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Carnival and Loitering in The Waggoner

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Peter Bell and *The Waggoner* are associated in the lower ranks of Wordsworth's book-length poems for sound thematic and historical reasons. Both works use low diction and depict vulgar characters; both burlesque epic conventions; the narrators of both are fond of self-conscious digressions. They were published two months apart in 1819, though both were written years before, *Peter Bell* in 1798, *The Waggoner* in 1806 (under the title *Benjamin the Waggoner and his Wagon*). Yet there is a marked difference in scale between these poems that their author noted in the dedication of *The Waggoner*: "from the higher tone of imagination, and the deeper touches of passion aimed at in [*Peter Bell*], I apprehended, this little Piece could not accompany it without disadvantage."[1] The earlier work is about how God leads human beings, represented by the unregenerate potter Peter Bell, to morality, humility, and fraternity by means of the figurings of the natural world. The telling of this tale draws on "carnivalized" modes, like mock-epic, which are uniquely compatible with the poem's doctrine. *The Waggoner* can be interpreted as Wordsworth's re-writing or parody of *Peter Bell*, in that it responds to the earlier poem by problematizing its appropriation of folk tradition. The sole conflict in *The Waggoner* (and, perhaps, the only aspect of the poem endowing it with critical interest) is that between the need for communal play and the dangers of play on time that belongs to someone else. Benjamin's world has become commodified, far more than Peter's; everything has become property to be owned by someone, even time. If Peter begins to learn charity and fraternity, Benjamin learns how these things are tolerated only if they produce a clear financial benefit. Wordsworth's attitude toward the loitering protagonist of *The Waggoner* is inconsistent, seemingly marked by a division of his loyalties between the spirit of carnival and the rights of property. He has come to fear carnival, to fear wandering, for others or for himself, yet he remains attracted to them both. Although the responsibility for the wagoner's loss of his job clearly belongs to his employer and, through him, to the effects of capitalism that are so apparent in the poem, Wordsworth represses this knowledge, blaming fate or Benjamin's "sin." He resolves his contrary reactions to wandering by showing that it ought to be indulged only in fiction: certainly just one form of aimlessness and play remains safe after we have read these two poems in succession, that occurring in the act of narration.

Wordsworth wrote and said little about his intentions in composing *The Waggoner*, and the best evidence of how he came to interpret it is its constant coupling with *Peter Bell*. As Paul Betz notes of these poems, "their textual histories became intertwined in March 1812 when Sara Hutchinson transcribed revised versions of each into the same notebook" (p. 24). Not only were they revised and recopied together from that point on, but in 1812 the poet took both to London to read to literary friends (pp. 20-23). Several periodicals reviewed the two works together and saw them jointly epitomizing Wordsworth's lighter style.[2] A coincidence of names within the works themselves may illuminate one protagonist's descent from the other: the "highland girl" Peter impregnated called her unborn child Benoni, the name (Hebrew for "son of my sorrow") that in Genesis 35:18 Jacob's wife Rachel gives to her new child before she dies and Jacob re-names him Benjamin ("son of the right hand"). The wagoner thus is figuratively Peter's son.

The religious or moral import of *Peter Bell* at times seems to be undercut by the comic presentation. Wordsworth tells of a cruel itinerant peddler of earthenware pots who after years of indulging in various sins (married twelve times, and so on) is brought to goodness through the example of a jackass, and the poem seems unconvincing in its own Christian terms, most jocular and least assertive when its content is most sacred. Although the tale is apparently true in the eyes of the poetic speaker, a village bard who sits in his garden telling the story to nine friends, he repeatedly reveals his uncertainty about the facts he relates. Our poet "cannot say" whether Peter has left his "wife or wives" (*1799*, 308-09), and he does not know why Peter is traveling this particular night (336-40).[3] Even the climactic redemption is qualified, with the phrase "Tis said" (1021). Such distancing is common in the *Lyrical Ballads*, but it seems less congruous in a story involving a man's salvation. Pale and "sore . . . from a slight contusion" after a long trip to the stars in his "little boat," the narrator starts to tell the story "to cover [his] confusion" (192-95), and while to begin *in medias res* is epic, the coarse language of Peter's "I will *bang* your bones!" (200) undercuts any pretensions to loftiness. The poet's humble listeners are baffled and insist that he start at the beginning. Feeling inadequate later, he tells them that he has "play'd and danc'd with my narration" and "loiter'd long ere I began" (841-42). Climaxes are played down or undercut: when Peter, seeing the orphaned boy kiss the jackass, cries "Oh! God, I can endure no more!" the poet, like an answering God, promptly obliges: "—Here ends my tale:—for in a trice / Arrived a neighbor with his horse" (1170-72).

