

# Constructing the Classical Past: the Role of Landscape in Christopher Wordsworth's Greece

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*This article examines the works of Christopher Wordsworth (1807–85), who has hitherto been neglected as an important and intriguing figure in the history of travel writing on Greece. His texts, which invite readers to 'view' the country from mountain-tops and to imagine its caves and quarries filled with ancient figures, highlight the importance of landscape as a frame for studying classical reception. Wordsworth 'received' ancient Greece through its visible, modern landscape in three ways: through a sense of the landscape as a container for memory, through the use of specific landscapes as springboard for 'flights of fancy' enabling a vivid engagement with the classical past, and as a tool for better interpreting and understanding the history and literature of the ancient Mediterranean. Christopher Wordsworth constructed a vision of ancient Greece for his readers through his description of the nineteenth-century landscape. As such he offers an important reminder to consider the role played by the embodied experience of space and place in analysing acts of classical reception.*

The opening passage of a popular 1839 illustrated guidebook, *Greece: Pictorial, Descriptive, and Historical*, invokes a scene from Herodotus in which Aristagoras, the tyrant of Miletus, brings an offering to Cleomenes, the king of Sparta.<sup>1</sup> That offering is 'a tablet of bronze, on which was engraved an outline of the earth' and, though 'rude and imperfect, it served the purpose of conveying to the mind of the spectator a general idea of the leading features of the countries which it pourtrayed [*sic*]'.<sup>2</sup> Christopher Wordsworth, the author of *Greece*, sought to achieve a similar feat, though with one key difference: 'to construct a map from a view of the country itself, rather than to communicate an idea of the country from the contemplation of a map'.<sup>3</sup> Wordsworth's literary map would produce for his readers a vision of Greece

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<sup>1</sup> Herodotus 5.49.

<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 1).

<sup>3</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 2).

as a country that was still, in its essence, an ancient place and as this article will establish, he both perceived and presented the visible landscape of Greece as the ideal vehicle for accessing its ever-present past.

Thus, in his opening pages, Wordsworth invited his reader to join him upon the summit of Mount Lakmos (2,295 m, in the Pindus range). From the foot of this peak, Wordsworth notes, run the five largest rivers of Greece: the Aoös, the Arachthos, the Haliacmon, the Pineios, and the Achelous. Travelling mentally down these rivers, ‘the Grecian traveller who stands on this point’ could ‘converse . . . with noble cities, and thick forests, and rich valleys, and fields of battle, which crowd, in his mind, upon their banks, and lastly, with the seas themselves into which they fall’.<sup>4</sup> Each of these topographical features is layered with rich associations with the classical past. Wordsworth would use this device — of placing himself and his reader imaginatively upon a mountain summit and following the landscape features radiating from it across the geography and history of the country — again and again.<sup>5</sup>

This article will explore the relationship between landscape and classical reception in Christopher Wordsworth’s two published accounts of Greece: his *Athens and Attica: Journal of a Residence There* (1836), and his *Greece* (1839). Both texts feature detailed descriptions of Greece which promote, as Wordsworth phrased it above, ‘an idea of the country’, not just in terms of its present formation but also its ancient history. It is through experiencing the landscape of Greece that the past, for Wordsworth and his readers, is ever-present. Such a comment — that the topography and archaeology of Greece brings to life the classical past — may seem blindingly obvious to any reader who has visited modern-day Greece armed with even an inkling of classical knowledge. However, this article will demonstrate, through the example of Wordsworth, the value of landscape as a ‘frame’ for understanding some acts of classical reception.<sup>6</sup>

Wordsworth’s particular form of classical reception is a compellingly ‘composite’ one, for his aim was not merely to interpret an individual text or author but rather to construct a vision of Greece as a whole, and as a country embedded in its own past. As the following sections will elaborate in turn, the landscape serves him as the

<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 3–4). Wordsworth implies that he is following the example of the seventeenth-century poet John Milton, who, he comments, described the Roman empire in terms of the roads radiating from Rome (Milton 1671: 80–82). This device also echoes the ‘radial plan’ of some portions of Pausanias as identified by Hutton (2005: 139–42), although Wordsworth does not immediately acknowledge this himself (see n. 9).

<sup>5</sup> In the space of his first forty pages alone, Wordsworth takes the view from Tymfristos (1839: 12–13), Parnassus (19), Hymettus (29–32), and the lower summit (St. Ilias) of Lykaion (33–34). On Lykaion he notes a classical precedent for his device, in Lucian’s dialogue *Charon, or the Inspectors*, in which Charon and Hermes sought an imaginary prominence from which to view ‘the known world’.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the edited volume by De Pourcq, De Haan, and Rijser (2020), and in particular Lorna Hardwick’s comment therein that greater attention should be given to ‘place . . . [as a site] for the symbiotic relationship between ancient and modern’ (Hardwick 2020: 28).

tangible container of classical memory, as the basis for classical ‘flights of fancy’, and as the lynchpin for fresh interpretations of ancient events, genres, and texts. For Wordsworth, viewing the landscape is as much an act of reception as reading literature or examining a statue, and landscape is the medium by which he communicates his sense of Greece to the reader with a vivid immediacy: the sights he shares with them are offered as the bases for their own imaginative engagements with the ancient past.

This article will also seek to reinstate Wordsworth as an important figure in the nineteenth-century reception of Greece. He was born in 1807, the son of a clergyman and nephew to the famous poet. He was ordained in 1835 and consecrated bishop of Lincoln in 1869, remaining so until his death in 1885. Before entering clerical orders, however, he distinguished himself as a classical scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge, and travelled in Greece and Italy in 1832 and 1833.<sup>7</sup> Out of these travels came his *Inscriptiones Pompeianæ* (1837), which included the first published explication of the graffiti at the site, and the two texts with which this article is concerned: his *Athens and Attica* and his *Greece*.

