the formation of place, rather than as the final end of poetic creation.

3.2 Historical Consciousness: Deepening the Spirit of the Place

Wordsworth’s perception of the travel destination is not confined to natural scenery. He extends his attention to cultural history and emblematic architecture, exploring the construction of the spirit of the place in a temporal dimension. As Tuan states, human beings discern geometric patterns in nature and “try to embody their feelings, images, and thoughts in tangible material. The result is sculptural and architectural space, and on a large scale, the planned city. Progress here is from inchoate feelings for space and fleeting discernments of it in nature to

their public and material reification.” (Tuan, 1977, p. 17) Correspondingly, at the level of poetic form, Wordsworth adopts a combination of a longer meditative poem and a sequence of sonnets. The opening poem “Musings Near Aquapendente” establishes the reflective tone of the sequence, which is then developed through a series of shorter and more structurally contained sonnets. These sonnets take the form of a modified Petrarchan pattern rather than adhering strictly to the conventional octave–sestet division. The volta may occur at varying points, including the sixth, seventh, or tenth line. Prior to the turn, the poems typically dwell on immediate sensory perception within the present landscape. After the turn, they move into a mode of reflection and poetic reconfiguration. Wordsworth also demonstrates considerable flexibility in his rhyme schemes, with shifts in rhyme occurring at different points across the poem. The turn is not fixed at a single structural position but often emerges gradually across several lines. It does not register a strict logical opposition, but rather unfolds as a process of meditation. In this sense, the sonnet form itself enacts the transition from space to place.

As noted above, the poet’s engagement with visual landscape gives rise to imaginative movement. The poem then turns to a historical figure, “Him / Who oftentimes within those narrow bounds / Rocked on the surge, there tried his spirit’s strength / And grasp of purpose, long ere sailed his ship / To lay a new world open” (ll. 126–30). Here, “Him” through its evocation of the Genoese coast, maritime turbulence, and “to lay a new world”, clearly refers to Christopher Columbus (1451–1506). In the poem, Columbus is constructed as an exemplary figure who tempers his will within narrow bounds and instability, thereby cultivating the spiritual strength required for future enterprise. The invocation of this historical exemplar leads the poet toward self-reflection, forming a progressive structure that moves from external experience to inward contemplation. Italy, as the homeland of Columbus, thus ceases to function merely as a geographical backdrop and instead becomes a symbolic place in which a sense of vocation is activated. By recalling Columbus’s early trials, the poet transforms his own

sensory experiences of travel into a meditation on “appointed tasks” (l. 124), allowing immediate spatial perception to enter the domain of ethical self-consciousness. It follows that the formation of the spirit of the place does not reside solely in natural scenery or historical representation. Actually, it emerges through the dynamic interplay between historical memory and an individual’s awareness of purpose. Italy thus becomes a generative site of spirit. It offers historical models while also prompting the individual to orient future action through processes of memory and reflection.

The blest tranquillity that sunk so deep
Into my spirit, when I paced, enclosed
In **Pisa’s Campo Santo**, the smooth floor
Of its Arcades paved with sepulchral slabs,
And through each window’s open fret-work looked
O’er the blank Area of sacred earth
Fetched **from Mount Calvary**, or haply delved
In precincts nearer to the Saviour’s tomb,
By hands of men, **humble as brave**, who fought
For its deliverance (Wordsworth, 2009, ll. 153–162)

As the poet walks within the Campo Santo of Pisa, Wordsworth enters this religiously charged location through a bodily experience of space, becoming aware that its foundations are laid with soil brought back by “humble as brave” men from Mount Calvary. For their descendants, therefore, this site possesses much more important meaning which could constantly “nourish[ed] Piety”(l. 169), namely “it holds / And to all living mute memento breathes, / More touching far than aught which on the walls / Is pictured, or their epitaphs can speak, / Of the changed City’s long-departed power, / Glory, and wealth” (ll. 163–168). The poet then arrives before the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Its tilted form initially evokes a sense of

