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Exploring forgiveness in nineteenth-century poetry [draft]

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Abstract

This essay serves as an introduction to the essays collected in the 'Nineteenth-century Poetry and Forgiveness' cluster. It takes as its foundation the recent turn to questions of hospitality, forgiveness and gift in the intra-disciplinary field of religion, philosophy and literature and highlights the centrality of these issues for reading nineteenth-century poetry. The essay argues that nineteenth-century poetry attempts to figure forgiveness as poetic sound and rhythm as a way of thinking reciprocal forgiving relationships between people. Part I contextualizes this argument and argues for an understanding of forgiveness through emotion. Part II offers an overview of the field of forgiveness scholarship and explores its relevance for nineteenth-century debate on the topic. Part III offers a way into thinking forgiveness as sound and rhythm in Wordsworth's poem 'Airey-Force Valley' through Martin Heidegger's reading of poetics and being.

The recent turn to questions of hospitality, giving and care in the intra-disciplinary field of religion, philosophy and literature has created an arena in which the issue of forgiveness is central. My own awareness of this was sharpened at 'The Hospitable Text' in 2011, a conference that I co-organized with a group of scholars who sought to find a theme that would showcase the most insightful and forward-looking scholarship in this intra-discipline. Part of the conference remit was to organize a series of seminars on specific ideas that might highlight focal areas of thinking: the contents of my own seminar – on 'Poetry and Forgiveness' – gathered not only an exceptionally thoughtful set of paper responses, but also sparked an absorbing conversation with those who attended the seminar discussion. The articles collected here arose from this event and my introduction serves to frame them with a commentary that explores why nearly all of the papers and ensuing discussion gravitated towards nineteenth-century poems, philosophies and theology. This periodizing factor corresponds with my current research on nineteenth-century grace: there is something particular about the way forgiveness and the related idea of grace come to frame other theological concerns in this period, not simply through commentaries in sermons and religious pamphlets, but also in the pronounced contemporary debate about prosody and rhythm. Many nineteenth-century poets interested in forgiveness evoke poetic sound as that which enables a discussion about how human beings connect and communicate, concerned as they are with the primacy of relationalism and reciprocity to processes of absolution, confession and connectedness. As Paul Kim notes in 'The Idea of Forgiveness in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" from an Ecotheological Perspective', forgiveness is the origin of love granted by grace, a tenderness that arises (or, as Coleridge has it, 'springs') in spite of conditions that would seemingly suppress it. The link between grace and forgiveness is significant because it reveals their shared meaning as bestowal,

mercy and favour, expressions registered by people as emotions. In Part I, the idea of forgiveness as an emotion is explored to suggest that poetry encourages an affective listening key to the forgiveness process. Part II offers a context for reading the articles included in this cluster by giving an overview of current thinking on forgiveness in relation to nineteenth-century readings of the subject that assess it as both an adjudicatory process and compassionate form of creativity. Part III develops Part I's notion of forgiveness as an aural experience in a reading of Wordsworth's poem 'Airey-Force Valley' via Martin Heidegger's thinking of the 'sway' and suggests that both thinkers conceive of forgiving as a poetic and specifically rhythmic project. As such, Heidegger's thinking of poetry in particular might be read as part of a philosophical attempt to ask forgiveness for his affiliation with National Socialism. While his refusal to directly apologise for his political affiliation or to comment on the Holocaust remains scandalous, one reader who saw in his thinking of poetry a model of forgiving was Hannah Arendt, whose politics are here traced back to Heidegger's denunciation of National Socialism in his early lectures on Friedrich Hölderlin.

I

Poetry is connected to forgiveness through a shared stress on listening. Both the reader of poetry and the believer in forgiveness engage the aural aspect of his or her being to access the expression of their interest. This process is founded by Isaiah's proclamation that we listen for and to the Word: 'Incline your ear, and come to me' (55.3), a sentiment repeated throughout the Old and New Testaments. Believers are frequently instructed to listen to God and be saved. As Paul says, Christ's love redeems the past, and gives us a new home in him: 'if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!' (2 Corinthians, 5.17). In a period when God's voice was drowned out by both the material sounds of a newly industrialized and technologized society and also an empirical and scientific focus on how to 'hear' and sense the invisible, nineteenth-century religious poets sought to reframe the devotional listening relationship. God became, not a voice to be strained towards, but a soundscape in which faith and redemption resonated: believers had to attune themselves into God's frequency rather than wait for the word to come upon them. The significance of close listening for religious experience finds curious expression in Florence McLandburgh's short story, 'The Automaton-Ear' (1873), in which an academic creates a mystical ear trumpet to magnify sound. After weeks of working on the trumpet, he finally reaches a spirit-voice, the 'hum of mighty hosts!' a 'female voice' that breaks 'the fetters of mortality' before 'the Infinite' (714). At first, the professor is aurally drawn into the subtle breathings of the world, but to his dismay, its 'sorrow and suffering and death' are soon 'poured' into his ear (714). Overwhelmed by this 'great Ear of the World' (715), his desperation to hear the infinite holds a larger resonance for a contemporary desire to 'hear' God in the nineteenth century. Contemporary theories of sound enabled this thinking of God as an immeasurable soundscape by conceiving of sound as waves that bounce off the walls of an enclosed space to reach the listener as noise. Sound theory thus became a popular metaphor for measuring