Although both were products of the same journey, and both demonstrate similar interests in terms of the literature drawn upon and the monuments and landscapes described, they are stylistically distinctive. *Athens and Attica: Journal of a Residence There* is written, as its subtitle would suggest, in the first person, and ostensibly follows the route which Wordsworth and his companions took through the country. As such, it matches the generic conventions established over the course of the eighteenth century for the ‘personal’ travelogues produced by travellers returning from the Grand Tour. Published three years later, *Greece: Pictorial, Descriptive, and Historical*, is more expansive, with Wordsworth consciously including the reader, or ‘Grecian traveller’, in his use of the first-person plural: ‘we’ journey up mountains and down rivers with him. In its regional overviews, notation of key sites, and intensive historical detail, *Greece* locates itself within a newer genre of travel-writing: that of the guide book, and seems to be written partly with the self-consciousness that the reader might have it in hand during their own travels around the country.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, with its lavish illustrations — both steel engravings on plates and woodcut illustrations set within the text — it was clearly also intended to transport the reader to Greece without requiring them to leave their fireside.

Wordsworth’s writings are important within the wider context both of the histories of foreign travellers to Greece and of the shifting attitudes towards it as a country

<sup>7</sup> Pawley (2004).

<sup>8</sup> John Murray — who published Wordsworth’s *Inscriptiones Pompeianæ*, his *Athens and Attica*, and the later editions of his *Greece* — is typically presented as the originator of the ‘guidebook’ genre with his *Murray’s Handbooks for Travellers* beginning in 1836. However, Pieter François has argued that texts which blurred the line between ‘travel accounts and travel guides’, and which represented an earlier nascence for the genre, were in evidence in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century. See François (2012) and cf. Goodwin and Johnston (2013).

of unique significance due to its classical legacy. He travelled to Greece in 1832, the same year that Prince Otto of Bavaria was made the first king of the newly-independent country. He followed in the footsteps of philhellenes who had travelled to Greece at the turn of the nineteenth century and had left their own marks on literature about the country and its history and indeed *upon* the country and its history: topographers such as William Gell, artists such as Edward Dodwell, ‘collectors’ such as Lord Elgin, and idealists such as Lord Byron.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, he visited a quite different Greece, and stood at the cusp of a new generation of travellers. In the decades before, during, and following the War of Independence the ‘classical landscape’, particularly in Athens, underwent deliberate ‘purification’ to better meet the Hellenic ideals of Greeks and visitors alike.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the decades following the publication of Wordsworth’s *Athens and Attica* and his *Greece* saw an explosion of a new volume and type of travel to Greece: mass tourism.<sup>11</sup>

As a traveller to Greece, Wordsworth has been relatively neglected: passing references in recent years have largely focussed on his role as literary executor and biographer of his more famous uncle William, or on his commentary, as Bishop of Lincoln, on the literalism of the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib.<sup>12</sup> However, his *Greece* enjoyed enormous success and seems to have become ubiquitous as a handbook for subsequent travellers to the region.<sup>13</sup> Following its initial publication in 1839 *Greece* was rapidly reissued in 1840 and translated into French in 1841. Further editions were released in 1844, 1853, 1858, and 1868. A final edition, edited by Henry Fanshawe Tozer, a fellow classically-minded traveller, was released in 1882. Annotated bibliographies gestured towards *Greece* as ‘an admirable introduction to the study of the geography, history and literature of that wonderful country’.<sup>14</sup> By the late nineteenth century, it was apparently standard to carry a copy of Wordsworth’s tome on any travels around Greece, although not all travellers found

<sup>9</sup> Eisner (1993: 89–118). In his *Greece*, at least, Wordsworth is frustratingly vague in identifying the writings of postclassical travellers and ancient authors alike upon which his work is built: in the front-matter he lists key works of ‘Greek Geography’, ancient and modern, but notes that it was ‘inconsistent with the plan of the present work’ to include immediate in-text citations (1839: vii–x). He does single out his ‘obligations’ to the works of topographer William Martin Leake (1839: ix) and the more specific footnotes to his *Athens and Attica* reveal his reliance upon an unsurprising cast of ancient writers including Euripides, Pausanias, Livy, Thucydides, Plutarch, Strabo, and Herodotus (1836: throughout).

<sup>10</sup> Athanassopoulos (2002) and Bastéa (2000: 100–4).

<sup>11</sup> Eisner (1993: 125–7).

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Benton (2015) and Finnegan (2014). In terms of scholarship on Greece, Wordsworth does make very brief appearances in Stoneman (2010: 163, 241–2), Eisner (see n. 13) and Athanassopoulos (see n. 23).

<sup>13</sup> Eisner (1993: 134) briefly touches on Wordsworth, locating his works ‘among the more popular travel books of the century’.

<sup>14</sup> Porter (1875: 170). See also Pycroft (1854: 164 and 176–7).

this an edifying experience: the *Holiday Letters from Athens* (1873) of Matilda Barbara Betham Edwards commented acerbically that '[w]e had Wordsworth's "Greece", but I (heretically) advise no one to so encumber himself.'<sup>15</sup> Reviews in response to the release of new editions were fulsome.<sup>16</sup> In 1882, the *Building News and Engineering Journal*, of all periodicals, carried a lengthy and fulsome review of Tozer's new edition, observing that 'as a popular and descriptive history of the country it is still unsurpassed'.<sup>17</sup> Wordsworth's particular vision of Greece was undoubtedly influential upon the experience of subsequent travellers and the views of interested readers who never saw it for themselves.

### Landscape and memory

Throughout both works, Wordsworth actively emphasizes the way in which the Greek topography serves as a container for classical memory. In terms of modern theories of memory, Wordsworth's approach most closely mirrors Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory.<sup>18</sup> Greek placenames, the view of the Athenian cityscape, and the association of specific locations such as Thermopylae are all presented as possessing a shared cultural significance which his readers will undoubtedly recognize, even if at the same time Wordsworth does model his own idiosyncratic ways of imagining the past as contained in such *lieux de mémoire*.

