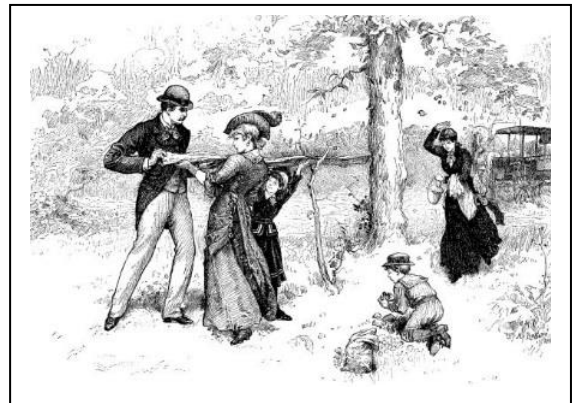


## “Nutting” by William Wordsworth

—It seems a day  
(I speak of one from many singled out)  
One of those heavenly days that cannot die;  
When, in the eagerness of boyish hope,  
I left our cottage-threshold, sallying forth  
With a huge wallet o'er my shoulders slung,  
A nutting-crook in hand; and turned my steps  
Tow'rd some far-distant wood, a Figure quaint,  
Tricked out in proud disguise of cast-off weeds  
Which for that service had been husbanded,  
By exhortation of my frugal Dame—  
Motley accoutrement, of power to smile  
At thorns, and brakes, and brambles,—and, in  
truth,  
More ragged than need was! O'er pathless rocks,  
Through beds of matted fern, and tangled thickets,  
Forcing my way, I came to one dear nook  
Unvisited, where not a broken bough  
Drooped with its withered leaves, ungracious sign  
Of devastation; but the hazels rose  
Tall and erect, with tempting clusters hung,  
A virgin scene!—A little while I stood,  
Breathing with such suppression of the heart  
As joy delights in; and, with wise restraint  
Voluptuous, fearless of a rival, eyed  
The banquet;—or beneath the trees I sate  
Among the flowers, and with the flowers I played;  
A temper known to those, who, after long  
And weary expectation, have been blest  
With sudden happiness beyond all hope.  
Perhaps it was a bower beneath whose leaves  
The violets of five seasons re-appear  
And fade, unseen by any human eye;  
Where fairy water-breaks do murmur on  
For ever; and I saw the sparkling foam,  
And—with my cheek on one of those green stones  
That, fleeced with moss, under the shady trees,  
Lay round me, scattered like a flock of sheep—

I heard the murmur, and the murmuring sound,  
In that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay  
Tribute to ease; and, of its joy secure,  
The heart luxuriates with indifferent things,  
Wasting its kindliness on stocks and stones,  
And on the vacant air. Then up I rose,  
And dragged to earth both branch and bough,  
with crash  
And merciless ravage: and the shady nook  
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,  
Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up  
Their quiet being: and, unless I now  
Confound my present feelings with the past;  
Ere from the mutilated bower I turned  
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,  
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld  
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky.—  
Then, dearest Maiden, move along these  
shades  
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand  
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.

(In *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798)



The speaking “I” in this poem describes an episode of childhood in which a feeling of sheer joy and harmony with nature is ruptured when the boy begins to despoil the hazel trees of their crop of nuts and suddenly finds himself playing the part of a trespasser, doing violence to Nature. He is, after all, behaving just as boys always behave in fulfilment of the mission on which he has set out from home—the rural pastime of “nutting”. He ends by invoking a supposed listener, the “dearest Maiden” of the final lines, whom he advises to approach the “spirit of the woods” with “gentleness of heart [and] gentle hand”—a very different temper from his boyhood self. The plot the poem can readily be seen to reflect that of the story of Eden in Genesis (Chaps. 1 & 2) where Man is shown destroying Paradise through his own illicit desires—though in the original it is Eve rather than Adam who succumbs to the allure of Satan. The misogynist bias of the Biblical tale is here reversed. Yet, in spite of the invocation of a female listener, there is no interlocutor in the poem which, therefore, reads like a dialogue with the self—a practice much more typical of way the Romantic poets framed their ego-centred ruminations in longer philosophical poems. It is probable that the “dearest Maid” was his sister Dorothy.