Sometimes during his early twenties in Edinburgh, Robert Louis Stevenson acquired the six-volume Edward Moxon edition of William Wordsworth’s *The Poetical Works* (London, 1857), which he kept with him until his death in Samoa in 1894. Now held at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, the edition is heavily marked and annotated in Stevenson’s hand, reflecting his careful and repeated reading over many years. Though Stevenson’s marginalia cannot be precisely dated, the handwriting alongside Wordsworth’s poetry ranges from the large slanting script of his early years (1870–1874) to the small, rounded and upright letters he used in the final period of his life (1890–1894). Though George S. Hellman provides a brief and general overview of Stevenson’s marginalia in his 1931 article ‘Stevenson’s Annotated Set of Wordsworth,’ he acknowledges that his account is ‘hardly more than an intimation’ of the source (p. 8). Hellman posits that outside of Stevenson’s own writings, the annotated Wordsworth edition is the ‘most autobiographically revealing’ of all the books in Stevenson’s personal library (p. 1). Given the depth of Stevenson’s engagement with Wordsworth and the critical neglect of the poet’s influence on his work, this note briefly suggests some elements of his marginalia likely to interest Stevenson scholars and provides a complete transcript of Stevenson’s markings and annotations.

Stevenson’s Wordsworth annotations reveal a deep ambivalence that alternates between praise and criticism. In the first volume’s inside cover, Stevenson wrote, ‘Wordsworth has written much that life is too short for us to read – much, also, that life is too bare of enjoyment for us voluntarily to miss.’ Stevenson’s mixed response to Wordsworth is evident elsewhere in his mar-
ginalia. He corrected Wordsworth’s grammar, for instance, and wrote the ironic exclamation ‘verse!’ next to an especially prosaic phrase in *The Prelude*. Then again, he also wrote next to ‘Proud were ye, Mountains,’ ‘I don’t believe there is a finer sonnet in the world’. In my article ‘Robert Louis Stevenson’s Evolutionary Wordsworth’ I used Stevenson’s marginalia to trace the conflicted intersection of Wordsworthian and Darwinian ideas in his writing, arguing that Stevenson used both Wordsworth’s and Darwin’s differing ideas to correct and revise each other, retaining and rejecting elements of each. This analysis suggests that Stevenson’s markings include both endorsement and criticism and that what Stevenson leaves unmarked can sometimes be as revealing as his markings. For example, Stevenson marked the entirety of Wordsworth’s ‘My Heart Leaps Up’ except the final line expressing the poet’s wish that his days will be ‘bound each to each by natural piety,’ suggesting it is the only part of the poem he cannot identify with or support. (Stevenson ironically alluded to this phrase in an 1884 letter to Bob and Louisa Stevenson: ‘My days shall [...] be bound each to each in natural impietee [sic]’ (*Letters* 4: 259–60). Having lost his Christian faith after reading the evolutionary writings of Darwin and Herbert Spencer, Stevenson did not associate nature with piety.

Rather than discussing select markings or analyzing a particular theme in Stevenson’s annotations, I shall note a few general topics that emerge in the marginalia before transcribing their details. Stevenson’s frequent travel and relocations to England, France, Switzerland, America, and Samoa help explain the particular interest his annotations reveal in travel, sailing, and exile. ‘Extract from the Conclusion of a Poem, composed in anticipation of leaving school’, ‘Lines written while sailing in a boat at evening’, ‘I travelled among unknown men’, and ‘Where lies the Land to which yon Ship must go?’ are all marked. Place also shapes the Scottish writer’s engagement with his English predecessor. Poems dealing with Scottish history (‘Song at the
Feast of Brougham Castle’ and ‘Mary Queen of Scots Landing at the Mouth of the Derwent’), Scottish literature (‘At the Grave of Burns’ and ‘On the Banks of Nith, near the Poet’s Residence’), Scottish geography (‘In the Pass of Killicranky’ and references to Scotland’s Stirling Castle and the rivers Tay and Clyde in ‘Yarrow Unvisited’) are specifically marked, along with other poems from Wordsworth’s travels in Scotland, such as ‘The Solitary Reaper’ and ‘Stepping Westward.’ Stevenson, who penned *A Child’s Garden of Verses*, marketed *Treasure Island* as ‘a story for boys,’ and described writing as child’s play, was also interested in what Wordsworth categorized as his ‘Poems Referring to the Period of Childhood.’ He marked ‘My Heart Leaps Up’, ‘To H.C. Six years old’, ‘Three years she grew’, the ‘Intimations’ Ode, and a number of passages in the first two books of *The Prelude* on Wordsworth’s childhood and early schooling. Stevenson experienced intense anxieties about his ability to support himself through writing even as he attained celebrity for his work. He marked Wordsworth’s descriptions of posthumous literary fame and poets who failed to gain recognition in their lifetimes, including ‘After-Thought’, ‘Remembrance of Collins’, and his description of Thomas Chatterton in ‘Resolution of Independence.’