In the preface of *Athens and Attica*, he defends his choice to use ancient rather than modern orthography for place names.<sup>19</sup> He explains that he is 'addressing himself to the eyes of English readers, in some degree familiar with the literature of ancient Greece', and thus wants to greet them with names which they recognize in order that they might 'suggest a train of agreeable recollections'. His aim, he asserts, is 'to suggest to the reader not . . . [the] modern sound [of place names], but their ancient sense'.<sup>20</sup>

The orthography of place therefore serves to preserve classical memory and associations; so too does the physical makeup of the Greek landscape. Regarding the ruins of a city at the summit of a 'rugged hill' on the shore of Boetia, Wordsworth

<sup>15</sup> Betham Edwards (1873: 150). For other travel accounts either using Wordsworth's *Greece* as a guidebook 'in the field', or as a source of complementary material to present to their readers alongside their own impressions, see for example de Vere, *Picturesque Sketches* (1850: vol. I, 150 and 205), Mahaffy (1876: 32 and 34), and Smith (1884: 19, 37, 92, and 310).

<sup>16</sup> E.g. *The Athenaeum*, January 29 1853, no. 1318, p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> 'Greece', *The Building News and Engineering Journal*, 43 (1882), pp. 685–7.

<sup>18</sup> Nora (1996: 6–20). See also Erll (2011: 22–27). Hölkeskamp (2006) draws upon Nora in developing an understanding of 'Rome's monumental memory' (487) and its evolution during the middle Republic.

<sup>19</sup> Throughout this article, I have left spellings of place names as they are in direct quotations from Wordsworth, but elsewhere give them in accordance with contemporary usage.

<sup>20</sup> Wordsworth (1836: v–vi).

muses that ‘Nature did well in forming Greece of hard imperishable limestone’, with the result that ancient monuments seem ageless. More than mere memorials, these remains flip time,

appearing to appropriate the beholder to themselves, and not be influenced by him. They exist not, it seems in their age; but he lives in theirs. Their share in to-day seems greater than his own.<sup>21</sup>

This same sense of reversal — of the classical past possessing a greater solidity and reality than the nineteenth-century present — again assaults both Wordsworth and the reader when regarding the ancient ruins of Athens. Visiting in the immediate aftermath of the Greek War of Independence, Wordsworth found the modern town shattered, and the Temple of Theseus in more ‘perfect a state’ than any contemporary structure. For the traveller seeking to commune with the classical past, this ‘desolation itself has value’, for it ‘simplifies the picture . . . and leaves the spectator alone with Antiquity’.<sup>22</sup> Here, Wordsworth is either being naive or disingenuous: the appearance of ancient monuments in Athens had already undergone proactive ‘purification’ even during the years of war.<sup>23</sup> The immediacy of access to classical memory detected by Wordsworth was the result of deliberate planning, underpinned by nationalist philhellenic ideals, rather than a propitious side-effect of conflict.

The passages above are all drawn from Wordsworth’s *Athens and Attica*. Three years later, in his *Greece*, he would articulate the ruins of Athens from a different perspective, neglecting any reference to the recent history of the city in favour of foregrounding the interior experience of the educated (foreign) visitor and their unique capacity to fully appreciate the meaning of the cityscape. Far from being transported into the past, the present-day viewer can never experience Athens as it was in ancient times:

it is impossible, at this time, to convey, or entertain, an idea of Athens such as it appeared of old to the eyes of one of its inhabitants. But there is another point of view from which we love to view it, – one which supplies us with reflections of deeper interest, and raises in the heart sublimer emotions than could have been ever suggested in ancient days by the sight of Athens to an Athenian.<sup>24</sup>

He goes on to observe — in marked contrast with his impression in *Athens and Attica* — that the ancient city of Athens is viewed only ‘in ruins’, in the ‘mutilated’ remnants of

<sup>21</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 5).

<sup>22</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 51–52).

<sup>23</sup> See Athanassopoulos (2002: 290–1 and 294). Bastéa (1997: 49–53) suggests that foreign travellers — including Wordsworth, whom she quotes — visiting Greece in the aftermath of independence tended to dwell on the desolation of modern-day Athens, with no reference to the rebuilding efforts of the new state, and reserved most of their interest and approbation for the more appealing ruins of the ancient past.

<sup>24</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 130).

temples and in sparse surviving pillars and stone steps. This forces the viewer to reflect on ‘the perishable nature of the most beautiful objects which the world has seen’, but also, in contrast, highlights ‘the permanence and the vitality of the *spirit* and *intelligence* which produced these works’.<sup>25</sup>

The distinction Wordsworth makes here is not between the ancient and the modern city, but between the ancient and the modern viewer. In the preceding paragraphs, Wordsworth depicts the ancient Athenian as being familiar with the traditions and early history of the city ‘from his infancy’, rather than gaining such through study and research.<sup>26</sup> But where the modern viewer has lost familiarity, they have gained the distance which enables them to fully appreciate the sight of Athens as a sublime experience. This is quite different from the transcendental experience described by Wordsworth in *Athens and Attica*, where the sight of Athens smoothly transports the viewer into the past. Instead, the ‘memories’ evoked by the sight of nineteenth-century Athens include a web of associations of all that the ancient city resulted in; not just its own buildings, but those around the world modelled upon them, and even the lasting ‘spirit’ and influence of Athens’ ‘Poets, Historians, Philosophers, and Orators’.<sup>27</sup> In *Athens and Attica*, Wordsworth had observed — in what is now a well-worn cliché — that ‘Athens . . . though a very tattered manuscript, is not yet, like Rome, a Palimpsest’, where the modern city had been built over the ancient one.<sup>28</sup> However, in *Greece* it is the palimpsest of memory and associations that privileges his modern viewer because they can simultaneously appreciate the multiple layers of meaning, if not archaeological strata, attached to the sight of the city.<sup>29</sup>