The two central elements of the poem, the didactic conversion story and its colloquial presentation, conflict with each other, and the best proposal for uniting them is to see its style as an example of the Christian humility and fraternity that it puts forward as an ideal. Leah Marcus finds precedent in European religious practice for Wordsworth's use of the jackass as a type of Christ's sacrifice and a model for Christian living.[4] Like Vaughan's "The Ass"

and Coleridge's "To a Young Ass," *Peter Bell* draws on the cultural tradition epitomized in the Medieval Feast of the Ass, a festival that inverted all hierarchies and exalted the lowly, which was represented by the jackass led into the church (Marcus, 225-26). The Feast of the Ass was distinctly carnivalesque, as that quality is described by Mikhail Bakhtin in his studies of Dostoevsky and Rabelais, and Peter's jackass, with the cross marked on its shoulders that makes him think of the ass Jesus rode into Jerusalem (1021-30), is exemplary of the carnivalized Christianity of Wordsworth's tale.[5] Marcus's study brings out a problem that lies behind this poem and such other "lighter" Wordsworth works as *The Waggoner*, that he does not make a convincing peasant—*Peter Bell* comes across merely as a sermon from a self-consciously upper-class poet—yet if her explanation does not unify *for us* the effect of *Peter Bell*, it does help us to see how the poem might be read on its own terms, and how those terms then are qualified in *The Waggoner*.

The style of narration in *Peter Bell* clearly is consistent with the doctrinal content once it is perceived that the poet's awkward telling of the tale is a social act—indeed, that this gathering of humble friends in his garden is the most concrete realization within the poem of the ideal of humility figured in the jackass. If the ass is carnivalesque, so is the storytelling, the narration being no mere "text" but a man's voice speaking on a particular occasion, a voice that several times we hear being interrupted and challenged by others. The exchanges among voices remain play; no permanent damage is done, and no misfortune of a character or the narrator lasts. In a roadside inn, Benjamin of *The Waggoner* will find playfulness similar in carnival spirit to that practice in the *Peter Bell* poet's garden, but his decision to indulge will have a price, one that reflects Wordworth's impulse to restrict carnival to art.

Like *Peter Bell, The Waggoner* is about a journey. "Mild Benjamin" (45), a wagoner of "much infirmity" (51)—that is, a liking for ale—gives a ride to a sailor and his family who have been caught in a thunderstorm. The lame sailor has a jackass, as if to compel the reader to make comparisons with *Peter Bell*. At the Cherry Tree Inn it is "the village MERRY-NIGHT" (305)—one of those "rural Festivals, where young persons meet in the evening for the purpose of dancing," Wordworth's note informs us—so Benjamin and the sailor stop off and enjoy themselves there for two hours. Afterward the horses "With increasing vigour climb, / Eager to repair lost time" (660-01), but all for nought. When Benjamin reaches his destination, he is fired by his "sour and surly" employer, who suspects that Benjamin "loitered on the road" (701, 706). Wordsworth drew on a real incident for the poem, the original of the employer being Robert Southey's landlord Jackson.[6] In his epilogue the poet regrets "that unhappy sin / Which robbed us of good Benjamin" (844-45), and the ambiguity here is central to the poem as a whole: what "sin" was committed, Benjamin's dalliance or the employer's harhsness?