Moxon’s 1857 edition of *The Poetical Works* comes from Wordsworth’s final authorized edition of 1849–1850. The same text formed all subsequent Moxon editions, as well as later publications from Ward, Lock, and Tyler, and all scholarly editions until the comprehensive *Cornell Wordsworth*, which includes earlier versions of Wordsworth’s poems. In the transcript below, I have marked Stevenson’s pencilled comments in bold with ‘RLS.’ Where necessary, I have offered explanations. The ‘X’ represents poems that Stevenson marked with an ‘X’, generally next to the title. Some poems he marked with ‘XX.’ Underlined passages are specifically noted, otherwise Stevenson marked with pencilled vertical lines in the margins.
Transcript of annotations to Stevenson’s copy of 
_The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth in Six 
Volumes_ (London: Edward Moxon, 1857)"

**Volume 1: Annotations**

Visiting Card on inside cover of each volume: ‘Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson’

RLS: ‘Wordsworth has written much that life is too short for us to read – much, also, that life is too bare of enjoyment for us voluntarily to miss.’ This comment is followed by Stevenson’s later reflection, written some twenty years later: RLS: ‘Sententious gentleman!’

‘Extract from the Conclusion of a Poem, composed in anticipation of leaving school’ (p. 1, lines 11-14 underlined)

‘Written in very early Youth’ (p. 2, line 1 underlined)

‘Lines written while sailing in a boat at evening’ X (p. 14, lines 5-8 underlined)

‘Remembrance of Collins, composed upon the Thames near Richmond’ XX (p. 15, lines 5-8 underlined)

‘My heart leaps up when I behold’ X (p. 147) *Stevenson marked the entire poem with a solid vertical line in the left hand margin. The final line, however, has only a faint dash of the pencil, broken off from the rest of the marking.

‘To H.C. Six years old’ XX (p. 171)

‘Strange fits of passion have I known’ XX (pp. 214-15) **RLS:** ‘How perfect! No colour. The first verse only is feeble.’

‘She dwelt among untrodden ways’ X (p. 215)

‘I travelled among unknown men’ X (p. 215, lines 11-12 marked by two vertical lines in the left margin)

‘Ere with cold beads of midnight dew’ (p. 216, lines 5-8 marked)

**Volume 2 Annotations**

The following titles are marked in the table of contents: ‘To the Daisy,’ ‘There was a Boy,’