the immeasurable and apophatic, especially God's capacity for forgiveness through grace. It was especially pertinent to forgiveness because of the way it invited the reader to conceptualize the process of pardoning through a form of movement that rebounds: as sound waves reflect and refract so forgiveness reciprocally moves between the wrongdoer and forgiver, covering (*kipper* in Hebrew means to both 'cover' and atone) the sin to remove those involved from the pain inflicted by the forgiven act. The sound and metre of poetry thus become a way to mediate forgiveness, or as the Lithuanian poet, Tomas Venclova (1999) puts it, poetry serves as a penance that refrains from identifying with or replacing the sinful act itself.

As a form of penance, poetry reveals forgiveness as a reciprocal process of exchanged emotion. Forgiveness scholars sometimes define 'emotional forgiveness' (a process in which the forgiver works to feel positively towards the wrongdoer) against 'decisional forgiveness' (wherein the forgiver acts differently towards the offender), but both methods arguably demand a shift in human reaction that is at root an affective process (see Worthington 2006). Both too seek to unburden the forgiver and wrongdoer from feelings of blame, guilt, shame and self-condemnation, aligning forgiveness with emotion and entangling those involved in a network of affect that plays out through specific expectations about morality, duty, ethics and care. The primacy of feeling in forgiveness – from compassion to anger and deep resentment – is also at the foundation of theological and philosophical discussion of the subject. Tied to ethics or faith, for example, forgiveness is arguably inseparable from the act of loving, as much as forgiving, the wrongdoer: 'Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you' (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.31–32). This corresponds to Emmanuel Levinas and Hannah Arendt's understanding of forgiveness as an alteration or purification of the past. For Levinas (2008), forgiveness 'permits the subject who had committed himself in a past instant to be as though that instant had not past on, to be as though he had not committed himself . . . pardon acts upon the past, somehow repeats the event, purifying it' (283). Without advocating the forgetting or condoning of wrongdoing, Levinas interrogates the worth of punishment in a way that finds analogy with a Christian reading of forgiveness as a personal response to wrongdoing bestowed on the deserving or the ignorant: 'God forgive them, for they know not what they do' (Luke 23.34). This conception releases the forgiver from resentment or anger and allows the forgiver to create or accept a re-orienting of a relationship broken by wrongdoing by releasing the wrongdoer from blame and allowing for atonement through a refusal to punish. As the forgiver overcomes uncomfortable feeling, he or she enters into a moral relationship with the wrongdoer as well as a renewed wellbeing in which bad feeling is given up to free the forgiver him or herself. Arendt echoes this reading in *The Human Condition* (1958), claiming that Jesus was 'the Discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs' because he sought to open forgiveness into the lived experience of the world as something 'mobilized by men toward each other' (239). She writes:

It is decisive in our context that Jesus maintains against the 'scribes and pharisees' first that it is not true that only God has the power to forgive, and

second that this power does not derive from God - as though God, not men, would forgive through the medium of human beings - but on the contrary must be mobilized by men toward each other before they can hope to be forgiven by God also. Jesus' formulation is even more radical. Man in the gospel is not supposed to forgive because God forgives and he must do likewise', but 'if ye from your hearts forgive', God shall do 'likewise'. (1998, 239)

For Arendt 'the power to forgive is primarily a human power' in which we are released or freed from the 'sin' of wrongdoing, but also from the duty or expectation of forgiving as moral or psychological imperative (238-43). Forgiveness is thus a covering or forgetting of sin as several Hebrew words for forgiveness connote: *kipper*, to cover; *nasa*, to carry away; and *salach*, to let go, suggestive as they are of absolution and re-thought relationship. Sin is not literally forgotten in such a definition, but rather the wrongdoing in question is barred from intruding into human relationships and the forgiver released from a desire for retribution and hatred.