The force that intrudes on Benjamin's life is the way in which others' property rights encircle him. Peter at least could decide for himself how quickly he would travel to sell his earthenware jugs, but Benjamin is only a hired man, whose journey uses another man's wagon and horses and another man's time. The difference between the kinds of property relations depicted in the two poems not only reflects the gradual shift towards hired labor essential to the rise of capitalism, but draws attention to a consequence, the locus of which is psychological and phenomenological, the commodification of time, described thus by E. P. Thompson: "As soon as actual hands are employed the shift from task-orientation to timed labour is marked. . . . Those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer's time and their 'own' time. And the employer must *use* the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted: not the task but the value of time when reduced to money is dominant." As is clear enough in *The Waggoner*, "Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent."[7] In a passage from *The Prelude* written in 1804, Wordsworth perceives hoarding of time as central to utilitarian discipline (here, in education): he criticizes "the tutors of our youth," the "stewards of our labour, watchful men / And skilful in the usury of time . . ." (V.376, 378-79; Refs. to 1805, Norton edition). Time is introduced as a theme early in *The Waggoner*, when the narrator says that the church clock would be tolling midnight, if the church had a clock (276-84). This detail, appearing immediately after Benjamin picks up the sailor's family, attracts the reader's attention with its clumsy digressiveness and hints that any transgression resulting from the wagoner's kind act will be temporal. Furthermore, it is implied that Benjamin has no way to know how much time he spends (the sailor and he stay at the inn for two hours, but that figure is supplied by the narrator).

The carnivalesque, which in *Peter Bell* is put forward as the best, most Christian mode of behavior and of discourse, is shown in *The Waggoner* to be inhibited by the property rights essential to modern commercial society. Although carnival (according to Bakhtin) "was limited in time only and not in space," its "central arena could only be the square, for by its very idea carnival *belongs to the whole people*. . ." (*Problems*, 128). In *The Waggoner* there is a place for carnival, the public "central arena" of the Cherry Tree Inn, and a time set aside for it, the Merry Night, but unfortunately the time Benjamin uses is the private property of someone who does not recognize the occasion. Benjamin is no innocent child of nature, however. In his mind the world of the "Merry-Night" is not exempt from the rules of ownership and exchange, but rather "reasons manifold" make the visit to the Cherry Tree seem to him "like a lawful earning" (313-15).[8] Much in the way Peter thinks that the ass is his "lawful prize" (410), Benjamin sees a celebration as his due. Although the Merry-Night is by nature a public

event, while the ass obviously belongs to another man, Benjamin's time nonetheless is not his own to spend, and he is dimly aware that he risks the "anger of the sky." Peter and he misinterpret for their own pleasure, and each pays for his mistake, the kind wagoner more than the potter. Benjamin knows that his dalliance is a crime against property, at one point referring to his frequent stops for ale as such: he tells himself, "I *trespass'd* lately worse than ever" (114; emphasis added), and his ambiguous use of that word interrelates two offenses, one against God's laws and one against human property rights. While the manuscripts of 1806-12 here read "I've been a sinner, I avow" (*1806*, 107), with Wordsworth's eventual choice of a more formal religious vocabulary enters the sense of crossing over illicitly into what belongs to someone else. By stealing these two hours Benjamin tries to recover a mythic time when this act of celebration would not be criminal, a time when dividing time into "play" and "work," "carnival" and "not-carnival," would be unthinkable.

The values that were promulgated in *Peter Bell* are shown in this poem to be subject to economic forces that recognize no holidays and no altruism. When the mastiff snarls at his "meek comrade" the ass, the latter "Salutes the Mastiff on the head" (542-47), and although by the ethics of *Peter Bell* the dog deserves this chastisement, its injury later is the final provocation for Benjamin's angry master. The message is clear: considerations of property outweigh those of amity. The Christian charity that Peter is only beginning to learn Benjamin displays several times, such as when he helps the sailor's family. The poet laments that such generosity is not shown by Benjamin's successors, who apparently know how their employer's demands overrule all others. Benjamin got his job when one day he came upon the "piteously abused" team of horses and showed he could get them to move (126-35). His supervision of the horses is milder than that he receives from his employer, depending on their own negotiation of the work at hand: "To stand or go is at *their* pleasure; / Their efforts and their time they measure / By generous pride within the breast" (107-09). But he can treat them well for as long as he does only because making them happy and efficient benefits their owner. Helping travelers, on the other hand, is unjustified if it delays the wagon, and we might suspect that, conversely, no one would consider Benjamin's drinking a sin if it did not make him late.

