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“Vain dalliance with misery”: Moral Therapy in William Wordsworth’s “The Ruined Cottage”

Abstract

The following paper will examine how (male) speakers in William Wordsworth’s “The Baker’s Cart” and “Incipient Madness,” which eventually became reworked into “The Ruined Cottage,” narrate the histories of traumatised women. It will be argued that by distorting the women’s accounts of suffering into a didactic lesson for themselves, the poems’ speakers embody the tension present in the chief psychiatric treatment of the Romantic period, moral therapy, which strove to humanise and give voice to afflicted subjects, at the same time trying to contain and eventually correct their “otherness.”

Out of all the psychiatric disorders in the current taxonomy, “trauma- and stressor-related disorders” are the only ones explicitly requiring exposure to external circumstances in order to be diagnosed (APA 265) – all other disorders are theorised to develop as a result of a complex interaction of a number of factors (Barlow and Durand 29), with a direct external trigger not always being possible to pinpoint. Due to this link with the outside world, while conceptions and classifications of other psychiatric disorders have changed throughout history (Shorter 2–6), the negative influence of traumatic life experiences has been recognized and described since the ancient times (Lis-Turlejska 14).

Because of this persistent character, tracing the outlooks on trauma makes for a good way of studying the progress of psychological and psychiatric thought. Seeing also as psychology and psychiatry are relatively young branches of science, to gain a complete picture, one needs to turn towards pre-scientific, literary accounts of personal experience. With major developments, paradigm shifts, and crises happening in these sciences even today (Lilienfeld 65; Eklund, Nichols, and Knutson 1), keeping in mind the road traversed so far can possibly help us avoid the pitfalls and errors that have once been overcome, at a great cost to the affected population (Schultz and Schultz 4–5). This article will attempt to present evidence of how one of such errors – denying subjectivity by fitting the personal experience of suffering to a theory considered infallible – was portrayed in poems

of William Wordsworth dealing with the aftermath of psychological trauma – “The Baker’s Cart,” “Incipient Madness,” and “The Ruined Cottage.”

1. Psychiatry in the Romantic Period

The scientific climate of the Romantic period was exemplified by a particular symbiosis with contemporary philosophical and literary trends. As Alan Richardson describes:

It was a time when poets (like Coleridge) consorted with laboratory scientists and when philosophical doctors (like [Erasmus] Darwin) gave point to their scientific theories in verse, when phrenology and mesmerism gained adherents across the medical community, when Bell could work out his physiological psychology in a series of lectures to London artists, scientists could perform as showmen, and Galvani’s experiments with “animal electricity” could be replicated by an eager public wherever frogs were to be found. (7)

At that time, psychiatry was dominated by a paradigm based on John Locke’s ideas of the human mind as a “blank slate” and of mental processes as combining and processing stimuli. Accordingly, insanity, in all its variations, was viewed as a split between the rational and the irrational parts in the psyche: “a breakdown of internal, rational discipline” (Porter 111, 129–132). The method of treatment extrapolated from those ideas was that of moral therapy, pioneered by Philippe Pinel in France and William Tuke in England (Porter 8). Moral therapy involved listening to the suffering person, trying to make sense of their experience, and gradually convincing them to behave more in line with society’s expectations, thus the moral aspect:

moral treatment could occur once the medical listener had entered into the inner distance between rational self and the self lost in alienation, for then the doctor could hope to find a therapeutic relationship based on an appeal to the remnant of reason – moral reason – that had not succumbed to passion. (Thiher 152)

This new subjectivity granted to the individuals undergoing psychological turmoil influenced literature and the arts, with literary heroes such as Goethe’s young Werther becoming “a theorist of his own madness, capable of a self-reflexive discourse that dramatizes the distance between the sane and the deviant part of the self, all found in one breast” (139). The popularisation of this outlook on insanity among the general public fed back into psychiatry and further entrenched it – moral therapy and asylums in which it was carried out soon enjoyed a great success throughout Europe (Porter 118).