These views find parallel in the nineteenth-century struggle over the definition of forgiveness as either adjudicative or compassionate. Bishop Joseph Butler's influential 1726 sermons on forgiveness are foundational to the debate, discourses that accept the difficulty of absolute hatred and present forgiveness, not as a reactive response to sin but as a complex of affective response beyond compassion. Butler admits that, as a form of feeling, forgiveness is impossible to assess in that neither the forgiver nor the wrongdoer can ever know the 'real' intentions of the other. This provokes two responses in the nineteenth century: a call for order through law; and a turn to care through creativity. The adjudicative view is represented by Judge James Fitzjames Stephen's *A History of the Criminal Law of England* (1883), in which the legal system is called on to pronounce what should and should not be forgiven. As Stephen argued, the 'sentence' of the law is 'to the moral sentiments of the public in relation to any offence what a seal is to hot wax. It converts into a permanent final judgment what might otherwise be a transient sentiment' (81-2). For Judge Stephen, wrongdoing demands anger and the law rationally fulfills a public passion for vengeance and resentment. Stephen's sense of strength through control finds immediate precedent in David Hume and Immanuel Kant's philosophical thinking of forgiveness as weakness. For Hume (2008), the inability to feel anger is evidence of weakness, a view supported by Kant's (2001) injunction that anger is the dignified and necessary (categorical) response to injustice. Nietzsche's more playful view claims that the 'strong' man refuses to concede his dominion over himself to anyone and 'shakes off with a *single* shrug many vermin that eat deep into others' (1967 39). In understanding forgiveness through power, Nietzsche anticipates Foucault's later reading of forgiveness through a voyeuristic confessionality, in which the acceptance of blame or offering of compassion evokes a 'truth' 'linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it' (1986 74-5). To envision forgiveness in this way, however, depends on a view of the world in which the 'critic' stands outside looking in, analysing constituent parts of it and actions within it as if he or she has an

objective gaze onto subjective being. As Heidegger argues in 'The Age of the World Picture' (1977): 'The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture', a fantasy of 'man's producing' (134). Against this stands a creative understanding of forgiveness as a healing process in which we are one with the world and any damage is damage against all. Duns Scotus, for example, the favoured spiritual teacher of Gerard Manley Hopkins, as well as Heidegger, suggests that confessional practice is medicinal and restorative: forgiveness becomes that which is called forth by the repentant sinner's emotional transformation into a state of willingness to discontinue wrongdoing. As such, forgiveness is a way of acting creatively within the world with others and not a spell one casts through faith or law.

II

The latter viewpoint has dominated current criticism on forgiveness. Julie McGonegal (2009) argues that literary interpretation has a purposeful role in shaping our understanding of the expression of forgiveness, at once mediating and imagining new and different ways of communicating. Jill Scott (2010) too argues that 'creative' responses to conflict offer rhetorical strategies that can both facilitate forgiveness and negotiate 'wrongdoing'. For McGonegal and Scott, analysis of texts allows for an 'ethics of intercommunication' that extends back to Bishop Butler's humanizing of the wrongdoer, in which forgiveness allows the 'victim' to therapeutically let go of resentment, and forward to Jacques Derrida (2001) and Julia Kristeva's (2010) conception of forgiveness as an unconditional 'gift' given freely to the other. John D. Caputo (2004) invokes the implications of this for wider communal peace in his focus on forgiveness and society, writing that:

Forgiveness loosens the knots of the social network, slackens the ties in the relations of power, even as revenge draws them tighter and makes them more intractable and oppressive. Forgiveness opens the space of the social network; it makes the future possible and denies to the past its role as fate. Forgiveness makes new forms of subjectivity possible, even as revenge condemns us to repeat the past in endless cycles. Forgiveness releases and opens; revenge traps, incarcerates and closes. Forgiveness is not given to minute interior rehearsing of the past and intensive subjectification, but is rather dismissive and forgetting. (135)

For all of these critics, forgiveness is best understood as an attitude or disposition, what Scott calls a 'way of being in the world' (4, 11). Kristeva in particular reads this disposition as poetic, embedded in the rhythmic sonority of linguistic expression between people, rather than granted by an authority (a judge, a victim, a god) to a wrongdoer. Developing Kristeva's position, the philosopher Kelly Oliver (2004b) argues that the suspension of judgement that forgiveness allows can serve, not as a specific moment or change in attitude, but as a gateway into being human. Engaging with forgiveness thus becomes an ethical stance and way of being that reconciles personal, internal discord as it offers redemption between people and groups. Scott, however, is the only critic to offer any extended commentary on how this redemption might play out in literature: her reading of Kafka's *Letter to His*

Father (1919), for example, finds a semantic resistance (in the repeated use of the letter 'd' as a grapheme and phoneme) to the surface narrative's obsession with hatred and anger.