“decline and fall” (l. 180), provoking the sense of fear, but this feeling dissipates when he perceives instead “splendor unextinguished, pomp unscathed, / And beauty unimpaired” (ll. 183–184). In the poet’s vision, the assemblage formed by the cemetery, the baptistery and the tower presents an image of serene sublimity. These structures are no longer “fondly after more / Struggling against the stream of destiny, / But with its peaceful majesty content” (ll. 189–191), accepting the marks left by the passage of time while remaining fulfilled in a state of spiritual sufficiency. Through his movement and reflection within this site, the poet experiences “the blest tranquillity that sunk so deep / Into my spirit” (ll. 153–154), internalizing it as a source of spiritual strength. A comparable spatial configuration emerges in the geographical network centered on Horace (BCE 65–8), which comprises the Sabine vales, the Bandusian spring and the crumbling shrine of Vacuna. By linking these sites through poetic tradition, Wordsworth transforms this region into a place endowed with value orientation, into which Horace’s celebrated ideals “peace, leisure, freedom, moderate desires” (l. 260) are inscribed as part of the spirit of the place. Thus, through embodied movement, historical memory and religious contemplation, Italy’s geographical space is transformed into a spiritualized place, which is capable of speaking across time, characterized by tranquillity and restraint, and endowed with enduring ethical and affective significance.

But where’er my steps

Shall wander, chiefly **let me cull with care**

Those images of genial beauty, oft

Too lovely to be pensive in themselves

But by **reflexion** made so, which do best,

And fitliest serve to crown with fragrant wreaths

Life’s cup when almost filled with years, like mine. (Wordsworth, 2009, ll. 198–204)

Amid his immersion in both natural and cultural landscapes, the poet is overwhelmed

by the abundance of impressions. Yet he insists, “let me cull with care / Those images of genial beauty”, for they are often “Too lovely to be pensive in themselves / But by **reflexion** made so”. Wordsworth thus clearly registers the sensuous pleasure generated by visual perception and bodily movement, while simultaneously recognizing their potential to inhibit thought and imagination. Accordingly, he integrates sensory experience with reflective contemplation in his poetic writing, arriving at a deeper apprehension of his Italian journey and creatively constructing a distinctly personal version of the spirit of the place, namely Italy.

3.3 Ethical Reflection: The Function of the Spirit of the Place

In *Memorials of a Tour in Italy*, the construction of the spirit of the place extends beyond the individual and bears the potential to affect the broader human community, thereby reflecting Wordsworth’s universal ethical concern. In “Musings near Aquapendente”, he criticizes the “chilled age” (l. 325) in which despite the abundant achievements of scientific progress, humanity has submitted to “To her pur-blind guide Expediency” (l. 336) and has consequently lost the capacity to perceive the vitality of life. In response, Wordsworth asserts that humanity stands in need of “More of ennobling impulse from the past” (l. 349). It is precisely through poetic creation that he seeks to mediate such impulses, to “yield[ed] up my soul / To transports from the secondary founts / Flowing of time and place” (ll. 359–361), and thereby to “shed / Influence, at least among a scattered few, / To soberness of mind and peace of heart / Friendly” (ll. 365–368).

And who—if not a man as cold
In heart as dull in brain—while pacing ground
Chosen by Rome’s legendary Bards, high minds
Out of her early struggles well inspired
To localize heroic acts—could look
Upon the spots with undelighted eye,

Though even to their last syllable **the Lays**

And very names of those who gave them birth

Have perished? — Verily, to her utmost depth,

Imagination feels what Reason fears not

To recognize, the lasting virtue lodged

In **those bold fictions** that, by deeds assigned

To the Valerian, Fabian, Curian Race,

And others like in fame, **created Powers**

With attributes from History derived,

By Poesy irradiate, and yet graced,

Through marvellous felicity of skill,

With something more propitious to high aims

Than either, pent within her separate sphere,

Can oft with justice claim. (Wordsworth, 2009, ll. 277–288)