However, the initial enthusiasm eventually waned, as moral therapy reached its natural limits set out by the aforementioned moral aspect – asylums ceased to serve a purely medical function, and became law-ordained spaces in which insanity was permitted, serving as a didactic, disciplinary example for the rest of the society, similar to prisons (Faflak 2005, 721). Thus, what the Romantics regarded as a revolution and affirmation of boundless individuality became a tool of enforcing social conformity. Already in 1807, Scottish physician and scholar Thomas Trotter warned that the “selfish desire of engrossing the sympathy and attention of others to the narration of their own sufferings” (qtd. in Faflak 2009b, 78) was threatening to disrupt the wider social order. To limit excessive introspection, such “feminine” (unbalanced, irrational, going against the contemporary ideas of sanity as a logical and objective outlook on life) tendencies were consigned to the sphere of psychiatry (78) in order “to promulgate rather than eliminate the excess, marking it as a vice in order to curb its enthusiasm toward specific social ends” (80). Psychiatry became the science of trying to cure psychiatric disorders by forcing the disordered individuals to better conform to the societal demands which caused these disorders in the first place (Cushman 1990).

Psychological distress thus became associated with individuals outside of social and moral norms and gendered, a “feminine disorder, the sign of a purely unhealthy excess that is then distinguished from the kind of masculinist regulatory excess” (Faflak 2009b, 87). This excess seems above all apparent in psychological trauma, as it forces its victim into a paradoxical state of not having comprehended, or even consciously experienced, the initial traumatising event, and yet being forced into re-living it in intrusive memories and sensations, intended as a coping mechanism (Leys 98). In the poems discussed in this article, the trauma will most often concern women losing their husbands, and so being left without power or agency to sustain themselves, often also being left without any acknowledgement of their suffering. To curb this “unhealthy excess” of talk and preoccupation with the personal which trauma engenders, in Romantic poetry, “this distinction [between female trauma and male rationality] [...] usually centres around male poets or characters who write about or speak of silenced or inarticulate women” (Faflak 2009b, 87).

As this article will attempt to show, William Wordsworth’s “The Ruined Cottage” and the poems leading up to its creation can be seen as an illustration of the above process of reshaping personal experience into a moral lesson. “The Ruined Cottage” presents the social aspect of trauma: how it is perceived by others. It is notable for being Wordsworth’s “first poem in which he masters the difficulties inherent in presenting a plain story of distress, without resort to melodramatic or Gothic exaggeration” (Finch 180). However, it also unmasks the flaw at the heart of moral therapy (inadvertently or otherwise) by portraying a woman’s experience as little more than diagnostic material for men. Their diagnoses are, in turn, accompanied by overt assurances of self-restraint (the aforementioned

“masculinist regulatory excess”). This usurpation is additionally compounded by the fact that the intended recipients of this “talking cure” are the male figures themselves rather than the female ones they talk about. The women merely serve as examples with which to give advice and life lessons among men. As a result, the story and experience of trauma itself becomes relegated to the background – enforcing the existing social order remains the priority.

2. “The Baker’s Cart”

“The Ruined Cottage” was published in 1814 as a part of “The Excursion.” However, fragments of the complete story appear already in two poems from a 1795 manuscript, “The Baker’s Cart” and “Incipient Madness” (Faflak 2009b 80; Finch 182). The complete poem itself had also undergone several revisions, reaching its fourth iteration in 1799 (Faflak 2009a, 85). The story of the poem’s creation carries certain implications for its content. Describing “The Baker’s Cart” and “Incipient Madness,” Joel Faflak (2009a) argues that

these fragments comprise a type of primal scene or psychic pre-text for a fixation on aberrant and traumatic empirical phenomena. That is to say, they fetishize rather than either repress or redress psychopathology [...] and so evoke a displacement of reason that signals a fundamental inability on Wordsworth’s part. (80)

In other words, Wordsworth rather avoids an excess of empathy, instead constructing, through an iterative process of creation, “a hermeneutics of psychosocial containment – a psychotherapy that treats trauma philosophically” (Faflak 2009a, 80). Subsuming personal experience under a pre-defined framework, however, limits understanding, and with it – the chance for offering help.

“The Baker’s Cart” tells the story of the speaker witnessing a baker stopping at a “wretched hut” (9), but not giving any bread to its destitute denizens. The titular baker’s cart is “loaded” (3) and its wheels “rumble” under the weight of its load (7); it is a symbol of abundance, and its passing by of the “wretched hut” (9) dramatically underscores the poverty of the family that inhabits it: a woman and her five children (Faflak 2009a, 81). They are singled out, dehumanized, and contained from the onset of the poem, with the speaker going so far as to suggest that the woman’s five children “were not born to live” (“The Baker’s Cart” 5) due to their sheer poverty. The metaphor of food and nourishment is continued when the speaker judges the woman’s mind to have been “long neglected, and denied / The common food of hope” (19–20), due to which it now became “Sick and extravagant” (21). Sanity becomes here a resource whose distribution reflects the relationship between the social classes: The speaker is sane and wealthy, the woman mad and poor. Such a stance also implies that mental health, like procuring