A similar intensification of feeling, evoked by the hindsight with which the modern viewer is privileged, occurs in Wordsworth’s panegyric upon the marble quarries of Mount Pentelicus. Once again, he contrasts the modern experience of the ‘deserted and silent’ sites with those of the ancient, when the walls ‘would have resounded with the din of busy workmen’.<sup>30</sup> However, as at Athens, the modern viewer possesses the privilege of knowing what the product of the quarries has since become, and the meanings those products have come to possess for the wider world. He encourages his reader or fellow-traveller to view the quarries as one would the birthplace of a great man. How, he asks, could one

regard with indifference – nay, without a feeling of veneration – this, the *native place* of so many buildings and statues, which have inspired the admiration, refined the taste, influenced the acts, humanized the manners and elevated the thoughts, and even added dignity

<sup>25</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 130–1).

<sup>26</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 129).

<sup>27</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 131–2).

<sup>28</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 51–52).

<sup>29</sup> Jenkins (2014: 24) refers to a similar sense of ‘accumulation’ in the appreciation of the monuments of Rome.

<sup>30</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 117).

to the religion of men, – nay, of whole cities and kingdoms, for hundreds and thousands of years[?]<sup>31</sup>

The emphasized temporal distance — ‘hundreds and thousands of years’ — between the modern-day viewer of the quarry and its ancient past is, as with Athens, a boon rather than a deficit. From the vantage point of the nineteenth century they can enjoy the richest experience by virtue of commanding a sense of the full history of a site and the significance it (or in the case of the quarries, the buildings and sculptures that came out of it) acquired *after* antiquity.

Elsewhere, in both texts, layers of memory can also serve either to mislead the viewer or to recreate landscapes which no longer exist. Each chapter of his *Athens and Attica* opens with a classical quotation or inscription, and his fourth chapter, which opens with a discussion of the road from Athens to Oropus, is headed with a brief line from Theocritus: ‘Where are my Bay-trees vanished?’ (II.1).<sup>32</sup> This quote leads Wordsworth to a discussion of the *Voyage de Jeune Anacharsis*, a popular late-eighteenth century historical novel purporting to tell of the fourth-century BCE Greek travels of the Scythian Anacharsis. The novel, by Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, drew upon genuine ancient writings, and depicted the road from Athens to Oropus as ‘sheltered by the green foliage of bay-tree groves’, an image apparently taken from the writings of the geographer Dicaearchus.<sup>33</sup> Such bay trees are nowhere to be found, and Wordsworth concludes that they never existed, and are nothing more than the descendants of a transcription error: ‘They have been planted in such abundance upon these hills by geographers, out of the fertile nursery-garden of a false print’.<sup>34</sup> False memories can thus interpose themselves between the viewer and an accurate appreciation of the landscape as it existed in ancient times. For all this, past imagined trees, a few pages later, serve to beautify the dreary landscape experienced by Wordsworth, as he travels onwards to Rhamnus and Marathon *en route* to Athens. ‘We must, I suppose, console ourselves for the dreary barrenness which is spread over this whole country, by adopting Plato’s belief, that in better days it was shaded by stately trees which are now no more’.<sup>35</sup>

The most drastic example, however, of imagination and literary memory standing in for the viewed, contemporary landscape is that of Thermopylae. In *Greece*, Wordsworth observes that ‘The pass of Thermopylae was never stormed by main force. Its conqueror, and its only one, has been Nature’. Rivers have taken new courses, new land has risen out of the sea, and the ‘grander features of this remarkable place’ are changed beyond recognition. Nevertheless, the detailed record of ‘the

<sup>31</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 117–18).

<sup>32</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 26).

<sup>33</sup> For this passage Wordsworth cites John Hudson, *Geographiae Veteris Scriptores Graeci Minores*, vol. 2 (1703), p. 11, which was reproduced in Karl Müller, *Geographi Graeci Minores*, vol. 1 (1804), p. 100.

<sup>34</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 27–28).

<sup>35</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 30), citing Plato, *Critias*, III. C.

ancient historian' has, in some way, 'fixed the river and the sea in their old positions for ever. Thermopylae is now no longer Thermopylae, except in the pages of Herodotus. *There it will never cease to be so*'.<sup>36</sup> The modern-day visitor can, turning to the lines with which the historian recorded the ancient topography with such 'fidelity and minuteness', effectively replace the scene before their eyes with the landscape as it stood in the time of King Leonidas.

Landscape, therefore, is bound up with ideas of memory and remembering in the writings of Wordsworth, but not necessarily in a simplistic or straightforward way. He suggests early on in his *Athens and Attica* that ancient ruins are somehow more real, more substantive, than the flesh-and-blood modern viewer, and elsewhere implies that literary memory — whether faulty or not — has more of an impact on what that viewer sees in their mind's eye than the modern-day landscape before them. Some elements of the landscape — the names of places, the unyielding limestone out of which long-preserved monuments were created — are physical repositories of memory, spaces where time stands still or indeed in which the traveller is transposed to the ancient world. Other elements — trees, river beds — are mutable, vanishing or moving in reality and, sometimes, metaphorically created out of thin air by incorrect editorial conjectures or mistranslations. In these cases, it is the textual memory which overlays the landscape: the false trees which inform the traveller's expectations, or the words of Herodotus which obliterate the present-day reality and preserve the pass of Thermopylae in the form it possessed during the events which lent it its greatest fame.

