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William Wordsworth's Golden Age Theories during the Industrial Revolution in England, 1750–1850

Mark Keay

palgrave

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2001 978-0-333-79436-4

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First published 2001 by

PALGRAVE

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010

Companies and representatives throughout the world

PALGRAVE is the new global academic imprint of St. Martin's Press LLC Scholarly and Reference Division and Palgrave Publishers Ltd (formerly Macmillan Press Ltd).

ISBN 978-1-349-42018-6

ISBN 978-1-4039-1956-4 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781403919564

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Keay, Mark.

William Wordsworth's Golden Age theories during the Industrial Revolution in England, 1750–1850 / Mark Keay.

p. cm. — (Studies in modern history)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-349-42018-6

1. Wordsworth, William, 1770–1850—Knowledge—History.

2. Wordsworth, William, 1770–1850—Political and social views.

3. Literature and society—England—History—19th century.

4. Literature and history—England—History—19th century.

5. Pastoral poetry, English—History and criticism. 6. Industrial

revolution—England—History. 7. Lake District (England)—In

literature. 8. Golden age (Mythology) in literature. 9. Industrial

revolution in literature. 10. Social values in literature. 11. Country

life in literature. 12. Populism in literature. I. Title. II. Studies in

modern history (Palgrave (Firm))

PR5892.H5 K43 2001

821'.7—dc21

2001021203

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01

Children form the most conservative of human societies.
Philippe Aries

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Preface

This book should begin with a friendly warning. You will not find here another work of Romantic scholarship or even a cradle-till-grave biography of William Wordsworth. What you will find is a detailed case study of social and economic change and continuity during the Industrial Revolution in England. It does, of course, add something new to our understanding of English Romanticism, as well as supplying a thematic biography of William Wordsworth's life and work as a modern poet. It is, however, primarily a work of social and economic history and explanation. It starts moreover from a fresh perspective on Wordsworth's life and work which falls outside the tired (if not completely old-fashioned) frameworks of Marxist and post-structuralist accounts of the topic. In other words, it has a revisionist aim – to place Wordsworth within a living and historically credible world which does justice to his own perceptive remarks on Man, Nature and Society. In this respect it is based upon the social and economic research and – to a point – the political conclusions of revisionist historians of modern English society like J. C. D. Clark, William D. Rubinstein and A. J. Mayer who have each redefined our view of the old landed order between 1688 and 1914. Within this context of the 'old regime' in England, Wordsworth is shown to represent, in certain respects, an anti-modernist tradition in politics and literature that was opposed to the patchy class and industrial society and commercial values that were evident in the period 1750–1850. He was always 'a man speaking to men', but his views of social life and economic relations were arguably more like those of agrarian radicals such as William Cobbett and Feargus O'Connor than *bona fide* members of radical, whig or tory propaganda. They were based in fact upon an abiding sympathy with the 'common man', in general, and a Golden Age ideal of social life and moral relations, in particular, which arose from his experience of a vanishing way of life in Old Lakeland in the years 1770–89. Above all, this book reveals that Wordsworth's ill-defined status in the old landed order was *the* social cause of his need for, and satisfaction with, the populist perspective of the old-fashioned farmers, labourers and artisans of the remote north. Sharing the values and ideals of the social class beneath him, the 'well-to-do' Wordsworth sought to reform the effete culture and feelings of those around and above him. His most radical poetry therefore was, socially speaking, complementary to, but not quite dependent upon, the democratic aims and political objectives of the French Revolution. Furthermore, his own revolution in art and culture was,

emotionally speaking, based upon backward looking ideas and pre-modern forms of thought and feeling, which were found in a particular historical context, namely the Lake District community. Hence my original *caveat* to would-be reviewers and lay readers. Read this book as a contribution to social and economic history or you will, probably, miss the point.

MARK KEAY

Acknowledgements

I have a number of formal acknowledgements to make here. First, I gratefully acknowledge the receipt of a Deakin University Postgraduate Research Award, from the Faculty of Arts, which has enabled me to study full-time for almost three years.

In the course of my primary research I have been helped by a number of private and public libraries both in Australia and England. In particular, I would like to thank the staffs of the following libraries: the Inter-library Loans Office at Deakin University, Geelong; the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne; the Borchardt Library at La Trobe University, Bundoora; the Rare Books Collection at the State Library of Victoria; the Institute of Historical Research, London; the Wordsworth Room at the University of Lancaster; the Kendal Library (Stricklandgate), Kendal; and the Kendal Records Office. Above all, I would like to thank Professor Robert Woof of Dove Cottage Library, in Grasmere, for permission to use material from the Trust's collection and for his hospitable reception of a young scholar 'from down under'. In the same vein I would like to thank his chief assistant, Dr Jeff Cowton, for his friendly help on a number of occasions.

My next acknowledgements are, perhaps, the most important. I wish to thank my assistant supervisor, Dr Roy Hay, for his earnest efforts to keep my 'conservative' theory upon the straight and narrow path of academic fairness towards my 'left-wing' opponents. Of course, I alone am responsible for any problem which may yet remain on this score. My debt to my principal supervisor, Professor Bill Rubinstein, is almost too great to admit in a brief sentence: I will simply say that he is a first rate teacher, mentor and historian.

Likewise Professor Jonathan Clark has been a superb representative and editor for Palgrave. He has encouraged my labours at all stages of publication and has now seen the work to its final destination in print. I thank him most sincerely for the time and effort he has bestowed upon my book.

I have also to thank my brother, Kevin Keay, for making the mysteries of Microsoft Word less esoteric to me.

Above all, I must dedicate this book to my wife, Veronica, and to our children, Renwein and Stephanie, who have travelled to far away places in search of history and truth. I hope their love and devotion have not been wasted.

List of Abbreviations

AHEW	Agrarian History of England and Wales
AHR	Agricultural History Review
BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
DNB	Dictionary of National Biography
DNBMP	Dictionary of National Biography: Missing Persons
ECHR	Economic History Review
ECS	Eighteenth Century Studies
EHR	English Historical Review
HT	History and Theory
HW	History Workshop
IRSH	International Review of Social History
JBS	Journal of British Studies
JMH	Journal of Modern History
JRSS	Journal of the Royal Statistical Society
MEB	Boase's Modern English Biography
MP	Modern Philology
NH	Northern History
PP	Past & Present
PR	Cobbett's Weekly Political Register
SH	Social History
SIP	Studies In Philology
CW2	Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 2nd Series
TIBG	Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers
TRHS	Transactions of the Royal Historical Society
VCH Cumb.	The Victoria County History of Cumberland
<i>comp.</i>	Date of composition.
<i>pub.</i>	Date of publication.