‘Yew-trees,’”Three years she grew in sun and shower,’ ‘A slumber did my spirit seal,’ ‘Song at the Feast of Brougham,’ ‘Tintern
Abbey,’ and ‘The Pass of Kirkstone.’
‘To the Daisy’ (‘In youth’) (p. 25, lines 9–24, 49–56)
‘To A Sky-Lark’ (‘Up with me!’) **XX** (Vol. 2, p. 31)
‘To the Cuckoo’ (p. 94, lines 3–4)
‘Lorton Vale Yew-Trees’ (p. 97, lines 16-33)
‘Three years she grew in sun and shower’ **XX** (p. 102, lines 19-34)
‘A slumber did my spirit seal’ **X** (p. 103)
‘I wandered lonely as a cloud’ (p. 104, lines 19–24)
‘Resolution and Independence’ (p. 124, lines 3–7, 8–14, 43–46)
‘Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle’ (p. 144, lines 118–156, 161–164)
‘Tintern Abbey’ (p. 150, lines 76–93, 102–107, 134–159)
‘Laodamia’ (p. 158, line 72 double marked)
‘Dion’ (p. 164, lines 73–76)
‘The Pass of Kirkstone’ **XX** (p. 168)
‘To -------, on her first ascent to the summit of Helvellyn’ (p. 176, lines 15–16)
‘On the Power of Sound’ (p. 212, lines 7–9, 27, 61–64, 145–160)
**RLS**: ‘O!’ next to the ‘Argument’ that prefaces the poem, beginning ‘the Ear addressed, as occupied by a spiritual functionary in communion with sounds, individual, or combined in studied harmony.’
‘Nuns fret not’ (p. 260, marked in its entirety)
‘To Sleep’ (p. 269, marked in its entirety)
‘Surprised by Joy’ (p. 273, marked in its entirety)
‘It is a beauteous evening’ (p. 275, lines 1-4)
‘Where lies the Land to which yon Ship must go?’ (p. 276, marked in its entirety)
‘The World is too much with us’ **XX** (p. 276, margin marked in its entirety)
‘Scorn not the sonnet’ (p. 278, marked in its entirety, ‘in his hand / The thing became a trumpet’ [12-13] underlined) **RLS**: ‘Just
as this string of conceits begins to weary, come these three inevitable concluding lines.’

X ‘With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb’st the sky’ (p. 289, lines 7–14, 7–8 underlined and double marked)

Sonnet XXIX (‘Though narrow be that old Man’s cares’) (p. 293, sonnet marked in its entirety)

‘Composed Upon Westminster Bridge’ (p. 296, marked in its entirety, lines 12-14 double marked)

‘A Grave-Stone Upon the Floor of the Cloisters of Worcester Cathedral’ (p. 306, lines 7–14)

‘Roman Antiquities Discovered at Bishopstone’ (p. 320, lines 9–10)

XX ‘Proud were ye, Mountains’ (p. 320, marked in its entirety)

RLS: ‘I don’t believe there is a finer sonnet in the world. It is one gorgeous, equable crescendo.’

Volume 3 Annotations

The following titles are marked in the Table of Contents:


‘At the Grave of Burns’ (p. 3, lines 31–36)

‘Thoughts: suggested the day following, on the Banks of Nith, near the Poet’s Residence’

X (p. 5, lines 43–48)

‘Stepping Westward’ X (p. 15, lines 8–15)

‘The Solitary Reaper’ (p. 17, lines 9–24). X by ‘More welcome notes to weary bands’ (10) RLS: X ‘More sweetly to reposing bands’ old reading (and better)’

‘Sonnet. Composed at ------ Castle’ (‘Degenerate Douglas!’) X (p. 24, lines 5–8, 11–14)

‘Yarrow Unvisited’ (p. 24, lines 1-3)

‘In the Pass of Killicranky’ (p. 27, lines 4–10)

‘On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic’ (p. 56, marked in its
entirety)

‘Written in London September 1802’ (‘O Friend!’) (p. 59, 5–14)
‘London, 1802’ (‘Milton!’) (p. 60, 6–14)
‘It is not to be thought of that the flood’ X (p. 61, marked in its entirety)

RLS: ‘A splendid sonnet’

‘Ode. Imagination--ne’er before content’ (p. 116, lines 57–102)
Elegiac Stanzas (‘Lulled by the sound of pastoral bells’) (p.144, 31–36)

‘O Mountain Stream’ X (p. 207, marked in its entirety)

‘Return, Content!’ (p. 213, lines 1–8)
‘Not hurled precipitous from steep to steep’ (p. 216, marked in its entirety)

‘After-thought’ X (p. 217, marked in its entirety)
‘The White Doe of Rylstone’ (p. 267, lines 938–971)

Volume 4 Annotations

‘Walton’s Book of Lives’ (p. 102, marked in its entirety, lines 2–4 and 12–14 doubled marked).

