44. “Skiddaw and Derwent Water,” composed between late February or early March and May, MSS II, V. Revised and split into two poems for inclusion in Spiritual Times (August 1829 and February 1830), as Ruskin’s first two publications. Printed in PJR, 1:11-14 (MS II version, edited and split into two poems, but not the same division as that in Spiritual Times); Works, 2:265-68 (MS V and February 1830 Spiritual Times versions); Cook, Life, 23 (amalgam of portions of February 1830 Spiritual Times and PJR editing of MS II version); and in John Ruskin, Three Lakeland Poems, ed. and ptd. by J. S. Dearden (Bembridge: Yellowsands Press, 1971) (MS V version).

Misdated 1828, Works 2:536. In his May 10, 1829, letter presenting the poem for his father’s birthday, Ruskin says “I think I began it about three months ago” (RFL, 200)--i.e., late February or early March (at the latest), which would correspond to the position of the draft in MS II, following no. 43. This draft must be “that blank verse upon Lake Derwent” that Ruskin “demurred at bringing” to his father, as he reminds John James in the May 10 letter, since “it was designed for your birthday and I did not wish you to see it beforehand,” and “there was a line saying something about this happy day and I was afraid you would ask me what happy day and then the whole secret would gradually have been hauled out of my unwilling mouth” (RFL, 199). The draft does contain such a line at the end of first section, that on Skiddaw (“. . . but no more <on> / on this sad subject on this happy day”), and this line is present also in the fair-copy MS V version. (This penultimate half-line and concluding line are omitted from PJR, 1:11-12, which prints the MS II version, but which silently edits out these lines, presumably in keeping with the policy that “Birthday Addresses usually need lopping to be presentable as ‘poems’” [1:270].) Ruskin’s evasive maneuveurs to prevent his father from reading the poem may have been negotiated about April, when a gap in the family letters suggests that John James was at home.

The presentation copy of no. 44 alluded to in the May 10 letter is probably that contained in the handmade booklet tipped into MS V, “Battle of Waterloo: A Play,” a booklet that also presents fair copies of the (formerly misdated) birthday poem no. 41 as well as of nos. 29, 36, 44, 57. That this fair copy of no. 44 is Ruskin’s intended birthday presentation becomes more evident, if one omits Burd’s bracketed editorial insertion in Ruskin’s remark, “On Newyearsday I prepared a small poem for you,” so “on your birthday it becomes me to have a much larger [one] for you” (RFL, 199); i.e., by a “larger,” Ruskin may mean, not just a larger poem, but a much larger project--the handmade booklet containing several poems and a play. The fair copy of the poem in this booklet was not used by Collingwood as copytext, probably because he had not seen the booklet by 1891, its insertion into MS V being first mentioned in the Library Edition bibliography of the poetry manuscripts (compare PJR, 1:264, and Works 2:531; Collingwood had seen the booklet by 1893, however, when he summarizes it in Life, 32).

If Burd takes it too much for granted (RFL, 200 n. 3) that the enclosure with Ruskin’s 10 May 1829 letter must have been only one poem--a “missing” presentation copy of no. 44, rather than, as I believe, the “Waterloo” booklet--nonetheless one cannot entirely discount the possibility that no. 44 once existed in a separate birthday presentation copy by itself. Such a copy might explain Ruskin’s perplexing remark in the May 10 letter that he had “found a way of evading this line” about the “happy day,” which the “poem sounded quite well without” (RFL, 200)--perplexing, since the booklet version does retain the line from MS II. Ruskin may mean, however, that he evaded the line when reading the draft aloud to his father.