The nature of Benjamin's "sin" merits careful consideration. While both *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner* superficially encourage temperance, in the former Christianity seems to be on the side of lowly celebration. The wagoner "trespasses" (to use his own loaded word) against conventional Christian teaching only by drinking, yet that is perhaps the lesser of his transgressions against the specific contemporary religious doctrine whose rise is so apparent in *Peter Bell*, Methodism, and there is strong continuity between the religious element of *Peter Bell* and that of this poem, although no religious group is mentioned here and the vocabulary of sin by which Benjamin is condemned was not unique to the Methodists. The message of temperance we find in *The Waggoner* and in contemporary Methodism served a comprehensive ideology of labor, one that attests, in Thompson's words, to "the extraordinary correspondence between the virtues which Methodism inculcated in the working class and the desiderata of middle-class Utilitarianism."[9]

The preacher may have solved Peter Bell's problems, but *The Waggoner* implies how this religious doctrine would impoverish the life of men like Benjamin and Peter because of its insistence on compartmentalizing labor, time, and human experience itself. If, as I suggested above, Benjamin's name represents him as Peter's son, then the wagoner has in fact inherited the harsher effects of the potter's new-found faith. In Wordsworth's age even the carnivalesque had been enlisted in aiding capitalist production, and evangelical movements played a key role in the process. Relating the Methodism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to changes in work discipline, Thompson points out how the "intermittent character" of passions like that involved in Peter's conversion divided life into two distinct temporal realms, with the brief carnivalesque period permitting work discipline to be made more rigid: "Energies and emotions which were dangerous to social order, or which were merely unproductive . . . were released in the harmless form of sporadic love-feasts, watch-nights, band-meetings or revivalist campaigns. . . . These Sabbath orgasms of feeling made more possible the single-minded weekday direction of these energies to the consummation of productive labor."[10] Clearly a distinction must be made between these carnival times and ones like the Merry-Night.[11] The latter is a remnant of earlier rural culture, and although for Benjamin it exists within the quantified world of economic exchange (where it presumably can have acquired a new, ultimately oppressive purpose), it briefly recovers the Eden before such commodification and, perhaps, can be taken to prefigure its return.

What is the dominant view taken of the poem's action? Wordsworth does sympathize with Benjamin, who at the end has been separated unjustly from his proper role in the world. "The 'Waggoner' was written con amore," Wordsworth recorded in a 1819 letter, "and as the Epilogue states almost in my own despite" (*MY*, II, 848)—the narrator of this poem is meant to be a self-portrait, as the *Peter Bell* poet is not. The wagon hardly outlasted the wagoner, for no one else could make the horses perform, and its job now is handled by "Eight sorry Carts, no less a train" (827)—an unhappy fall into commercial efficiency. That the poet wants to reject recent changes in the Lake District is clear in his note on the homemade sign at the Swan Inn (89-98): "Such is the progress of refinement, this rude piece of self-taught art has been supplanted by a pro-

fessional production." But with his irony in this comment he judges more decisively than he can manage regarding the major events of the poem. Wordsworth's view of what occurs cannot be expressed as a coherent argument, for *The Waggoner* is essentially contradictory, a "light" poem about a man being stripped of his livelihood. The poet apparently intended the comic tone to express forgiveness for Benjamin's failings, and thus while he asserts his solidarity with Benjamin, he assumes that the wagoner's transgression requires both absolution from him and some apology to the readers. Charles Lamb found "a spirit of beautiful tolerance" in the poem, but did not notice anything presumptuous about that spirit.[12]

The poet's viewpoint can be discussed in fairly concrete terms because Wordsworth depicts himself in the work when Benjamin passes by Dove Cottage, which was once an inn:

> Where once the DOVE and OLIVE-BOUGH
> Offered a greeting of good ale
> To all who entered Grasmere Vale;
> . . . a Poet harbours now,—
> A simple water-drinking Bard; (53-55, 59-60)

What was public space has been made private, and our "simple water-drinking Bard," so unlike the revelers who once drank there, is aligned with the new order. This passage confirms what we could infer without it, that a man of Wordsworth's social class would not be at the village Merry-Night—or, for that matter, in the *Peter Bell* poet's garden. The narration of *The Waggoner*, like that of the earlier poem, has carnivalesque elements: such mock-epic inversions as terming Benjamin "our Hero" (61), "the Conquerer" (101), or "a hero, crown'd with laurel" (435); such comic self-corrections as when the poet notes that he "might have told before" that the sailor is lame (379); the inappropriately Miltonic description of the poem as an "adventurous Song" (775); and the various references to the fickle muse's activities. But in this work the narrator is not speaking amid a gathering of humble people and interacting with them; instead, he sits alone, writing.

Wordsworth would not want to loiter as Benjamin does. Indeed, perhaps he has reasons to fear wandering, and wanderers. The sailor is a vagrant, one of many veterans wandering about in the aftermath of the Treaty of Amiens, and although his past is made comic (his obsession with Nelson's 1798 victory at the Nile is reminiscent of Toby Shandy's foibles), he remains an intrusive, unwanted reminder of current British social disruption and of the divided loyalties that events in France had caused former radicals like Wordsworth. Aimless wanderers are possibly a threat, and there are a few scattered hints that the sailor is one: he does tempt Benjamin to go into the Cherry-Tree, the employer takes particular offense to him and his ass (734-41), and, most significantly, his wife speaks of him "as if half afraid" (240). Wandering may have been innocent once, but no longer.

The event crucial for understanding the poet's attitude toward gatherings like the Merry Night may be his visit to Bartholomew Fair in 1802, between the writing of *Peter Bell* and the writing of *The Waggoner*. In the 1805 *Prelude* he describes the fair as "anarchy and din / Barbarian and infernal," where one sees "All freaks of Nature, . . . / All jumbled up together to make up / This parliament of monsters" (VII.660-1, 689, 691-92). The fair "lays, / If any spectacle on earth can do, / The whole creative powers of man asleep" (VII.653-55), and according to Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, who consider how authorship as an institution defines itself as protection against public space (much as property rights in general do), this place where "the boundaries between all categories are confused and transgressed" threatens most the poet's sense of his own authorial power to put raw experience in order (120). When we place the perceived threat to his artistic potency beside his implication that the fair is only one event chosen from among many "when half the city shall break out / Full of one passion" (VII.646-47), it seems apparent that the political element to his distrust of crowds resides in a network of associations in his mind (involving French excesses, the betrayals of "the political world of action,"[13] perhaps Burke's "swinish multitude") but *primarily* in the challenge that communality makes to individualism, as the latter is manifest in both his political ideology and his ideology of literary production. In the poet's response to Bartholomew Fair there is not just fear but fascination, and this episode of *The Prelude* would seem a fitting preface to the ambivalent depiction of celebration in *The Waggoner*.

The difference between these two poems lies in which of the two reactions Wordsworth emphasizes and in how closely he relates the carnivalesque to its price. His Merry Night is tinged with a sense of "trespass," but in this instance he makes explicit the attractiveness of "universal overflow": "What tankards foaming from the tap! / What store of cakes in every lap!" (332-34). What ensues in the poem shows that a celebratory gathering *need not* cause pain, for it is the restrictions of the commercial world rather than the Merry Night that costs Benjamin his job; however, the story reveals at the same time that Wordsworth cannot conceive of such joyous freedom without a penalty (even for a wagoner with no authorial power to lose). Writing *The Waggoner* sometimes seemed mere loitering to Wordsworth, John Williams proposes, and Benjamin's sobriety ought to be equated with the poet's dedication to the long philosophical poem he had undertaken, *The Recluse* (185). The story of Southey's landlord dismissing an employee gives Wordsworth an opportunity to express what guilt he feels about his slow progress with *The Recluse* for wagoners can be fired for loitering while bourgeois poets cannot. The penalty Benjamin receives

represents, in a benign, deflected manner, the one the poet half-suspects he himself deserves.