The papers presented in the 'Poetry and Forgiveness' seminar agreed on the necessity for new work on the meaning of forgiveness in poetry, one that envisions a thinking that is capable of untying knots of morality and the unconscionable. As Elizabeth Ludlow writes in 'Christina Rossetti's *Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets* (1881): Exploring the Fearfulness of Forgiveness', forgiveness as grace cuts through circumstance to renew the present away from moral judgment and fear. Michael Tomko too argues in 'Forgiving Wordsworth: Revision, Religion and Cockney Reconciliation in Leigh Hunt's *The Feast of the Poets*' that forgiveness is key to nineteenth-century studies because of the origins of Romanticism as a field invested in the positive emotion and experience of human existence. This reclaiming of goodness, Tomko points out however, was swiftly associated with secularization: critics translated Romantic poets' invocations of devotion and faith into reflections on everyday life that, as Harold Bloom (1971) declared, went 'beyond the hierarchy of grace' (xviii). The motivation to strip literary representations of belief and goodness of their religious clothing is founded on an (ostensibly) liberal antagonism towards the study of theology that the renewed field of religion and literature serves to interrogate. This antagonism arguably emerges from an anxiety that the literary is inseparable from the 'religious' in Victorian culture, a topic Richard Gibson explores in his exposition of forgiveness and popular nineteenth-century lyric poetry. Gibson's 'Browning's "A Forgiveness": a Grammatical Reading' reveals how knowledgeable nineteenth-century readerships of all backgrounds were in the discourse of forgiveness, in sermons and hymns as well as popular poetry, a factor Robert Browning depended on to invert our assumptions about forgiveness in his dramatic monologue 'A Forgiveness' (1876). When poets from this period re-think theological assumptions about doctrine, however, they are reliant not only on their readers' familiarity with biblical law, but also on their readers' willingness to negotiate and explore such law. Such reflexivity regarding religion is sometimes absent from modern evaluations, which can overlook how nuanced ideas like faith or grace or love or forgiveness are for nineteenth-century believers: current 'religious' opinion fixes such ideas into immovable doctrine; while 'secular' opinion seeks to empirically 'explain' them without recourse to any kind of sacred context.

This hermeneutics of suspicion impacts on more than our study of religion, though. Criticism also finds it problematic to 'think' positive emotion beyond giving histories of them, 'good' emotions like love, joy, empathy, gratitude, fulfillment, contentment, happiness overlooked in favour of human pathology, suffering and tragedy: as Donald Moores (2013) argues, literary critics are often too willing to dismiss the positive half of human existence as trivial or ersatz. In an interview given only a week before his keynote at 'The Hospitable Text', for example, Rowan Williams (2011) argued for the importance of pushing 'back on what I see as a kind of sentimentality in theology' and a favouring of religious poetry characterized by 'non-sweetness'. Despite Williams' own thoughtful faith position, one repeatedly enacted in his charitable and intellectual work alike, he is nevertheless keen to

publicly distance the religion he values from a faith of sentimentality and sweetness. Cheri Larsen Hoeckley acknowledges the bias this produces in her essay 'The Dynamics of Poetics and Forgiveness in Adelaide Procter's "Homeless"', Procter a poet who has 'slipped from our collective literary memory, in part, because her poetry falls into the female Christian tradition that, until recently, was seen as too formally simplistic and sentimental to merit close critical attention'. A major public voice in Victorian poetry, Procter is little studied today arguably because her poetry is hymn-like, emotive and concerned with forgiveness, charity and social virtue. Even poets like Wordsworth, who one might argue spent his poetic career attempting to find a language to articulate good feeling, seem to attract critics intent on highlighting his decline from radical to Tory or his poetic fall from joyful, if strange, lyricist to classical simulator. As Moores (2013) writes, those theoretical positions that privilege 'dark' readings of poets like Wordsworth rely on distorted expectations that force a 'pathogenic' view, even when the subject being viewed is 'salutogenic' (21, 38). To theorize what it means to read positively without being accused of complacency or naivety is as key for critics interested in how poetic language 'does' feeling' as it is for readers of forgiveness: positive feelings form the very conditions for forgiveness to flourish and be sustained and are foundational of a hermeneutics of sympathy to counter suspicious minds.

III

How might poetry offer the conditions to 'move' the reader into forgiveness as a way of being that promotes development and renewal, a way of 'living gently' as Erin Lafford puts it in her essay 'Weeping as Gentling in Blake's *Milton*'? I call on Heidegger's thinking of being and 'swaying' in this final section to read Wordsworth's 'Airey-Force Valley' as a poem that teaches the reader how to listen to poetry as a way of imagining a process of forgiveness that connects us with others. Wordsworth is indicative in the context of this special issue because he understands forgiveness, not as a doctrine, but as a tuning-into others that can be taught, or realized, through the rhythms of his poetry. By 'realized' I imply Geoffrey Hartman's argument that Wordsworth's poetry is 'maieutic', its rhythms and sounds triggering or bringing forth latent memories or reminiscences in the reader (206). Without poetry, these reminiscences are obstructed by bad emotion, tensions between communities and people: poetry grants the forgiveness necessary to remove such tension and enable memory to function. While this understanding of forgiveness as a way out of conflict parallels straightforward models of forgiveness, Wordsworth envisions it in a way that rhythmically admits how unstraightforward it can be to relate to others in a non-conflicted way. Such a struggle is inherent to the poet's rhythms of forgiveness, that is, his ability to capture a back and forthness of being through the contradictions, lost answers, fleeting moments of emotion, aural interruptions and hypermetrical stumbling inherent to his poetry. This back and forth-ness in Wordsworth's poetry resonates with Heidegger's argument that we move back and forth in 'being'. He acknowledges that human beings sometimes feel centred, they 'are' or 'be', and sometimes don't feel that way. The human 'is' in that he or she is here, but a concern for the rooted affective quality of that being is

