THE LANGUAGE OF WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

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THE LANGUAGE OF
WORDSWORTH
AND COLERIDGE

FRANCES AUSTIN

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MACMILLAN

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To my Mother and Father

Prefatory Note

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge wrote poems for *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and their names have understandably been linked ever since. They do, indeed, have many things in common, not least their reaction against eighteenth-century modes of writing poetry. Yet there are differences, too, and these determine the pattern of such a book as this. In themselves the contrasts between their poems are enlightening and help us to understand each poet better. But the difficulty is obvious from the start. *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) contains only four poems by Coleridge, whilst Wordsworth wrote the remaining nineteen. The collection opens with Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and many books have been written about that poem alone. Nevertheless, if we look at the collected poems of the two writers it is clear that Wordsworth wrote a great deal of first-class poetry and that Coleridge's first-class poetry consists of no more than about twenty pieces. Two of them (*Kubla Khan* and *Christabel*) are unfinished, and some would say that, magical and unique as they are, they never could have been finished. Any book about the two poets together consequently has to reflect in treatment and proportions this almost physical discrepancy in output. However, it would be wrong to judge the merit of the poems by the number of pages given to them. The quality of Coleridge's best poems is very high. This book is not a competition between the two poets but a recognition of their likenesses in some matters and their even greater and quite individual excellences – and sometimes weaknesses – in others. That Wordsworth is given more space and Coleridge less lies in the nature of their respective output of poetry. It does not mean that Wordsworth is being rated above Coleridge.

East Stour, Dorset
September 1987

FRANCES AUSTIN

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It is a great pleasure to acknowledge the help I have received from my former student, Valerie Milling, who has responded so promptly to enquiries about certain books not readily accessible. Dr Bernard Jones has given much time to reading my various drafts and has made many helpful suggestions. Above all, Professor Norman Blake has been tireless in answering questions and generous with encouragement, and not only during the writing of this book. I need hardly say that these people are not responsible for the shortcomings that are inevitable in a short book on so vast a subject.

Grammatical Terminology

Inevitably in a book of this kind grammatical terms must be used. Since many readers may be unfamiliar with even 'traditional' terminology and others may be used to different terms used in the various current grammatical 'models', a few words on the usage here will not come amiss.

The basic terms for the 'parts of speech' – noun, verb, adjective, etc. – have been retained as is the practice of most current models of grammar. For explaining and describing the basic structure of sentences Systemic Grammar has generally been followed, sometimes in a modified form. In Systemic Grammar the clause is divided into four main elements: Subject, Verb, Complement and Adjunct. These are represented by the notation S V C A. Subjects and Complements (the term Complement includes both the Object and Complement of 'traditional' grammar) are often 'realised' by nominal groups. A nominal group is a group of words based round a noun which is called the 'head' of that group. An example is 'the swift flowing river with its swirling eddies', where the 'head' is the word *river*. All nominal groups can be used as the Subject of a sentence. Complements are also 'realised' by adjectives or adjectival phrases when they follow the verb *to be* or other 'copula' verbs such as *seem*. Examples are 'the river is *deep*', 'the lion looked *very fierce*'. Verbs are 'realised' by verbal groups. These may consist of a single verb or a verb preceded by one or more auxiliary verbs. 'John *swam* a hundred yards' is an example of the first kind and 'John *would have been swimming* today but he has a cold' of the second. Note that the verb which conveys the 'main' information (called a 'lexically full' verb) comes last in the group. An Adjunct is essentially anything which does not come under one of the other three headings. There are,

therefore, various kinds of Adjuncts, but the basic one and that to which the notation A refers in this book is an adverb or adverbial group. Examples are 'merrily'; 'with great courage'; and 'beside the stream' in sentences such as 'he sang *merrily*'; 'he fought the lion *with great courage*'; and 'she knelt *beside the stream*'.