The narrator obfuscates in laying the blame for what happens to Benjamin, seeing supernatural forces conspiring against the wagoner: "who can hide / When the malicious Fates are bent/ On working out an ill intent?" (693-95). But the "malicious Fates," "destiny" (696), and "the utmost anger of the sky" (348) are really the poet's misappellations for the man who dismisses Benjamin. If the "sin which robbed us of good Benjamin" is the wagoner's dalliance, then, we can infer, his employer is filling the role of God. In his extensive revisions between 1806 and 1812 Wordsworth changed one four-line passage to emphasize both the transgressive aspects of Benjamin's behavior and the agency of the natural world. The cumulative effect of the change is to transfer this newly-stressed "trespass" partially from geography to moral law, and hence it attests to the strategy (no doubt for the most part unconscious) that I see pervading the published poem. The passage in question occurs at the point toward the conclusion when Benjamin is within sight of his displeased master. The 1806 manuscript reads:

> And the morning light in grace
> Crimsons o'er his lifted face,
> And some sober thoughts arise
> To steal the wandering from his eyes. (*1806*, 703-06)

"Wandering" suggests not just tipsy unsteadiness but the earlier straying that this condition evinces; however, the word leaves vague the offense in what Benjamin did. The 1812 manuscript and the published text read:

> And the morning light in grace
> Strikes upon his lifted face,
> Hurrying the pallid hue away
> That might his trespasses betray.
> (727-30; cf. *1812*, 823-26).

The second half of the original compound sentence has been made a dependent clause, so that it is the grace-filled morning light, not Benjamin's "sober thoughts," that tries to obscure the signs of his erring; most significantly, while "trespasses" now indicates that a set boundary has been crossed illicitly, nevertheless extending the notably god-like agency of the light to the change in his face largely transforms the nature of that trespass from literal and proprietary to metaphorical and moral, since the latter is the kind that grace effaces. What occurred Wordsworth now will term a trespass, but he has deflected the implications of that word, bringing out its religious meaning so as to assign to God the responsibility for whatever law that has been broken. In fact, any forces responsible for what happens to Benjamin work through his master. The "fates" and "destiny" represent Wordsworth's attempt to conceal the real villain, the social trends that make everything into a commodity. He represses his awareness of this threat by rewriting it as a familiar, conventional abstraction, thereby making it permanent and invisible.

To summarize: on the one hand, the poet feels for Benjamin and tries to make us feel for him; on the other, he personally is among those who live soberly, privately, in what was once a public place for celebration. He may perceive this inconsistency as necessary. In *The Prelude* it seems clear how he qualifies the elevation of humble subject matter that he had proposed earlier, in the *Lyrical Ballads* Preface; as Stallybrass and White formulate the poet's new attitude, "the low forms could only be ennobled if the poet was, in both literary and social terms, *superior to his subject* (123)." In order for Wordsworth to represent the Merry Night he must be tucked away safely in Dove Cottage. He does make a distinction, however, between his character's physical behavior and his own symbolic behavior in narration, a distinction that permits him to have it both ways, to wander with Benjamin while staying inside, protecting his private space that in turn protects him. In both *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner* the act of narration is associated with wandering and loitering. The village poet who recounts Peter's story uses the trope of an inefficient journey when he asks the friends who have "waited . . . on [his] good pleasure" to indulge him further: "I loiter'd long ere I began" (842-43). In *The Waggoner* the muse will not "servilely attend / The loitering journey to its end," and so the poem loiters elsewhere, in a fanciful digression that is also the muse's physical detour to nearby features of the landscape (590-639).[14]