In the MS II draft, the section that Collingwood printed separately and entitled “Skiddaw” is followed by no. 45; however, when the draft resumes after no. 45, there is no indication that Ruskin intended a separate poem called, as Collingwood entitles it, “Derwentwater” (PJR, 1:13-14). The draft following no. 45 begins “skiddaw derwent water / Now derwent water come a looking glass,” a transition of a like kind with one in the preceding draft that Collingwood omitted from his printing of “Skiddaw”: “But enough / Ive treated of the clouds. now skiddaw come” (falling in lines 14-15, as printed in PJR, 1:11). In other words, the MS II version was intended as the integral piece that is fair-copied in MS V (see Works, 2:266-68 n.), an intention evident from the start in Ruskin’s draft title “description of skiddaw & lake derwent.”

The Library Edition added both important textual and bibliographic detail and further confusion, by claiming to print the text as it “first appeared in The Spiritual Times . . . February 1830”--“the earliest printed work of Ruskin” (Works, 2:265 n. 1). The claim is only half true, as James Dearden has discovered (“John Ruskin’s First Published Work,” Book Collector 42, no. 2 [summer 1994]: 299-300). Ruskin’s first publication in fact occurred half a year earlier, in the August 1829 number of The Spiritual Times, which printed a version of the third strophe of the MSS II/V poem--i.e., the strophe that in the MS II draft is designated “conclusion,” beginning “sweet derwent on thy winding shore.” The printing appears as follows (with several interesting variants from the earlier MSS II/V versions of the strophe; compare Works, 2:267-68):

LINES

WRITTEN AT THE LAKES IN CUMBERLAND.

Derwentwater.

Sweet DERWENT! on thy winding shore,

Beside thy mountain forests hoar,

There would I love to wander still;

And drink from out the rippling rill,

Which from thy rocky head doth fall,

And mingles with the eagle’s call;

While from Helvellyn thunders break,

Re-echoed from Old Derwent’s lake.

And where the lightning’s flaming dart,

Plays o’er the Poet’s eye, and warms his heart:

Though such thy glories Earth, thy proudest whole,

Can never satiate the grasping soul!

R——

This strophe, it was believed, had been cut when the first “two sets of verses, on Skiddaw and Derwent Water respectively, [were] run together,” as Cook and Wedderburn (misleadingly) state, and were printed in the February 1830 Spiritual Times as “On Skiddaw and Derwent-Water.” In fact, the concluding strophe was cut because it had already been separately printed; and the remaining Skiddaw and Derwent Water sections were not “run together,” since they had never been separated in the first place (except for later, in Collingwood’s misinterpretation of the MS II draft).

Thus, among the decisions made in the few months between May and August 1829--not the two years between 1828 and 1830, as believed until recently--was, first, to separate the third, concluding strophe from the body of the poem, as it had appeared in the draft and fair copy--a separation never evident in any of Ruskin’s manuscripts. Second, significant revisions were made to the now separated parts of the poem. Most notably, a pious concluding couplet was added in the published “Lines,” and decorous revisions transformed the ending of the 1830 “On Skiddaw and Derwent-Water,” as well. The sentiment in these revisions can be seen as contradictory to the spirit of the original versions. The friction caused by the revising process is probably reflected in debates over worldly beauty versus religious asceticism carried on in nos. 58-59. The debate seems to culminate in no. 60--unusually illegible, scrawled draft that almost certainly represents Ruskin’s troubled attempt at revising the Skiddaw and Derwent Water poem for publication.

The greater piety and decorum of the published versions make sense in light of their venue. The Spiritual Times: A Monthly Magazine was edited and owned by Ruskin’s tutor, the Reverend Edward Andrews, who had been hired to teach Ruskin only a few months earlier, in April (RFL 200). For information about Andrews as the magazine’s editor, Dearden, in “John Ruskin’s First Published Work,” points to Ian Anstruther’s Coventry Patmore’s Angel: A Study of Coventry Patmore, His Wife Emily and “The Angel in the House” (London: Haggerston Press, 1992). Andrews, it appears, published his own children’s verse in the journal, and so it was natural enough that he would edit verse by his precocious new student. (Reciprocally, John James would later copy verse by Andrews’s daughter Eliza in Ruskin’s MS VI [see part 1, MS VI, e].) In retrospect, then, it was auspicious that, in Ruskin’s May 10 birthday letter to his father accompanying the MS V “On Skiddaw and Derwent Water,” he devoted a quarter of the space celebrating the recent “coming of the tutor”--“a most important aera of my life” (RFL, 200). Worshiping Andrews’s mirthful yet learned character, Ruskin must have been ecstatic to be published in his tutor’s magazine, whatever he may have felt about the revisions demanded of his poem.