### Landscape and imagination

One of the most compelling features of both *Athens and Attica* and *Greece* is the way in which features of the landscape enable an imaginative blurring between past and present. Sometimes, as with the examples cited above of the absent bay trees and the transformed Thermopylae, this involves Wordsworth drawing on classical texts to imagine the landscape as it no longer is, or even never was. More frequently, however, it involves drawing on the sight of, or view from, a particular landscape feature to imagine the current-day landscape as being filled by figures or events from the past. In more complicated instances, the viewer is encouraged to fill the landscape with multiple figures from the classical and postclassical pasts, and to imagine the potential perception by the later figures of the earlier.

Both Wordsworth himself in *Athens and Attica* and his imagined co-traveller in *Greece* find themselves virtually tripping over imagined classical figures *en route*. For example, in *Athens and Attica*, whilst exploring the ruined city on the shores of Boetia, Wordsworth notes that 'you' might choose to ascend to the summit of a tower from which 'you might almost fancy' you could look down at 'the Euripus now lying below you . . . in order that you might assure yourself whether or not the Grecian

<sup>36</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 17–18).

fleet of Agamemnon was still lingering in the port of Aulis'.<sup>37</sup> 'Fancy' is a key word in this example: Wordsworth is doing more than instructing the reader to regard the Euripus and consider the fact that Agamemnon's fleet once floated there. Instead, he is suggesting that the absorbed traveller might feel the need to double-check whether the fleet is still there.

The landscape also enables Wordsworth to speculate upon the engagement between ancient Greeks and their own mythological past. Probably the most remarkable act of imaginative time-travel in Wordsworth's writings occurs in his *Greece*, which concertinas the present not only with the fifth century BC but also with classical mythology. Having traced key aspects of the geography of Greece via the rivers rising out of Mount Lakmos, Wordsworth invites his reader to join him at a different imaginative viewing-station, this time Mount Tymfristos (2,315 m). From this vantage point, Wordsworth follows not the rivers but the mountains radiating from Tymfristos.<sup>38</sup> This leads him to Mount Oeta, the site of Hercules' death, and crucially visible from Thermopylae. Wordsworth uses the imagined sight of Mount Oeta in order to key into the supposed mindset of the Spartans dying at Thermopylae in 480 BCE. He terms the death of Hercules on Oeta 'the apotheosis of heroic character', and comments on 'the reverence' with which the summit was viewed, especially by those 'who could number the hero, who died and was adored here, among their own progenitors'. The effect of the peak, Wordsworth hypothesized, would surely be strongest upon the descendants of Hercules 'called to undergo toils, meet dangers, and struggle with difficulties'.

Therefore we may well suppose that it seemed to the greatest of them, Leonidas, – when he stood with his three hundred Spartans near this spot, and knew that where he stood, both he and they must soon die, – to be a distinguished proof of the special favour of the gods towards himself and them that he and his chosen few were called upon to fight and fall in the shade of Mount Oeta [. . .] The Spartans, on this site, in the last hours of their life, while they saw the countless hosts of Persia in their front, while the Immortals of Xerxes were rushing to charge upon their rear, yet had above them the summit of Mount Oeta; and thence they drew courage and hope from the reminiscence which it supplied of their great ancestor, – of the labours which Hercules had undergone, of the death which he had there suffered, and the glory which he had won.<sup>39</sup>

This highlights both the significance of landscape to Wordsworth's imaginative engagement with the classical past, and the complexity of purpose to which it could be put. Mount Oeta does more, in Wordsworth's narrative, than inspire thoughts of Hercules: it encourages the reader to put themselves in the role of the Spartans thinking about Hercules. Throughout, Wordsworth encourages his reader or envisaged traveller to experience a greater sense of immediacy with the Greek past,

<sup>37</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 5).

<sup>38</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 12–14).

<sup>39</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 16).

specifically through their own experience of the landscape (whether that experience is ‘direct’ or at the one remove of reading Wordsworth’s descriptions). The landscape is the concrete object which underlies, supports, and enables imaginative flights of fancy into a long-distant past.

In *Athens and Attica*, Wordsworth’s fancies encompass an even greater chronological range, and imaginatively locate postclassical figures in the Greek landscape who had never actually visited it. Such a counterfactual occurs to Wordsworth whilst regarding the town and environs of Rhamnus:

The beauty of its site and natural features, enhanced as it is by the interest attached to the spot, is the most striking characteristic of Rhamnus [. . .] If Nicolas Poussin had ever left Italy to travel to Greece, and given himself to the delineation of [the] Greek landscape, he would have chosen Rhamnus as one of the first scenes to exercise his pencil. He would then perhaps have introduced into this his landscape a person who was connected with this place, who derived his name from it, and was alike remarkable for his genius, his actions, and his misfortunes. Antipho[n] the Rhamnusian would have been in his place here. And if the painter had been allowed further license, he would perhaps have imagined as appearing at the verge of this glen and descending from it, the scholar of Antipho[n], the historian of the Peloponnesian war. But he must have left it to the spectators of his landscape, to imagine that Thucydides was then arriving from Athens, having crossed, as he would have done, the field of Marathon, to come and listen here, in such a scene as this, to the words of such a master.<sup>40</sup>

As with his suggestive account of the thoughts of Leonidas upon Mount Oeta and thus Hercules, Wordsworth invites the reader to engage in a complex doubling of imaginative vision. *If* Poussin had painted Greece, he would have started at Rhamnus; *if* he painted Rhamnus he would have included Antiphon; *if* Antiphon he may have also included Thucydides, but *if* so he would have left it to the viewer to think of the historian crossing Marathon, and to imagine the meeting between the orator and his pupil. Once again, imagination is key, but Wordsworth is doing more than simply asking his reader-traveller to place Antiphon in the landscape they are regarding: instead, he is inviting them to imagine a painting which never existed, the thoughts of the painter who never composed it, and through both of these to think of the path travelled and the encounter enjoyed by the ancient figure of Thucydides. The lynchpin to all of this is Poussin, a seventeenth-century French painter, famed for his imaginative, historicized depictions not of Greek landscapes but Italian ones. Poussin’s inclusion in *Athens and Attica* is justified by his ability to do exactly what Wordsworth is tacitly trying to do throughout both his texts: to bring the modern-day landscape to ancient life through the evocation of events and individuals which once filled it.