These two poems do not show that moments of aimlessness are bad intrinsically; in fact, being possessive of time is condemned. Peter's great sin may be that he always travels but never wanders: the potter comes across the ass after getting lost in what he thought was a shortcut, and when he claims the ass as his "lawful prize" he does so "lest the journey should prove vain" (409-10).[15] To Wordsworth, these men like Peter and Benjamin's employer who would oppose wandering as "loitering," who want to see a profit that justifies travel or play or charity, are simply vicious. In *The Prelude* he writes about "the tutors of our youth" that they "to the very road / Which they have fashioned would confine us down /Like engines" (V.376, 381-83), and he probably would disapprove in like manner of critics like the *Literary Gazette* reviewer of *The Waggoner*, who had either missed or rejected the poem's ethics of inefficiency when he wrote that "[Wordsworth's] rumbling verse rolls on like the heavy-laden waggon its subject, and the author and the horses have equally uphill works of it" (*Romantics Reviewed*, ed. Reiman, A601). All the *Peter Bell* narrator's apologies for his loitering sound like empty conventional rhetoric. The impression given in these poems is that poetry is best when it rambles, when it makes detours for no greater reason than to take in the sights.

It is best for all concerned, however, if one wanders only in the manner of the village poet who sits talking in his garden and the "simple water-drinking Bard" who writes in Dove Cottage, for playfully digressive storytelling is safe as playful action is not. Reading *The Waggoner* occurs in a world apart, ruled by fancy, which protects the author and the reader, if not the hero. In 1836 Wordsworth explained the poem to John Taylor Coleridge as "a play of fancy": the poet "wished by the opening descriptive lines to put his reader into the state of mind in which he wished it to be read. If he failed in doing that, he wished him to lay it down." *The Waggoner* is itself carnival, where the usual ways of regulating response are to be suspended (it is to the point that this poem takes place *at night*, as does *Peter Bell*). In this conversation with Coleridge, Wordsworth implied a comparison between the mood that ought to overwhelm his reader and alcoholic euphoria, when "He pointed out . . . the glowing lines on the state of exhultation in which Ben and his companions are under the influence of liquor."[16] But the respite drink gives to Benjamin has a price absent in that literature can provide. The act of writing not only takes place in but *constitutes* or *creates* privileged space, in part because within both artistic production and the experience of the completed work the quantification of time can be annulled; the creative act becomes, like the Merry-Night, both an encapsulation of that largely-forgotten prior age and a hint of some future utopia.[17] Yet utopian fantasy usually reveals that a present cognitive or affective impasse is irresolvable, and such surely is the case with the poem in question, where Wordsworth cannot overcome intellectually his mixed responses toward what Benjamin does.

These two Wordsworth poems demonstrate that telling a story is far preferable to wandering or playing out in the real world. The literal wandering depicted in poetry is valuable, paradoxically, as an excuse for narrative wandering, and thus the physical act, which must be discouraged, when represented in art almost becomes reduced to a symbol or type of the stroll that the poet is taking. The *Peter Bell* narrator takes a trip through the sky in his "little boat" before he returns to earth and his friends, and while it is better to speak to friends than to fly through the sky, his travels prefigure the kind of light-hearted wandering he will do in telling Peter's tale—just as this fictitious bard's carnivalesque narration, in turn, figures that of Wordsworth in his own voice in *The Waggoner*. Benjamin's error becomes one of application rather than desire. Happiness in play like his must be transferred to the realm of narrative, because of the economic forces that from now on will be working through men like his employer.

NOTES

[1] *Benjamin the Waggoner*, ed. Paul F. Betz (1981), p. 39. All further citations of *The Waggoner* are given by lines to this volume, and since my emphasis is on reading the poem as an 1819 companion to *Peter Bell*, I am using the text of the first edition, unless my parenthetical attribution refers to ms. 1 (1806) or ms. 3 (1812). This emphasis prompts as well my decision to refer to the poem by its title of publication rather than the earlier title *Benjamin the Waggoner*. Almost no criticism has been written on *The Waggoner*; the most extensive and provocative reading is in John Williams, "Salisbury Plain: Politics in Wordsworth's Poetry," *Literature and History*, 9 (1983), 164-93.