The subsequent oversight of the 1829 printing of “Lines” cannot be attributed entirely to Cook and Wedderburn’s carelessness. John James himself seems to cite the 1830 “On Skiddaw and Derwent-Water” as Ruskin’s first publication in a list he compiled of Ruskin’s poetry publications (“on Skiddaw & Derwent Water / page 72 Spiritual Times / Feby 1830 age 11 years”; see part 1, MS IV). Although John James compiled this list in the later 1840s, almost two decades following the publication of “Lines,” it is very odd that the admiring father could have forgotten even the slightest detail about Ruskin’s first appearance in print. Surely, John James would have recalled not only his own pride but also, if a now common belief can be credited, his part in revising the poem for press (see B. E. Maidment, “‘Only Print’--Ruskin and the Publishers,” Durham University Journal 63, no. 3 [n.s. 32, no. 3] [June 1971]: 196). (No copies, incidentally, of either the August 1829 or the February 1830 issues of the Spiritual Times are presently known to have been owned by the Ruskins--the Bembridge copies, one of the last additions to the collection prior to its move to Lancaster, having originally belonged to Andrews--but it is beyond credibility that the family did not own both issues. See RBB, 214; and James S. Dearden, “The Ruskin Galleries at Bembridge School, Isle of Wight,” Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 51, no. 2 [Spring 1969]: 334.)

John James’s mistaken entry in MS IV is crossed out in pencil, which may mean that somebody in the family had spotted its inaccuracy; however, the scoring could also represent John James’s decision, a curious one, not to include his son’s first two publications in the 1850 Poems by “J.R”--not even the 1830 “On Skiddaw and Derwent-Water,” which he certainly remembered. The omission raises interesting questions that cannot be resolved in light of the available, largely negative evidence, but that at least challenge prevailing assumptions. Did John James, for example, in fact have a hand in revising the 1829/30 poems for press--a notion, after all, that started with a mere hazarded opinion by Cook and Wedderburn that “it is possible that Ruskin’s father or the editor touched them up for publication” (Works, 2:265 n.)? Was there, rather, something in the editing of the poems, and Andrews’s role in their publication, that either John James or Ruskin himself disliked enough to exclude them, two decades later, from the private-circulation collection? In 1850, John James informed his son that “we shall not print your 12 year poems which the marvellous are better in your own printed written [i.e., hand-lettered] little Book--We shall begin with Months age 16 I believe unless you desire earlier pieces” (qtd. in “Ruskin’s Poems 1850”). This does not explain why John James preferred the earlier poems to remain in their presentation-copy format; and, in any case, the 1850 Poems did not begin with “The Months” (no. 194) but with “Song” (no. 176), a previously unpublished poem of 1833. “Skiddaw” and “Lines” could have been vetoed by Ruskin owing to their trammelment in the religious and intellectual conflict already mentioned. John James could have harbored some resentment of Andrews as the first competition by an older male for his son’s affections, a possible jealousy that might have fed John James’s and Margaret’s later list of reasons for disapproving of the preacher and his family (see RFL 242-43, 366).