As indicated in the preceding textual analysis, the spiritual wandering and historical reflection triggered by visual and other sensory experiences are precisely the “those bold fictions” (l. 280) that Wordsworth seeks to preserve and transmit through poetry. He argues that “In those bold fictions that... created Powers / With attributes from History derived, / By Poesy irradiate, and yet graced, / Through marvellous felicity of skill, / With something more propitious to high aims / Than either, pent within her separate sphere, / Can oft with justice claim.” (ll. 280–288). That is to say, through the combined operation of poetry and history, these noble aims are sustained in ways that neither history nor poetry could achieve on their own. At one level, these “fictions” refer to the heroic narratives recounted by Rome’s legendary poets. Although both the poets themselves and their works have largely vanished over time, the “lasting virtue” (l. 279) embedded within them continues to be sustained and renewed in

specific places. At another level, the “fictions” denote the poet’s own carefully constructed the spirit of the place. Wordsworth anticipates that the cultural and historical treasures he discovers and celebrates in Italy will endure as a continuing source of spiritual force for future generations.

In his retrospective engagement with history, Wordsworth consciously intervenes in the narration of the spirit of the place. In the third sonnet of *Memorials*, “At Rome”, he criticizes modern historians such as Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776–1831) for stripping away “Those old credulities” (l. 1) of early Roman myth through rigorous historical scrutiny. Wordsworth suggests that this process risks dissipating the glory of Rome from the very ground it inhabits when he writes “The glory of Infant Rome must disappear, / Her morning splendors vanish, and their place / Know them no more.” (ll. 5–7) He contends that historical “Truth” (l. 7) resides not only in factual accuracy but also in the insight that “Assent is power, belief the soul of fact” (l. 14). In another word, affective identification with heroic legend becomes itself a source of moral spiritual force. In Tuan’s terms, place can be understood as “a concretion of value” (Tuan, 1977, p. 12). Thus, such affective and ethical engagement contributes directly to the formation of the place.

To sum up, Wordsworth revisits the natural and historical landscape of Italy in the *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837*, and constructs “the spirit of the place” endowed with ethical significance through the integration of sensory perception, personal memory, and historical reflection. The core of “the spirit of the place” in the *Memorials* lies in an attentiveness to the historical value of natural scenery and human architecture, through which Wordsworth derives spiritual strength to resist the encroachment of what he perceives as “a chilled age” (Wordsworth, 2009, p. 533 / l. 325). By linking individual experience with collective destiny, this mode of poetic writing elevates the representation of “the spirit of the place” beyond the confines of personal travel and aesthetic appreciation, endowing it with moral and ethical depth.

In doing so, Wordsworth fulfills the poetic vocation articulated in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, that “a Poet...is a man speaking to men” (Wordsworth, 2013, p. 103).

Conclusion

This paper examines William Wordsworth’s *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837* from the perspective of literary geography and argues that such travel poems function as a form of spiritual navigation. Through the retrospective writing of travel experience and its reconfiguration in language, the sequence integrates sensory perception into personal reflection and historical consciousness, transforming what was initially an abstract and conceptualized foreign space into a poetic place endowed with clear value orientation, and thereby constructing a dwelling space in which the subject may find spiritual repose. “The spirit of the place” that Wordsworth repeatedly invoked across his poetic career does not arise from any inherent or mystical property of place itself. On the contrary, it emerges as a form of spiritual treasure gradually generated through the mediation of lived experience, memory, and poetic reflection. The *Memorials* offers a concentrated expression of this transformative process. Foreign space is no longer merely a geographical object to be observed or traversed, but becomes a vital field in which the poet reflects upon history and affirms ethical values.

While it would be difficult to generalize across all of Wordsworth’s later works, the analysis of *Memorials* suggests that this poem sequence should not be regarded as a decline in poetic power. Rather, it reveals a shift in Wordsworth’s poetic concerns from an earlier emphasis on immediate sensuous experience and the representation of nature toward a more integrated engagement with memory, history and ethical reflection. In this context, travel poetry becomes an important mode through which Wordsworth pursues spiritual inquiry and articulates his poetic identity in later life.

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