

# RANDALL JARRELL, WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, AND THE ABSTRACTIONS OF MODERNITY BY JAMES APPLEWHITE

**BOTH POETS FELT, IN DIFFERENT WAYS,  
THE ABSTRACTION THAT LARGE-SCALE  
CONFLICT CREATED, WHEREIN INDIVIDUAL  
MORAL RESPONSIBILITY SEEMED LOST.**

I first read William Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" in *The Anchor Book of Stories*, a paperback edited by Randall Jarrell, that I bought in the bookstore of the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina in 1960.<sup>1</sup> Jarrell included two other narrative poems, William Blake's "The Mental Traveler" and Robert Frost's "The Witch of Coos," in his collection of mostly European modernist fiction. Stories by Katherine Anne Porter and Peter Taylor connected these works with the South. I was excited to find Wordsworth so precisely mirroring the psychic state of a character in a house and its grounds. I had recently finished a master's program at Duke, fitting together the fractured memories of the idiot Benjy in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* for my thesis. Like other Southern fiction writers, Faulkner used the details of a physical environment as the "objective correlatives" for memories and emotive states. This *Book of Stories* was for Jarrell an aesthetic statement. Partly through Jarrell's influence, I then chose Wordsworth for my dissertation topic when back at Duke in 1964.<sup>2</sup>

Notes contributed by NCLR staff

<sup>1</sup> Randall Jarrell, ed., *The Anchor Book of Stories* (New York: Doubleday, 1958).

<sup>2</sup> James Applewhite, "Benjy's Perception of Value in *The Sound and the Fury*," MA thesis (Duke U, 1960); "Wordsworth's imaginative use of place," diss. (Duke U, 1969).



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