<sup>40</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 42–43).

### Landscape and interpretation

In Wordsworth's writings, encounters with ancient Greece occur at the intersection between landscape, imagination, and text, with the landscape bringing to life and enabling a more immersive appreciation both of Greek literature and of key moments in ancient Greek history. However, there are also instances in both texts in which he takes a scholarly, analytical approach to the landscape rather than an imaginative one: in utilizing an immediate encounter with the landscape to inform close readings of classical texts, genres, and history. In these instances, landscape serves both as an interpretative tool for the reader of ancient Greece, and as a text in need of interpretation.

Wordsworth's appreciation of the genres of oratory and drama are particularly enriched by the experience of being in a particular landscape. In his *Athens and Attica*, he records his visit to the Pnyx, the site of the popular assemblies and of some of the most famous speeches of Demosthenes, statesman and orator of the fourth-century BC. Anticipating by some centuries the current interest in phenomenology and the experience of the audience, Wordsworth mused on the impact that Demosthenes' words must have had in such a setting, with 'the sky of Attica above his head, the soil of Attica beneath his feet, and above all, the sea of Attica visible behind him'.<sup>41</sup> The natural elements, the inimitable view, the built landscape surrounding them, were the forces 'by which the imagination of his audience was most forcibly excited, and in which their affections were most deeply interested'.<sup>42</sup> Demosthenes' speeches had a peculiar strength — which a modern-day reader like Wordsworth could only fully appreciate when in the location of their utterance — due to the landscape in which they were originally set. Later, he muses that the 'peculiar spirit which distinguishes Athenian oratory' might owe something to the inspiration of the natural scenery around the city, imagining Demosthenes rehearsing his speeches whilst pacing up and down the beach of Phalerum, with the Ægean sea as his audience.<sup>43</sup>

Not far from the Pnyx, Wordsworth was moved to similar musings by the environment of the 'Theatre of Athens', as he called it, or the Theatre of Dionysus, as it is now known. '[W]hatever its capacity might have been,' he commented following a discussion of the exact number of thousands it might have seated, 'the Theatre of Athens did not mainly depend on its dimensions for the attractions which it possessed'. Instead, the setting was its chief advantage, enabling as it did the spectators 'to be charmed by the mixed enchantments of nature and art'.<sup>44</sup> He pointed out that 'most of the metaphorical expressions of Æschylus are derived from objects which were *visible* to the audience', whether references to seas and storms, the navigation of ships, or the feeding of flocks on hills.<sup>45</sup> Wordsworth offers an implied vision of the

<sup>41</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 66).

<sup>42</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 67).

<sup>43</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 68–70).

<sup>44</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 93).

<sup>45</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 94).

playwright consciously drawing on the landscape features in ‘the immediate field of view’ of the theatre, and in so doing heightening the audience’s experience of ‘the poetical atmosphere’ he wished to promote.<sup>46</sup>

Going further still, Wordsworth credits the setting of the Theatre for ‘the successful daring of the Aristophanic plays’. He contrasts the imagined impact of particular features of Aristophanes’ plays in the open-air theatre with their effect in an enclosed, modern-day theatre building, gesturing first to Trygæus’ flight in the opening of *Peace*. Such a scene would be ‘reduced to a mere mechanical process of ropes and pullies’ in a modern theatre, but in its original setting Trygæus would have been lifted into the sky ‘by the simple machinery of the imagination of the spectators to which free play was given by the natural properties of the theatre itself.’<sup>47</sup> (Wordsworth does not specify the fact that the audience would also have been required to imagine the giant dung beetle upon which Trygæus made his excursion.) Likewise, Wordsworth thinks it a forced matter to imagine the birds ‘build[ing] their aerial city’, or ‘the Clouds . . . sailing on the stage from the heights of a neighbouring Parnes’ within the confines of a modern enclosed theatre.<sup>48</sup> However ‘here, under an open sky, with the hills of Athens around him,’ such moments would not seem like theatrical conceits to the audience member, but rather quite natural, ‘in some sense the creations of the place’, and easily imagined in a mind’s eye supported by the broad view on all sides.<sup>49</sup> Wordsworth may well be overestimating the extent to which the natural setting truly lent persuasiveness to Aristophanes’ ambitious scenes — indeed, one might argue that part of the comedy of his plays was in their deliberate anti-realism — but what is critical here from a reception perspective is that Wordsworth married his modern-day experience of the physical setting with his knowledge of the texts to come to new, imaginative conclusions about the composition practices of playwrights and the phenomenological impact of their works upon their audiences.

Elsewhere, Wordsworth looked to the character of particular landscapes to explain apparent curiosities within Greek literature. Describing Mount Helicon in *Greece*, with its ‘fresh rills, and cool groves, and flowery slopes’, Wordsworth noted that whilst most of the mountains of Greece found themselves associated with peculiarly violent legends, ‘Helicon had no Ædipus nor Pentheus’. Instead, he suggests that the nature of the landscape itself influenced the mythology attached to it, and that the stories of Helicon ‘partook of the softness and amenity which distinguish the natural character of the mountain from which they sprung’, suggesting that the shape and settings of Greek mythology and literature itself was influenced by the physical landscape as experienced by the ancients.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 95). The phenomenological perspective on Greek plays is of increasing interest today; see for example Bray (2021).

<sup>47</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 97). Aristophanes, *Peace* 125–79.

<sup>48</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 98) referencing Aristophanes, *Birds*, 809 and *Clouds*, 321.

<sup>49</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 98–99).

<sup>50</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 23).