what links Wordsworth to Heidegger. Heidegger captures this moving to and fro within being through the idea of rhythmic swaying: people sway into themselves (into being and a being-in-the-worldness) to feel that they belong and connect. The rhythmic nature of finding this place in relation to others by swinging forth into it is suggestive for Heidegger's proclamation that poets best reveal how to 'be'.

Heidegger writes that being is not an abstract idea prior to experience, nor is it selfhood or subjectivity, but is rather a 'gift' given in specific moments that unconceals its 'presence' or 'way'. His conception of being as 'a way' is reliant on his engagement (and unfinished German translation of) the *Tao te Ching*, a text the title of which signifies a 'way', or 'the way' as a path through the world (a 'way of being') that can only be explicated by poets. In his essay 'Why Poets?' (1946), for example, Heidegger (2002) argues that poets are embodiments of forgiveness: they restore, create and invent new thinking-experiences and lead us out of a 'time of the world' that is destitute, dark, night-time, a moment in which the 'default of God' can no longer be relied upon (200). Poets can lead the way through this night-time, says Heidegger, because they have the ability to stay on the 'gods' tracks' and enact what a benevolent God was once expected to enact (202). It is not that God is dead in Heidegger's thought, but rather that mortals beings have lost ownership of their natures and 'possession' of 'essence' (204): it is the divine aspect of *human* being that most needs resuscitation. Specifically, Heidegger argues, mortal beings have lost touch with three major areas of life – death, pain and love – all of which provoke extreme anxiety as a result. Anxieties about death, pain and love lead to a seeking of the care of others as an antidote: those who experience intense anxiety, fear and depression seek shelter with those who offer wellbeing, pastoral care and therapy. And yet as these roles will necessarily reverse, as beings 'sway' in and out of anxiety and wellbeing, people need a space that holds them in their swaying, a space Heidegger believes poetry offers. Like Wordsworth, Heidegger privileges rhythm in his discussions of poetry as a way of thinking relationality to things in the world and with each other. He argues that people think things into existence through poetic language because it overcomes the presence/absence dualism of metaphysics by finding expression within the swing of measure. Through rhythmic movement, poetry opens to its subject rather than asserting or fixing it, and so allows for a singing or 'saying' of life that is 'specially engaged' with 'what is to be said solely in order to say it'. For Heidegger, this singing/saying constitutes a thinking that opens up the 'heart's space' as a way of existing: 'To sing song, means . . . existence' (Heidegger, 2002, 237).

Poetry is creation, then, and avoids a controlling of the world beyond the strictures of 'advertisement' and 'business' to let affective relationality embodied in forgiveness appear. It is not a coincidence that Heidegger's essays on poetry, initiated in his Winter Semester lectures on Hölderlin in 1941-42, open a space for forgiveness (see Ronell 2005). These lectures record Heidegger's earliest (if encrypted) attacks on National Socialism, in particular its racism and biologism, and while they do not constitute an apology for his affiliation with the movement in its early form, they begin Heidegger's turn to a thinking of poetry that is transformative and (perhaps) redemptive. The controversy over Heidegger's Nazism will not be narrated here, but in the light of that controversy it is significant

to note that his work is foundational to Arendt's later philosophy of forgiveness in *The Human Condition*. As stated above, Arendt describes forgiveness as something 'mobilized' between people, an echo of Heidegger's thinking of being as relationality. After confirming Jesus' radicality in his insisting of forgiveness as a way of being, Arendt uses a rhythmic metaphor – of release and attachment, renewal and change – to argue for mutual redemption between people:

But trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly. Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new. (1998, 240)

For Arendt, such freedom has a 'rhythm' (120) of pain, effort, love and goodness comprising a lived existence in poetry, a genre she calls 'perhaps the most human and least worldly of the arts, the one in which the end product remains closest to the thought that inspired it' (169). The poet transforms memories and recollections through rhythm and in doing so provides a space for thinking, and thus forgiving. The analogy finds a contemporary example in Haim Gordon's essay 'Heidegger on Poetry and Thinking', wherein he defines the responsibility of the intellectual faced by 'evil and evildoers' (3) as one of poetic listening and thinking. As a social commentator on the Israeli government's treatment of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (1995), Gordon draws on Heidegger as a figure who deepens thinking by inviting readers 'to come under the sway of poetry' (34, 270). A submission to this sway through the reading of poetry, Gordon argues, moves us rhythmically back into a beingness able to relate and forgive.