food and eating properly, is ultimately the responsibility of the individual, recalling to mind the assumption behind moral therapy – that even in the most extreme states, a rational part of the self remains (Thiher 149). The speaker is thus separated from the woman, limiting his empathy and denying her “potential dialogue offering any cognitive value” (Faflak 2009a, 83), in other words, a talking cure. He acknowledges her trauma, most likely of loss and being forced into destitution, by referring to her “low and fearful voice / By misery and rumination deep / Tied to dead things, and seeking sympathy” (“The Baker’s Cart” 15–17), but soon breaks this closeness off to vainly muse on her psychology. The woman is denied any “common food of hope” (20), by the speaker as well.

Thus, the speaker either interprets the woman’s emotions in an authoritarian, almost possessive way, and thus establishes himself as a psychoanalytic authority, or the social and psychological gulf between him and the woman is too wide to bridge and creates a countertransference¹ leading the speaker to close himself off to any contact (Faflak 2009a, 83) as a defence reaction to the woman imposing emotional closeness on him, and thus threatening his sense of identity or ontological separateness. The woman addresses the speaker first, seeing that his “eyes / Were turned” (“The Baker’s Cart” 14–15) towards the bread cart, sensing a commonality of attention between them, and thus possibly expecting to be noticed and heard. Indeed, the speaker himself admits that she was “seeking sympathy” (17). However, the poem does not relate the speaker’s eventual response, ending instead with his reflections on the woman’s mental condition. From her words of “that waggon does not care for us” (18) and her general appearance the speaker surmises that she was driven to a “sick and extravagant” (23) state “by strong access of momentary pangs” (23–24) and, again, by her mind “being long neglected, and denied / The common food of hope” (21–22). Seemingly empathetic, considering the social divide between the interlocutors, such remarks hint at reproach and at blaming the woman for lacking mental fortitude enough to cope appropriately with her conditions. It is also interesting to note that the speaker’s reaction to the woman engaging him is a lengthy diagnosis of sorts, spoken with utmost certainty (“The words were simple, but her look and voice / Made up their meaning” 19–20). By focusing on the woman and underscoring her dishevelled state, the speaker denies any possibility of contact between them and sees her not as an actual person but as an archetypical example of a “mad woman,” setting himself above her as a discerning, Romantic psychiatrist, and confirming his normalcy (or sanity) by contrasting himself with the woman. Implicitly, he becomes the embodiment of the societal standards of emotional control and propriety to which comparisons should be made.

3. “Incipient Madness”

“Incipient Madness,” the second poem eventually coalescing into “The Ruined Cottage,” seems to be also an extension of “The Baker’s Cart.” Here, the speaker visits a ruined hut, presumably the same one that the destitute family inhabited in “The Baker’s Cart,” and becomes deeply attached to a “speck of glass,” a broken windowpane which he notices inside (“Incipient Madness” 12). This shard could stand for a “last vestige of social order” (Faflak, 2009b, 724), serving as a further link between the two poems. In “Incipient Madness,” however, the same hut becomes “a scene of trauma beneath the first text’s social veneer” (Faflak 2009a, 81), trauma being understood here as a sense of loss and a repeated, compulsive re-enactment that never brings closure and understanding. Thus, “in either text conversation is managed ambivalently to secure the narrator’s fragile identity (81).

Here, then, the composed, rational figure of the Romantic psychiatrist begins to unravel. As Karen Swann writes in “Suffering and Sensation in The Ruined Cottage,” “Incipient Madness” expresses Wordsworth’s “recognition that exorbitancy always threatens literature: although the pleasure of poetry originates and feeds on passion, passion always threatens to exceed the bounds of what can impart pleasure to other or even to the passionate individual” (87). Overly intense emotional attachment is, however, socially unbecoming. “Incipient Madness” “reveals the difficulty of separating, at any moment in this process, captivation from a study of captivation” (Swann 89), which in a wider context is precisely the problem Romantic psychiatry strove to guard itself against, also by imposing a structure on threateningly intense emotions and a suspiciously transgressive science (Faflak 2005, 78). In this way, “Incipient Madness” functions as an extension of “The Baker’s Cart,” more closely showing the private, internal thoughts of the speaker.