Similarly, Wordsworth utilizes the landscape in general to make an argument for (though he, of course, would not term it such) the role of environmental determinism in Greek history. Taking yet another mountain summit as his observatory, Wordsworth invites the reader to the summit of Mount Lykaion in order to regard ‘the map of the Peloponnesus unrolled, as it were, before his eyes’.<sup>51</sup> The physical environs of the Peloponnesus, Wordsworth suggests, impacted both the political and aesthetic activities of the people who inhabited it. First, ‘It is impossible’, when tracing the many mountain ranges dividing the landscape, ‘to avoid the reflection . . . that the Peloponnesus was intended by Nature to be the seat of different tribes of inhabitants, varying in their extraction, manners, and government’, not unlike the distinctive cantons of Switzerland.<sup>52</sup> The different communities of the Peloponnesians were inevitably ‘self-sufficient and independent’, as a direct result of the physical environment, with city-states isolated within their own ‘mountain defiles and fastnesses’.<sup>53</sup> The landscape thus promoted political and military autonomy that was only partially overcome by the federalism of the Achaean League.<sup>54</sup>

Wordsworth also set out to examine, with a specific focus on Arcadia, ‘how the religious faith, the mythological traditions, and the social manners of its inhabitants’ were shaped by the landscape of the Peloponnesus.<sup>55</sup> In general terms, he opines that the ‘mythology of Greece was the creature of its climate, of its soil, and its physical phenomena; it varied with their diversities in each particular province’. The ‘legendary religion of Arcadia’, in particular, was of a ‘remarkable character’, in keeping with the many geological peculiarities boasted by the region. An example of one such natural wonder is the hidden watercourse by which Lake Stymphalia passes underneath mountains before emerging as a river, the Erasinus, and falling into the sea at the Argolic Gulf.<sup>56</sup> The inhabitants of Arcadia, seeking a mythological explanation for this watercourse, deemed it the work of Heracles; thus, for Wordsworth, his cult in that region owed its origins directly to the natural landscape.<sup>57</sup>

Wordsworth further suggests that the landscape of Arcadia promoted a pastoral existence which in turn inspired an entire musical tradition and poetic genre. Bereft of soil suitable for agriculture, the inhabitants of Arcadia turned to pastoralism. This existence provided them, Wordsworth states (somewhat idealistically) with the ‘leisure and freedom, and familiarity with grand and beautiful scenes’ to develop both ‘mountain melodies’ upon the pipes inherited from their regional deity, Pan, and the

<sup>51</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 34).

<sup>52</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 37).

<sup>53</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 39 and 45).

<sup>54</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 41).

<sup>55</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 46).

<sup>56</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 48).

<sup>57</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 48–49). Wordsworth does not make explicit the source upon which he bases this claim, although Heracles was known for diverting rivers in some ancient accounts; see Luce (2006).

widely and poetically-respected virtues of a pastoral life.<sup>58</sup> By way of demonstrating the pastoral distinctiveness of Arcadia, Wordsworth points to the writings of Virgil, who when ‘commencing his didactic poem upon the affairs of rural life’, looked not to Italy but to Greece, and was inspired not by the ‘rivers and mountains . . . of his own beautiful land’ but instead from ‘the rude hills and barren sheep-walks of Arcadia’.<sup>59</sup> The landscape of the Peloponnesus, when viewed from the summit of Mount Lykaion, explains for Wordsworth not only the political division of the ancient tribes of the region, but also its mythology, the pastoral lifestyle of its people, and the impact of the latter upon wider ancient poetic traditions. Throughout his writings, landscape thus emerges as an active agent influencing Greek literature, politics, mythology and culture, to which any would-be interpreter of the ancient world must pay attention.

### Memory, imagination, and interpretation: Plato’s cave

The final encounter between Wordsworth, landscape, and the classical past which I will examine is his visit to, and explication of, a cave-grotto on Mount Hymettus now known as the Vari Cave or the Nympholyptos Cave. This example sees him drawing on an immersive landscape experience and a corresponding imaginative proximity to ancient events in order to intensify a scholarly conjecture regarding the identification of the cave with one visited by Plato in his youth. As such, it draws together many of the different features typifying Wordsworth’s use of and engagement with the Greek landscape highlighted in the discussions above.

He opens with an assertion of the potency of the location as a site of memory. Compared to the grand but ruined temples of Athens, ‘this simple grotto — a natural temple on a solitary mountain dedicated to natural deities’ has far more affective power. Wordsworth fancies that ‘Time has exerted no power here’: unlike the grander city temples, with their toppled or broken pillars, there is nothing to suggest to the viewer any gulf between what they are seeing and what would have been experienced by an ancient visitor to the same cave. He invokes the figure of ‘The Attic shepherd [Archedemus] to whose labour the cave is indebted for its simple furniture’, and whose figure is carved on the wall of the cave, musing that ‘you might fancy’ that this self-same shepherd ‘had just left the spot’ and would ‘return before evening from his neighbouring sheep-fold on Hymettus, with an offering to Pan from his flock there, or with the spoils of his mountain-chase, or with the first flowers . . . [from] his rural garden’.<sup>60</sup> Imagination, and a romantic perception of the same pastoralism which Wordsworth would identify with the rugged landscape of Arcadia in his *Greece*, means that the past is very much alive in this space.

However, the humble shepherd is not the only figure whom Wordsworth imagines stepping into the cave: he also makes the case that Plato (an author whom he

<sup>58</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 49–50).

<sup>59</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 50).