Heidegger offers the word 'sway' in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) to think about a moving into being as constitutive of everyday life, wherein people move between feeling centred and unsettled. For Heidegger, humans sway into being and their being-in-the-world, and sometimes sway out of it, but ultimately find a place between the two by relating to others in a forgiving, receptive way. Heidegger's idea of swaying to reflect on forgiveness is useful because it suggests a way of thinking and feeling about the self that is not egoic, and instead initiates a process of asking about others, one that 'inquires into the being "of" beings' by moving slowly and rhythmically into thinking about what constitutes the human and how individuals come to 'be' in specific moments in time (2006, 297). The word 'sway' is suggestive of a sweeping or swinging motion, a turn or veer of a thing or body, an inclination towards. The English word 'sway' is etymologically related to the Old Norse for bend or bow, swing and also twig, an object that curves and bends but is still rooted, either in the ground or upon a tree. Sway also signifies the power to command or influence, but in all these meanings, sway carries a sense of movement that is impelled and directed. Critics willing to interpret Heidegger in religious terms see a divine or godly force behind this impelling and directing. This swaying into being can also be read as an affective and communal impetus that

creates the conditions for being receptive to others: in Heidegger's terms, we enter into a 'being-with-others' that is dependent on those involved attending to each other. Neither Heidegger or Wordsworth name this impetus, and yet they do find a shared language for it in poetic, rhythmic and measured expression. For Heidegger, we sway into being; for Wordsworth we trip or are thrown into it. Whatever drives that swaying tripping motion is what holds people together and places them 'in' selfhood and 'in' time, grounding them and making them open towards others.

Such opening to others as a mode of forgiveness helpfully theorizes a way around the rehearsing of forgiveness as forgetting, overcoming, impossibility or ethics. Jesus, for example, shows that the capacity and willingness an individual has to forgive is directly related to that person's self-perception of the extent to which he or she needs forgiveness. If an individual's perception of him or herself is one in which he or she requires little or no forgiveness, then that person, Jesus argues, is not attuned to forgiving others. An example of this can be found in the parable of the two debtors in Luke 7. The story tells of a sinful woman who welcomes Jesus by willingly bathing his feet with her tears and kisses when he arrives at the house of a Pharisee. The Pharisee, convinced of his own goodness, does not feel the need to greet Jesus in this way, and so is closed to Jesus' love where the sinful woman is open to it (Luke 7, 36-50). Jesus then tells the Pharisee the story of two debtors, one who owes five hundred denarii, the other fifty; neither can pay the money back, so the moneylender forgives the debts of both. Jesus asks which of the debtors will love the moneylender more? The one who had the bigger debt, the Pharisee concludes, understanding Jesus' compassion for the sinful woman. Those who regard themselves as in need of forgiveness, then, are more receptive to Jesus than those who see themselves as good and righteous.

Wordsworth gets around seeing forgiveness as little more than trade by presenting forgiveness as a rhythm that enacts receptivity to others through receptivity to the self, but that is not based on an expectation of return. This rhythm is engaged with by listening and attending to it as one friend listens to another, an experience that refers people back to themselves by resonating within them. As Salomé Voegelin (2010) writes, 'the auditory is generated in the listening practice': in listening we are 'in' sound, 'entwined with the heard' (5). Wordsworth's tendency to drop in extra syllables to throw out his rhythm only to bring it back into a steady pace within a few words makes this inner hearing experience more conscious: it brings the reader back to the self by making him or her listen more intently. Wordsworth's throwing-out-ness of rhythm resonates with Heidegger's concept of 'thrownness', his word for being lopped into the world like fledgling chicks leaving a nest. Thrownness of rhythm and being equally map the way in which the self 'be-comes' by simply arriving in the world alongside others. Thrownness is also closely related to Heidegger's stress on falling, a word that describes how people tumble into the world and into a state of being-with-one-another: the human is born into the world rhythmically and gradually. In *Mindfulness*, for example, Heidegger calls his table of contents a 'Listing of leaps' and concludes the book with a section called 'Steps' (2006, 383). Leaping and stepping through thought is itself a deeply rhythmic process, but one that for Heidegger always builds towards an exploration of being or being-ness or becoming

being. As this being is always dependent on being thrown into or falling into a boundness with others it almost forces a forgiving relationalism between people. One cannot be bound to someone one is resentful or angry towards.