4. “The Ruined Cottage”

“The Ruined Cottage” joins together and develops the two aforementioned explorations of trauma, the personal and the social, yet the corrective, scientific undercurrent remains: the woman, finally identified as Margaret, is silenced despite being a topic of conversation between the speaker and the Pedlar. Throughout their discussion they “evolve a model of correct interpretation” (Faflak 2009a, 85), emphasize their emotional distance and analytical approach, and seem to usurp Margaret’s case for their own use. This usurpation takes place not only across the poem’s action, but across its subsequent versions as well. The first manuscript, now lost, “supposedly anatomized the bare life of Margaret, who, abandoned by her husband, falls from happiness and prosperity into poverty and despair, the victim of socio-political realities in post-Revolutionary England” (Faflak 2009b,

724), while in next versions Margaret’s story becomes incorporated into the dialogue between the speaker and the Pedlar, providing details of Margaret’s life. The excessive, feminine concern with suffering becomes sublimated in order to serve a didactic purpose, namely, to warn against the dangers of psychopathology to the social order. Thus, “Margaret’s story becomes a philosophical lesson upon, rather than a psychoanalysis of, her psychic etiology” (Faflak 2009a, 86).

The poem presents a frame story of the speaker meeting a travelling Pedlar near the titular ruined cottage. Deciding to rest there, the speaker eventually engages the Pedlar in a conversation, after which the Pedlar details to him the story of the cottage’s former denizen, Margaret, who, after losing her husband, forced by poverty to enlist as a soldier and travel to America, sinks into grief, depression, and destitution, eventually having “But for her babe, and for her little friendless boy [...],” “no wish to live” (“The Ruined Cottage” 441). Eventually, however the cottage falls into ruin and Margaret dies of exposure to the elements.

For Margaret, trauma is facilitated by her embeddedness in a system treating her as inferior (her financial dependence on her husband, the presumable discrimination she would face if she tried to remarry – one’s position in society is a crucial factor both in the occurrence of trauma as well as in the maintenance of post-traumatic symptoms, as Judith Herman persuasively argues in *Trauma and Recovery*) and is chiefly expressed through her continuing fidelity to her missing husband. She seems to be haunted by an unassimilated past experience of both a situational and psychological extreme (and we know from the Pedlar that before her husband’s disappearance, he and Margaret enjoyed a good, happy life together):

I knocked, and when I entered, with the hope
Of usual greeting, Margaret looked at me
A little while, then turned her head away
Speechless, and sitting down upon a chair
Wept bitterly. (437)

This traumatising event in turn causes her distress, a lowering of mood, and emotional numbing – all symptoms of a trauma-related disorder – evident by the Pedlar’s description of her slowed-down, detached look and behaviour:

She did not look at me. Her voice was low,
Her body was subdued. In every act
Pertaining to her house-affairs appeared
The careless stillness which a thinking mind
Gives to an idle matter. Still she sighed
But yet no motion of the breast was seen,
No heaving of the heart. (440)

The traumatising event also reimposes itself on Margaret in the form of depressive ruminations, as when at the Pedlar and Margaret's third meeting she remarks on her inability to resume living in the face of adversity:

I have been travelling far, and many days
 About the fields I wander, knowing this
 Only, that what I seek I cannot find.
 And so I waste my time. (439)

Indeed, the last of what the Pedlar hears of Margaret is that she idly "there to and fro" "paced through many a day" (442) and "made many a fond enquiry" (442) upon her husband's fate. Thus, on one hand she seems to suffer acutely from post-traumatic symptoms, while on the other hand, in her particular case the line between abnormality and behaviour expected from a grieving widow is blurred. Her unique, personal experience is thus fitted into a preconceived societal ritual of grief and appraised through this lens. The result is that Margaret's own suffering is largely misunderstood, while her spectators comfort themselves with a measured, rational – indeed, even "normal" – explanation of her experience.