<sup>60</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 192–3).

evidently favoured, given the frequency with which he cites him in both of his texts) visited the same cave in his childhood. He builds this argument upon a detailed description and interpretation of the various inscriptions around the cave, emphasizing the dedications to Pan, Apollo, and the nymphs.<sup>61</sup> He then compares this with a textual reference out of Olympiodorus, a biographer of Plato, who wrote of Plato being ‘carried by his parents up the slopes of Mount Hymettus’, where they laid offerings at a spot dedicated to the very same deities recorded on the walls of the Vari Cave. This allows Wordsworth to ‘indulge’, as he himself puts it, in the ‘conjecture, that the grotto in which we now are . . . was itself witness of that scene, and that we are now looking on the same objects which arrested the eye and perhaps inspired a feeling of devotion in the mind of the youthful Plato’.<sup>62</sup> Wordsworth treats the cave in *Greece*, and presents the same theory, with greater certainty: ‘There is good reason to believe that this cave . . . has been trodden by the feet of the great philosopher of Athens; and that his eye has rested upon the same objects that we now see.’<sup>63</sup>

In his *Greece*, then, the frisson of excitement comes from the general sensation of standing in the same spot that Plato once stood, of seeing the same sights that he enjoyed. However, Wordsworth went a little further in his earlier account of the cave in *Athens and Attica*. Here, he explicitly compares the cave to a description given in Plato’s *Phaedra* of a cave which ‘appears to be consecrated to some Nymphs’ (Phadr. 230. 6), theorizing that Plato drew his description ‘from his own acquaintance’ with the cave at Hymettus. However, in a footnote he goes further still, and suggests that the reader ‘Compare [with] his description of the allegorical cave’ in *The Republic*.<sup>64</sup> This dry comment alerts the reader to the subtext which is clearly at work beneath his enjoyment of the cave which Plato may have seen: namely, that the Vari Cave may well have offered the inspirational form for Plato’s allegorical exploration of the Forms. Much like the quarries on Mount Pentelicus, the experience of the cave is heightened by the thought of the great work that might owe some portion of itself to the location.

### Conclusion: landscape and reception

For the ubiquity of his *Greece* as a guide to nineteenth-century English-speaking travellers (whether active or armchair) alone Wordsworth would be worthy of the general attention of scholars of classical reception. He visited and wrote at an important intersection in the history of Greece and in the physical and symbolic construction of the modern Greek nation following the War of Independence; a construction in which Greeks and visitors to Greece were mutually interested and for which they

<sup>61</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 194–200).

<sup>62</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 200–1). Olympiodorus, *Life of Plato*, 24–29; Wordsworth disregards the fact that Plato was reportedly a newborn baby when the visit to Mount Hymettus occurred. Cf. Griffin, tr. (2015: 72).

<sup>63</sup> Wordsworth (1839: 124–5).

<sup>64</sup> Wordsworth (1836: 200).

were mutually responsible. In this context, Wordsworth is fascinating precisely because his writings are no mere collection of observations, but rather an active attempt to construct a particular vision of Greece. It is no coincidence that he is fascinated by the achievement of Herodotus in preserving the Thermopylae of the Spartans in text, or of the stone-worker Archedemus in creating the timeless environs of the Vari Cave, for he set out to do something similar not for a single location but for all of Greece.

His act of reception is thus, crucially, a composite one. He is not focussed on a single author, site, or aspect of the Greek past, but is instead concerned with capturing something of the essence of Greece as a whole. Moreover, because of his perception that the remnants of the ancient world are more ‘real’ and influential than either the modern fabric of Greece or the transient nineteenth-century visitor, that essence is an inherently ancient one. More precisely, Wordsworth’s project in *Athens and Attica* and especially in his *Greece* is to construct and communicate a particular vision of Greece and its past — or indeed of Greece as a physical space indivisible from its past. However, he is by no means straightforwardly transmitting or ‘remembering’ ancient Greece as a series of bald facts and events. Instead, he coaches his reader to perceive, imagine, and experience Greece in a particular way, placing at the forefront of their minds the classical (and postclassical) figures, ideas, and allusions that he deems most important and most edifying. It is for this reason — his deliberate construction of a specific vision of the country — that this article is titled ‘Wordsworth’s Greece’ and not merely ‘Wordsworth’s *Greece*’. He wrote not a book, but a country. The role that he played in constructing Greece whilst it was engaged in its own act of nationalist self-construction, the influence of his work upon later visitors, and the bridge he represents between travel accounts written before and after the establishment of the nation-state, are all worthy of further consideration.

In the first instance, however, the goal of this article has been to consider Wordsworth’s writings as a case study in the way landscape functions within classical reception. Where does landscape fit within reception studies? John Dixon Hunt applied reader-response theory to gardens, proposing that designers always had in mind an ‘implied visitor’ just as authors write for an ‘implied reader’.<sup>65</sup> However, there has not yet been an attempt to theorize or explicitly delineate the role of landscape within classical reception.

In writing Greece, the landscape which both Wordsworth and his imagined (or implied) visitor viewed had a crucial role. His writings do more than simply collate classical references to a specific site in order to augment his readers’ appreciation of them; instead, he actively ‘reads’ the landscape in order to promote a more vivid engagement with the past in which those authors existed. One might then say that the landscape is the ‘text’, in the postmodern sense, being read and received by Wordsworth, but this oversimplifies the process at work. Instead, landscape functions in multiple ways within his composite reception of the ancient world. It serves

<sup>65</sup> Hunt (2004: 13–17).

as the vehicle or medium through which the classical past is heightened or made more immediate, even to the point of urging the reader to imagine scenes or moments for which there is no textual or factual precedent. It also informs Wordsworth's analyses of classical texts and of ancient history: his direct experience of specific spaces and landscape are the lynchpin to theories he develops about the correct naming of a mountain or the origins of Plato's ideas.

Attention to landscape thus reminds us of the (by no means novel!) idea that reception goes far beyond the reading of texts, and that a sense of the ancient past could and can be mined from the sight of Grecian hills much as Pentelicus was mined for its marble. A focus on landscape, as in this study of Wordsworth's guides to Greece, also offers insight into the complex negotiation occurring between history, literature, memory, and embodied experience of place and space that all contribute to the ongoing reception of the ancient world in the modern day.

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