Again, one must guard against overinterpreting negative evidence, but the subsequent bibliographic history concerning Ruskin’s first publications grows irresistibly bizarre. In a part of Deucalion issued in October 1879, Ruskin confidently relayed an anecdote that transferred the event of his first appearance in print to his first prose publication, his 1834 papers for Loudon’s Magazine of Natural History (nos. 190-91, 193):

I well yet remember my father’s rushing up to the drawing-room at Herne Hill, with wet and flashing eyes, with the proof in his hand of the first sentences of his son’s writing ever set in type,--“Inquiries on the Causes of the Colour of the Water of the Rhone” . . . . My mother and I eagerly questioning the cause of his excitement,--“It’s--it’s--only print!” said he. Alas! how much the “only” meant! (Works, 26:275)

Ruskin may have been misled by a recent bibliography of his published writings, Shepherd, of which the first edition was published in September 1878, and which lists the “Inquiries” as Ruskin’s first periodical publication. In October 1878, Ruskin had written to Shepherd of the bibliography, “It will be of extreme value to me in filling up what gaps I can in this patched coverlid of my life before it is draped over my coffin--if it may be” (Works, 34:537). Shepherd, however, must have been misled in his turn by Ruskin, who, in an 1872 edition of the Catalogue of the Rudimentary Series of drawings at the Oxford schools, had remarked “that Mr. Loudon was the first literary patron who sent words of mine to be actually set up in print, in his Magazine of Natural History, when I was sixteen” (Works, 21:243). The important point, I believe, is that Ruskin--in the 1870s and in the context of his writings on drawing, botany, and geology--wanted to believe that his first publications were scientific and factual, not poetic, in nature.

Since Shepherd and Ruskin’s published remarks in the 1870s on his first publication would have been taken as authoritative, the succeeding major bibliographies--Wise (1:302-3, 2:111), and the chronological list of publications appended to Collingwood’s Life (1893, 1:233)--likewise awarded the distinction to the 1834 papers for Loudon’s Magazine. Ruskin’s first poetry publications, according to these bibliographies, were the 1835 contributions to Friendship’s Offering (see nos. 180, 207; Wise, 2:123; Collingwood, Life [1893], 1:233). Wise and his co-editor Smart were unlikely to be disabused by Ruskin or the Severns of any errors, the response from Brantwood to Wise being as politely insouciant and unhelpful as Ruskin had been to Shepherd (“Wise and Ruskin I,” 48, 51-52). Collingwood, for his part, may have relied more on Wise and Smart than they did on him (see “Wise and Ruskin I,” 46-47). Collingwood’s persistence in the error is remarkable, however, since he knew about John James’s entry in MS IV on the Spiritual Times publication and even printed it, without comment, in 1891 (PJR 1:264; Collingwood misprinted the 1830 date of publication as “1831”). This did not prevent Collingwood two years later in the Life (1893) from maintaining that Ruskin “began his literary career” as the “analytic John Ruskin . . . already an enfant terrible” (1:49-50).

In light of what, by the 1890s, appears to have settled into a prejudice favoring Ruskin’s analytic and scientific beginnings, Cook and Wedderburn must be given credit for locating at least the 1830 Spiritual Times version of “On Skiddaw and Derwent-Water,” which they used as their main copytext. Still, this printing contains one-and-a-half dozen punctuation variants from the original Spiritual Times version and changes the wording of three lines (line 11, “Chasing the others off” for “Chasing each other off” in the original; line 17, “majestic, a giant-nature’s work” for “majestic, giant-nature’s work”; and line 42, “And when he’s made it” for “And when he’s made”).

The “Lines” were not, as the published title claims, “written at the lakes in Cumberland.” Rather, as Cook and Wedderburn are probably correct in suggesting about “On Skiddaw and Derwent Water,” the poetry harkens back to the family’s 1826 trip to the Lakes (Works, 2:265 n. 1); they had also visited the district in 1824 and 1822 (TLC, 6-7). A “great tour” to the Lakes projected for 1828 had been cancelled due to the death of John James’s sister (see no. 25). Perhaps Ruskin believed that poetic compensation for the lost tour and anticipation of next journey to the Lakes (1830) would be appropriate for his father’s 1829 birthday.