The lack of personal attention towards Margaret is further compounded by the narrative structure subsuming her experience, as the first and last parts of the poem concerning the male speakers direct the reader's attention to them, rather than to the woman: Though the Pedlar was telling Margaret's tale, he ends it by describing his own reaction and way of coping with what happened, thus implicitly suggesting the speaker do the same. The Pedlar's narrative, being a collection of episodes in which he meets and talks with Margaret also forces the reader (and the poem's speaker) to divide their attention between each of them. The Pedlar himself compounds this effect by often disclosing his own feelings:

It would have grieved
 Your very soul to see her. Sir, I feel
 The story linger in my heart. I fear
 'Tis long and tedious, but my spirit clings
 To that poor woman. (440)

He also describes his own interactions with Margaret, again blurring the distinctions between the subjects of his story:

And when she ended I had little power
 To give her comfort, and was glad to take
 Such words of hope from her own mouth as served
 To cheer us both. (437)

The Pedlar's story is neither a full, clinical case study, nor an indulgent account of his own empathetic grief. Rather, it becomes a combination of both, forming

a specific example of Romantic psychiatry in which the speaker is equally concerned with establishing his own authority as he is with the person whose particular story allows him to do so. The result is that his “objectivity and self-control allow him to function as a screen that accurately represents Margaret’s suffering while tempering our potentially morbid or wanton responses to it” (Swann 85).

Lack of true, humanistic concern with Margaret is further revealed in the Pedlar’s language. Over the course of his story, he describes Margaret in progressively more machine-like terms (85). On their second meeting, after Margaret’s husband has left to join the army, she appears precisely when “The house-clock struck eight” (“The Ruined Cottage” 439), a “pale and thin” figure (439). At the end of their encounter, the Pedlar recounts that “she sighed / But yet no motion of the breast was seen, / No heaving of the heart” (440). Finally, describing the depressive routine Margaret fell into at her lowest point, the Pedlar says “[...] she would sit / The idle length of half a sabbath day” (441), pacing “to and fro” “through many a day” (442). In other words, she becomes entirely a machine. Karen Swann suggests that while on the surface such a reduction is an accurate and moving portrayal of a suffering woman, it ultimately gives the Pedlar a way to distance himself from Margaret’s story and her psychological pain (85).

It becomes clear, then, that as becomes two male psychiatrists, citizens of an “empire demanding moral management more than ever” (Faflak 2009b, 725), the speakers in “The Ruined Cottage” have to manage their emotions and constantly be mindful of their purpose in discussing Margaret, lest they succumb to the forces they have been ordained to master. In the second version of the poem, the B manuscript, the Pedlar remarks on his momentary overindulgence of affect: “You will forgive me, Sir, / I feel I play the truant with my tale” (“The Ruined Cottage B” 170–171, qtd. in Faflak 2009a, 88). However, this interjection is changed in the next version, the D manuscript, and survives until the poem’s publication in 1814; there, the Pedlar says

You will forgive me, Sir
But often on this cottage do I muse
As on a picture, till my wiser mind
Sinks, yielding to the foolishness of grief. (434)

Controlling himself, the Pedlar replaces feeling with contemplation (“I muse”; Faflak 2009a, 88) and hints at his status of a sophisticated authority. This strengthens the effect of certainty and self-assuredness that the Pedlar’s language establishes initially – the first thing he says in the poem is “I see around me here / Things which you cannot see” (“The Ruined Cottage” 433). Then, before proceeding to relay Margaret’s life story, he gives arguments pointing to his fitness for the task, comparing himself with poets: they are “Obedient to the strong creative power / Of human passion” (433), yet he considers himself no worse, as

Sympathies there are
 More tranquil, yet perhaps of kindred birth,
 That steal upon the meditative mind
 and grow with thought. (433)

Straddling the line between a poet and a doctor, the Pedlar epitomizes the aforementioned way “psychiatry stressed sympathy between doctor and patient and granted Romantic license to psychic singularity despite its menace to social order [...]” (Faflak 2009b, 721). This cautious managing of distance continues when the Pedlar asks the speaker whether he should continue, as if shifting the blame for his feminine indulgence in empathetic rumination:

Why should a tear be in an old man’s eye?
 Why should we thus with an untoward mind
 And in the weakness of humanity
 From natural wisdom turn our hearts away,
 To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears,
 And feeding on disquiet thus disturb
 The calm of Nature with our restless thoughts? (“The Ruined Cottage” 435–436)

At this, the speaker does not press for further details, and the two men take a short break, but the emotional weight of Margaret’s story soon prompts him to ask the Pedlar to resume. He agrees, but not without further authoritative admonitions: listening to Margaret’s story for its own sake would be “a wantonness and would demand / Severe reproof” (436). Empathy for the other’s suffering, evident in the speaker’s musings (“In my own despite / I thought of that poor woman as one / Whom I had known and loved” 436), is mistaken by the Pedlar for “vain dalliance with the misery / Even of the dead” (436), leading to “a momentary pleasure never marked / By reason, barren of all future good” (436). Once again, it is not the individual and his/her suffering that is given precedence, but rather the fact that this suffering can serve the greater good.