Heidegger and Wordsworth's own expressions of their relationships gloss the notion of a love that bounces back and forth between people. While Heidegger's relationship with Arendt is not without contention, it nevertheless embodies a process of continued human forgiveness and love, as Daniel Maier-Katkin's work (2010) exemplifies. In a letter to Arendt dated February 25, 1925, for example, Heidegger addresses the question of 'being' as reciprocal love, writing: 'Why is love beyond all measure of other human possibilities so rich and such a sweet burden for the one who has been struck by it? Because we change ourselves into that which we love, and yet remain ourselves . . . Love transforms gratitude into faithfulness to ourselves and into an unconditional faith in the Other' (2004, 3). Becoming that which we love while remaining ourselves speaks to the parable of the two debtors, the sinful woman true to her own fallen state even as she reaches out lovingly, through her kisses and tears, to Jesus. 'Love transforms gratitude into faithfulness', claims Heidegger, and 'into an unconditional faith in the other' that gives us something to fall into. Here now is Wordsworth (1982) writing a century earlier on August 11, 1810 to his wife Mary about the same sense of faithfulness: 'Every day every hour every moment makes me feel more deeply how blessed we are in each other, how purely how faithfully how ardently, and how tenderly we love each other; I put this last word last because, though I am persuaded that a deep affection is not uncommon in married life, yet I am confident that a lively, gushing, thought-employing, spirit-stirring, passion of love, is very rare even among good people' (60). Heidegger's unconditional faith and Wordsworth's blessed, thought-employing, spirit-stirring enact a sense of relationship based on a continual, daily, habitual love, one that 'gentles' us into communication. It is a shared giving that anticipates giving and connects people back to the real meaning of 'forgiving' through repetition, an act that should occur not seven times, but seventy times seven.

This continual rhythmic process blocks forgiveness from becoming a politics of conquest, where one party wins over another. Poetry offers a way out of an investment in mastery into a security where one does not have to 'reckon' with anxiety and fear: by swaying back into being, the human is again in touch with death, pain and love, and finds him or herself 'outside of all defense' and 'in' secureness (2002, 207). Heidegger (2002) takes the phrase 'outside of all defense' from Rainer Maria Rilke's poem 'As Nature gives', where being – humans, animals, plants – enter into security through 'a breath' that creates a 'safebeing' for them (207). This creating of safebeing through breathing is poetry for Heidegger: quoting Herder he calls the uttering of a poem "'the movement of a bit of air'" on which depends "'Every human thing that man has ever thought, willed, done and will do on earth'" (238). In his essay 'The Thinker as Poet', Heidegger (2001) even conceives of the poem as a human: 'Being's poem / just begun / is man' (4). Humans must be listened to as if they are poems, cradled in a listening process of opening, for-giving and gentling. As Heidegger (2010) argues in *Being and Time*, listening is a primary access to being-open and being-with others and for others: it enables a sense of

belonging and relationship so that people listen as if 'hearing the voice of the friend' (158). Through listening we 'become' being and friend, not just by hearing or understanding what is said, but by hearing listening: the self hearkens to what is heard, writes Heidegger in *Being and Time*: 'Harkening, too, has the mode of being of a hearing that understands. "Initially" we never hear noises and complexes of sound, but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the crackling fire' (158). Listening as understanding, then, translates words into sensibility not signification, an idea Jean-Luc Nancy elaborates in *Listening* (57). It is a rhythmic tuning-into the person one attends to, an attempt to engage on the same frequency. Listening is thus pre-emptive forgiveness: the listener is already in an open, conceding, receptive state that creates affective communication.

That Wordsworth's poetry is an attempt to shape the reader as such an open, conceding, receptive listener is clear to many of his critics. He may anxiously and endlessly seek the origin of his feelings, but he always unconceals this source as his narrative capacity to attend and receive sound. Wordsworth's narrators constantly listen to cuckoos and starlings and hedgehogs and glow-worms moving around the natural world; the boy of winander and the resident owls listen reciprocally to each other, redoubling and redoubling their calls and hoots; in 'Descriptive Sketches' even the air listens - like sleeping water (l.367); and in 'Yes, it was the Mountain Echo' the process of listening to how we listen is imagined - 'Such rebounds our inward ear / Catches sometimes from afar - / Listen, ponder, hold them dear; / For of God, - of God they are' (ll.17-20). Re-bounded sound is from God, then, but that sound needs to be enunciated to receive its echo. One space in which sound echoes from human through God and back is that of the church, and, in the 1830s, Wordsworth became animatedly concerned with the building of a new church where he lived in Cockermouth. Intent on raising money for the building, he entertained two visitors interested in funding part of the project – Joshua and Mary Watson – and conducted them on his favourite excursion for visitors, over the Kirkstone Pass to Aira Force near the head of Ullswater. Later writing to Joshua Watson (October 5, 1835), Wordsworth commented at length on the proposed church building, its current finances and potential trustees, but breaks in the middle of the letter to recall their excursion:

My walk . . . was beguiled by throwing into blank verse a description of the scene which struck Miss Watson and me at the same moment – Here it is:

–Not a breath of air
Ruffles the bosom of this leafy glen.
From the brook's margin, wide around, the trees
Are steadfast as the rocks; the brook itself,
Old as the hills that feed it from afar,
Doth rather deepen than disturb the calm
Where all things else are still and motionless.
And yet, even now, a little breeze, perchance
Escaped from boisterous winds that rage without,
Has entered, by the sturdy oaks unfelt,

But to its gentle touch how sensitive
Is the light ash! that, pendent from the brow
Of yon dim cave, in seeming silence makes
A soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs,
Powerful almost as vocal harmony
To stay the wanderer's steps and soothe his thoughts.

The poem, later entitled 'Airey-Force Valley', exemplifies Wordsworth's tripping metres and content, as well as his embodying of communal receptivity, a for-giving through sound. There is ruffling in the leaves, but no breath of air; the trees are as steadfast as rocks, but move about shaking these leaves; the hills run waters into the old brook, even though it stands deeply still and motionless; and when a little breeze does blow, the oaks cannot feel it. Even the sensory response of the ash trees appears incongruous, hanging as they do from the mouth of a cave like tree-like vocal chords, but swaying with a visual 'eye-music' rather than nature's sounds. Yet the boughs' harmony is compelling precisely because it is not as powerful 'as vocal harmony': the wanderer is calmed and soothed, not through persuasion, but through the care and affection of the breeze's touch into whose presence he is drawn through their gentle wave. To use Heidegger's words, this is a singing of existence through silent sound: the breeze is like the poet's breath exhaling the 'saying of the singer' that opens up 'the world inner space of the heart', an arena in which the wanderer is joined with the environment around him (2002, 239). When Heidegger writes 'Song is itself: "A wind"' he is reading, not only Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1922), but the idea of poetry itself as a connecting rhythmic breath of the kind Wordsworth conjures in 'eye-music'. The boughs thus serve as an example of how to be forgiving, hanging pendent and slow-waving to invite only receptive, open and attentive listeners who think poetically rather than coerce through powerful vocals.

The poem 'sounds out' forgiveness, then, rather than directly poeticizing mercy or ethics: forgiveness is not a 'topic' for Wordsworth but rather a mood or emotion, something to which we are attuned through our willingness to listen. The complete silence evoked by the breath-less atmosphere of 'Airey-Force Valley', in which things move only gently, enacts this forgiving listening, a state Jean-Louis Chrétien (2004a) calls 'silent listening' (48). Even when we speak, Chrétien argues, we still listen 'with the utmost attentiveness': 'This silence is not an absence but a way of bearing witness to the mind, and it invites us to enter ourselves, into the patient listening of speech, a listening that is both source and resource' (48, 50). The connection Chrétien identifies in listening is founded on Heidegger's understanding of speaking as an act of listening, and the intimate, shared listening of the self and the other that opens onto forgiveness (59). For Chrétien, such speaking silences are not only hospitable, but also musical because they sing out towards others like a hymn or prayer, a 'primordial' 'hearkening' that, as Heidegger claims, 'has the mode of being of a hearing that understands' (2010, 158). This engagement brings people into the world with others but it remains a personal choice as to whether the individual listens as to a 'friend' or defies this opportunity and turns away. I have argued that Wordsworth and Heidegger encourage us into the hospitable role of

friend through a rhythmic moving of the reader into relationalism. Closing this issue, Vittorio Montemaggi's 'Afterword: Forgiveness, Prayer and Meaning of Poetry' also asks what it might mean to be called into friendship, being, forgiveness and love by turning back from the nineteenth century to Dante and Shakespeare. Montemaggi invites us above all to consider whether this calling necessarily depends on a notion of divinity or truth, both terms of which modern criticism is notoriously suspicious. What might it 'take for us to create the conditions within which meaning could unfold in forgiveness in our academic debates?' Does this involve rethinking how we listen and attend to texts without returning us to old models of new criticism? Can a fuller understanding of the forgiveness process contribute to new models of managing hostile and interpersonal relationships? Exploring the mechanisms by which forgiveness works will certainly contribute to our understanding of self-esteem, social isolation and what it means to suffer and take revenge (see Kaplan et al 2006). Thinking poetry as a way of enacting forgiveness offers a way to think being as a gift of the voice and body that 'recalls' and repeats, as Chrétien writes, to return us to ourselves through 'the act of listening' (2004b, 24).

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