‘Conclusion’ (‘Why sleeps the future’) (p. 123, marked in its entirety)

‘Composed in Roslin Chapel during a storm’ (p. 224, lines 1–7, underlined phrase ‘The wind is now thy organist’[1])

‘The Brownie’ (p. 232, lines 9–13)
‘To the River Derwent’ X (p. 145, lines 1, 6–14)
‘Mary Queen of Scots Landing at the Mouth of the Derwent’ (p. 148, line 1)
‘Flowers on the Top of the Pillars at the Entrance of the Cave’ X (p. 165, marked in its entirety)
‘Iona’ (p. 166, lines 13–14)
‘Greenock’ (p. 168, 9–14)
‘Lines Written in Early Spring’ (p. 182, lines 13–20)
‘A Poet’s Epitaph’ (p. 192, 45–52)
‘The Fountain. A Conversation’ (p. 198, lines 29–48)
‘Personal Talk’ X (p. 200)
‘Fidelity’ X (p. 207, 25–33, 52–53).
‘Ode to Duty’ (p. 211, 37–40, 55–56)
‘Character of the Happy Warrior’ (p. 212, 26–27)
‘Ode Composed on May Morning’ X (p. 243, lines 37–40, 55–60)
‘To May’ (p. 248, 73–76)
‘Epistle to Beaumont’ (p. 7, line 210).
‘Gold and Silver Fishes in a Vase’ (p. 11, line 26)

Volume 5 Annotations
‘Intimations’ Ode (p. 148, lines 1–9, 25, 52–77, 131–191, 205–208; lines 143, 182–183 double-marked)
The Prelude (Book 8, p. 287, lines 55–69, 111–120, 470–475, 526–529)
‘On the mountain-tops where first he rose’ (475). RLS: X
references note at the bottom of the page: ‘See Vol I p 1.’ Stevenson cross-references a phrase from Wordsworth’s ‘Extract from the Conclusion of a Poem in anticipation of leaving school’: ‘A lingering light he fondly throws / On
the dear hills where first he rose,’ which is also marked in Stevenson’s edition.

‘The effect was, still more elevated views / Of human nature. Neither vice nor guilt’ (644–645, MS p. 306). **RLS**: ‘verse!’

*The Prelude* (Book 9, p. 309, lines 1–17, 335–338)


*The Prelude* (Book 11, p. 343, lines 105–118, 363–369)

*The Prelude* (Book 14, p. 377, lines 272–275)

**Volume 6 Annotations**

*The Excursion* (Book 1, p. 19, lines 249–250, 500–502)

‘Oh, sir! the good die first, / And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust / Burn to the socket!’ (500–502, underlined phrase)

*The Excursion* (Book 2, p. 50, lines 323–326, 346–348 [triple marked in the margins and underlined], 828–845, 832 underlined)

*The Excursion* (Book 3, p. 79, lines 650–651)

*The Excursion* (Book 4, p. 111, lines 522–525 [underlined], 1062–1070, 1170–1187,

*The Excursion* (Book 5, p. 153, lines 373–389). This is Stevenson’s final marking in the edition.

**Notes**


2  Stevenson’s tastes fit more neatly with modern Wordsworth scholarship than Victorian preferences. He heavily annotated *The Prelude* and apparently did not finish reading *The Excursion*.

4 Stevenson’s Annotated Set of Wordsworth, MS Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT, 6 vols, MS 5.306.


6 William Collins’s poetry was largely unnoticed in his lifetime, which ended in poverty, alcoholism, and insanity in 1759. Despairing in his failure to achieve sustenance, let alone fame and fortune from his writing, Thomas Chatterton committed suicide in 1770 at the age of 17.

7 I wish to thank Kayla Probeyahn – an excellent undergraduate research assistant – for her help with this transcript. The staff of Yale University’s Beinecke Library also provided valuable support.