The Pedlar eventually relents and continues the story, still exercising his authority, ends it with a didactic example, showing his own reaction to discovering that Margaret has ultimately died: “I turned away / And walked along my road in happiness” (“The Ruined Cottage” 443). It seems to have made a deep impression on the listening speaker, as afterwards the setting sun makes him feel “admonished” (444).

Karen Swann writes that “the peddler’s distance from Margaret must be purchased, and the price [...] is a sensationalizing of the abandoned woman” (84). He seems to be disturbed by what a potentially intense emotional contact with Margaret might uncover within him. When he arrives for his third visit, after Margaret’s husband has enlisted and left her, he has to wait for her to greet him, and as he does so, he “dwells on an unsettling experience of abandonment” (84).

The Pedlar remarks that “the spot though fair seemed very desolate, / The longer I remained more desolate” (“The Ruined Cottage” 439), and indeed, when looking around he notices the surroundings having a more despondent look to them:

[...] I thought
The honeysuckle crowded round the door
And from the wall hung down in heavier wreaths,
And knots of worthless stoncrop started out
Along the window’s edge, and grew like weeds. (438)

Things around the cottage have become “unwieldy” (438), “dragged,” “bent down to earth” (438), “straggled out” (438). Swann concludes that the Pedlar’s recognition of the transience of life and human relations “informs [his] subsequent distancing of Margaret” (85). It would thus seem that the goal of ensuring objectivity in his outlook progressively turns into avoidance of emotional over-engagement. It would thus seem that, similarly to the speaker in “The Baker’s Cart,” in the first instance of the poem’s events transpiring, the Pedlar enters a countertransferential relationship, reacting with distance and disengagement to the perceived existential (or psychological) threat from Margaret. An authoritative, intellectual perspective grants him not only a factual mastery over Margaret’s case and over his role as a Romantic psychiatrist, but also a psychological mastery over his own emotions. Margaret is thus presented as “an illustration rather than an analytical challenge” (Faflak 2009a, 86). Her life is subsumed under a psychiatric theory, and despite her actual absence, the speaker and the Pedlar stage a scene not of psychotherapy, but of moral therapy, to their own benefit rather than to that of the patient. The Pedlar’s success in impressing and educating his listener is perhaps best expressed by comparing their individual states at the beginning of the second part of the poem. While the speaker admits that the Pedlar’s story brought on a “heartfelt chillness in his veins” (“The Ruined Cottage” 436), the Pedlar had “in his face / Such easy cheerfulness, a look so mild” (436). By then, the roles of privileged, professional lecturer and subordinate apprentice have been fully assumed.

Conclusion

Ultimately “The Ruined Cottage” “economizes its implicitly psychoanalytic desire to probe Margaret’s untold thoughts in terms of the Pedlar’s gift of psychiatric wisdom to the Narrator” (Faflak 2009b, 725). It treats Margaret’s traumatic experiences as a thought exercise, ignoring her individuality and instead intellectualizing her as a case history, or a philosophical tale for the enjoyment and benefit of the ones who are sane. “The Ruined Cottage,” together with its earlier fragments, “The Baker’s Cart” and “Incipient Madness” is thus a tableau of

Romantic moral therapy, exposing (perhaps inadvertently) its cardinal issues: the permissible degree of individual compassion and attention, the status of doctor versus patient, and the precedence of diagnosis and delineation of “right” from “wrong” over authentic acknowledgement of individual suffering. Since the days of William Wordsworth and Romanticism, psychiatry has struggled with these issues still, in such episodes as the ubiquitous diagnosis of hysteria during the Victorian period or the recognition of trauma in men as valid in the aftermath of the First World War and the Vietnam War, then in women, as the prevalence of rape and domestic abuse – major sources of trauma – came to light. Thus, it seems reasonable to claim that one should remember history – also as it appears in Wordsworth’s “The Baker’s Cart,” “Incipient Madness,” and, especially, “The Ruined Cottage” – in order not to repeat it.

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Notes

- 1 In psychoanalytic terms, countertransference is a process of transference originating within the psychoanalyst and aimed at his client, which emerges as a reaction to the client’s transference aimed at the psychoanalyst (Grzesiuk 377).

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