[2] See the pieces that appeared in the *Eclectic Review*, the *Edinburgh Monthly Review*, and the *Literary and Statistical Magazine* (*The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, ed. Donald H. Reiman [1972], Part A, 386-93, 408-12, 572-77).

[3] Quotations are from *Peter Bell*, ed. John E. Jordan (1985). I cite the published 1819 text (although a "1799" before a line number indicates I am quoting from Jordan's reconstruction of the 1799 text of the poem).

[4] Leah Sinanoglou Marcus, "Vaughan, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the *Encomium Asini*," *ELH*, 42 (1975), 224-41.

[5] On carnival, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, introd. Wayne Booth (1984), pp. 122-32. Bakhtin briefly discusses the Feast of the Ass as an example of "sacred parody," in *Rabelais and His World* trans. Helene Iswolsky, foreword Krystna Pomorska, prologue Michael Holquist (1984), pp. 77-78.

[6] Although Betz seems to favor one John I'Anson, the innkeeper of the Royal Oak (p. 104), as the model for Benjamin's employer, Donald H. Reiman observes that Betz seems unaware of Southey's June 15, 1819, letter to Wade Browne, which identifies the man as Jackson (Reiman, *Romantic Texts and Contexts* [1987], p. 151). The letter is in Cuthbert Southey, *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey* (1849-50), IV, 348. My interpretation of the name "Benjamin," above, can stand whether or not it was the real wagoner's name.

[7] E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, no. 38 (Dec. 1967), 61. Thompson's description of the effects of traditional task-orientation pertains to my ensuing discussion: "Social intercourse and labour are intermingled—the working-day lengthens or contracts according to the task—and there is no great sense of conflict between labour and 'passing the time of day'." Furthermore, "to men accustomed to labour timed by the clock, this attitude to labour appears to be wasteful and lacking in urgency" (60).

[8] In his understanding of time as a commodity Benjamin differs from several other Wordsworth characters, notably the title figure of "Michael"; see Marjorie Levinson, "Spiritual Economics: A Reading of 'Michael,' " *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* (1986), pp. 58-79, particularly pp. 61-68.

[9] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), p. 365. For the influence of Methodist theology on Wordsworth's poetry, Richard Brantley, *Wordsworth's 'Natural Methodism'* (1975).

[10]See Thompson, *Making*, pp. 368-69. For an account of how time was referred to as a commodity in moralistic writing, which tried to supply each person with "his own interior moral timepiece," see Thompson, "Time," 86-89.

[11]One always should resist using the function of one "carnival" as grounds for interpreting all of them, because Bakhtin's concept is helpful only as long as we recognize that not all such privileged times will assume the same social role; see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), p. 14.

[12]*The Letters of Charles Lamb* . . , ed. E. V. Lucas (1935), II, 249, quoted in Betz, p. 3. See also the letter by William Pearson to Wordsworth, quoted in Betz, p. 27.

[13]The source of this phrase is John Williams, who sees all of Benjamin's trespasses as being unambiguously repulsive to the poet: "[Wordsworth's] experience of the political world of action had been one of betrayal, and the moral is contained in the metaphor of *The Cherry Tree* as a place of thoughtless, literally inebriated, activity" (Williams, 190).

[14]The poem originally began "At last this *loitering* day of June, / This long, long day is going out" (*1806*, 1-2; emphasis added); in the published version, "loitering" becomes "burning."

[15]As Jordan suggests in his edition of the poem, with the primrose that fails to attract Peter (258-60) Wordsworth may have been alluding to Hamlet's "primrose path of dalliance."

[16]Christopher Wordworth, *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* (1851), II, 310, quoted in Betz, p. 4. In later collections of his works he placed the poem among those dealing with the fancy, while putting *Peter Bell* among the poems of imagination (Betz, p. 29).

[17]As Thompson observes, the traditional work pattern of "alternate bouts of intense labour and of idleness," which generally was replaced by timed labor, nevertheless "persists among some self-employed—artists, writers, small farmers, and perhaps also with students—today, and provokes the question whether it is not a 'natural' human work-rhythm" ("Time," 73).