It is now customary in Systemic Grammar to discard the term 'sentence' and substitute 'clause complex'. Readers will find both terms used in this book. 'Sentence' seems too useful a term to be rejected completely but at times 'clause complex' is clearer and more precise because it indicates the clause structure of which the sentence is composed and the way in which those clauses are put together.

The term 'expansion' is a technical term. It is normally used to refer to methods of extending the clause (see M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Edward Arnold, 1985, pp. 202–16) but here mostly refers to expansion of the nominal group.

One further technical term that may be unfamiliar has been used. This is 'interpersonal', again a term modified from Halliday (see *IFG*, pp. 332–4). It is used for comments of the poet/narrator expressing a personal opinion that occur in the text but are really external to it. Examples are 'I think'; 'it seems'; 'perhaps'; and so on.

Students will find that in most books based on Systemic Grammar the Verbal element is marked with a P for Predicator. As V seems more accessible to those unfamiliar with this grammar it has been adopted here. It is used in J. F. Wallwork, *Language and Linguistics* (Heinemann, 1969). Readers may consult Chapter 5 of this book for a quick guide to the structure of the four main elements of the clause. A fuller exposition of Systemic Grammar will be found in Dennis Freeborn's, *A Course Book in English Grammar* (Macmillan, 1987). Halliday's *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (see above) is a much more advanced account of Systemic Grammar written by its leading exponent and it is referred to frequently in the notes. It is of particular use for textual studies and may be of interest to those who wish to pursue the subject further. A very useful introductory book on grammar, that shows the relation of traditional grammar to Systemic Grammar, is N. F. Blake,

Traditional English Grammar and Beyond (Macmillan, 1988). For other explanations of a rather more traditional, although up-to-date, kind, the grammars of Randolph Quirk and his collaborators cannot be ignored. The latest of these is R. Quirk *et al.*, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Longman, 1986). An earlier, somewhat shorter version is R. Quirk *et al.*, *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (Longman, 1972), and a simpler version based on this is R. Quirk and S. Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English* (Longman, 1973).

Texts and Abbreviations

All poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge taken from *Lyrical Ballads* are quoted from *Lyrical Ballads*, eds R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Methuen, 1963, rev. 1965) (*LB*). Wordsworth's successive versions of 'The Ruined Cottage' are taken from *The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar*, ed. James Butler (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell U.P.; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979). References to the origins of 'The Female Vagrant' are based on *The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell U.P.; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1975). Other poems by Wordsworth are quoted from *Poetical Works*, eds Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940–9) and the 1805 text of *The Prelude*, eds Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn. rev. Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959); also available in Oxford Standard Authors, 1960. The 1800 and 1802 Prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads* and the 1800 Note to 'The Thorn' are taken from Brett and Jones's edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. These may also be found in W. J. B. Owen, ed., *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), and the 1800 Preface in Vol. I of *Prose Works*, eds W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) pp. 118–58. The 1815 Preface to Wordsworth's *Poems* is taken from Vol. III of *Prose Works*, pp. 25–39, abbreviated to *PW*. Wordsworth's letters are quoted from the seven volume edition of Chester L. Shaver, Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill, which divides into The Early Years (*EY*), The Middle Years (*MY*) and The Later Years (*LY*) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967–88). This edition is a revision of Ernest de Selincourt's six volume edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935–8). References to letters are followed by the equivalent volume (where relevant) and page number in de Selincourt's

edition. Poems of Coleridge, other than those printed in *Lyrical Ballads*, are quoted from *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (1975, 1st edn. 1912). Quotations from *Biographia Literaria* (BL) are from the Everyman edition (London: Dent 1906, rev. George Watson 1965), to which page references are given. Coleridge's letters are quoted from *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71).

Datings for Wordsworth's poems are mainly based on Mark L. Reed, *The Chronology of the Early Years 1770–1799* (CEY) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1967) and *The Chronology of the Middle Years 1800–1815* (CMY) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1975).

M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985) is abbreviated to IFG.