

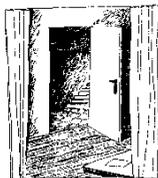
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WORDSWORTH AND FRANCE

Edited by

David Duff, Marc Porée
and Martin Procházka



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INTRODUCTION

David Duff and Marc Porée

The articles in this special issue examine different aspects of Wordsworth's connection with France, including his literary reception and legacy in that country. The fact that this is, to the best of our knowledge, the first volume of essays devoted to this topic is surprising given the importance of Wordsworth's French experiences in his life history and the frequency with which he returns to them in his writings. Wordsworth was, as every student knows, the only major English Romantic poet to experience the French Revolution at first hand, but critics and biographers still struggle, as Wordsworth himself did, to comprehend the full significance of that extraordinary experience. Reflecting in 1843 on his unpublished play, *The Borderers* (drafted in 1796-97), a violent historical drama set in the thirteenth century, he suggests that it was written "to preserve in my distinct remembrance, what I had observed of transition in character [...] during the time I was a witness of the changes through which the French Revolution passed."¹ Yet what was the "transition" through which his own character passed in that that fateful period, and what part did it play in the larger story of "the growth of the poet's mind"?

He confronts that question directly in his autobiographical poem *The Prelude*, in which (from the 1805 version onwards) his revolutionary experience is pivotal, but the answer he gives is so complex, so contradictory, and so incomplete that critics still disagree about what is really being claimed or confessed. The disagreements extend to Wordsworth's broader political trajectory, and an odd situation persists in Wordsworth studies whereby

¹ William Wordsworth, *The Borderers*, ed. Robert Osborn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982) 813 ("The Fenwick Note," 1843).

fundamentally different accounts of Wordsworth's journey from revolutionary radicalism to conservatism are considered equally plausible. Works written during, or soon after, his "residence in France" (a matter-of-fact phrase he used throughout his life which symptomatically belies the momentousness of what happened to him there) complicate the picture further, suggesting that his retrospective interpretation of his experiences was very different to one he had at the time – and the gap between lived experience and retrospective interpretation became a recurrent, even obsessive theme of his work.

What, then, was France to Wordsworth? A "strange attractor," certainly, to use a mathematical metaphor, as Germany was to Coleridge, and Greece to Byron. The strangeness in Wordsworth's case lies in the fact that he was both inexorably drawn to France – to enjoy its landscapes, learn its language and witness its history – and yet also destined to leave and ultimately reject it (his professed dislike for French literature and wilful forgetting of the French language in later life may be symptomatic). The country in which, to use his own resonant word, he experienced the fullest "bliss" imaginable – the *jouissance* of first love and sexual passion, combined with the euphoria of revolution and utopian expectation – was also the one in which he was brought face to face with ferocious political violence, as the Revolution rapidly advanced, in the time he was there, towards what he called "its extreme of wickedness."²

Whatever he felt at the time – and there is evidence that he was less troubled by the revolutionary violence than his retrospective accounts suggest – it was the transition from "bliss" (his own, and France's) to "wickedness" (in which, the suggestion lurks, he may also have been complicit³) that was later to become the focus of his attention. For Wordsworth, the Revolution was a laboratory of human nature, revealing the capacity of human beings, including himself, to be transformed, psychologically and morally, by the pressure of history, transformed beyond recognition, even into their very opposite. This fact alone makes analysis of his experience in France extremely difficult to assess, even without the further complication that his involvement in the political transformation coincided with a revolution in his personal life: falling in love, conceiving a child out of wedlock, and – for whatever reason – abandoning his new family.

² Wordsworth, *The Borderers* 813.

³ A complicity hinted at in the "unjust tribunals" passage in the 1805 *Prelude*, where Wordsworth describes "a sense / Of treachery and desertion in the place / The holiest that I knew of—my own soul" (X, 378-80). *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979).

The gaps in the biographical record are an added difficulty. Despite the efforts of generations of biographers, including the great French scholar Émile Legouis, who provided the first detailed account (other than his own) of Wordsworth's exposure to revolutionary France,⁴ key elements in the narrative are missing. We still know very little, for example, about his movements in Paris in October-December 1792, and about his personal acquaintances at that time. In the absence of any correspondence for these months or other biographical evidence, his state of mind as he lingered at the epicentre of the French Revolution before returning to England remains a matter of conjecture (the haunting description of this critical period in *The Prelude* may not be factually reliable). Crucially, too, we lack Wordsworth's side of his (and his sister Dorothy's) correspondence with Annette Vallon when back in London (two of Annette's letters survive, having been intercepted by the French authorities and thus saved from the later purge of textual traces of the relationship by members of his family or himself).⁵ The autumn of 1793 is another conspicuous gap in the biographical record, fuelling speculation about a clandestine return visit to France at the onset of the Terror.⁶ That there were further visits, involving meetings with his former lover and French daughter, in 1802, 1820 and 1837 is certain, but his response to those meetings can only be guessed at as he left no record of them (such details as we have come from others who travelled with him).

The essays in this volume are literary-critical rather than biographical in emphasis but the two scholarly modes cannot be clearly separated in Wordsworth's case, as influential previous studies such as Nicholas Roe's and Alan Liu's demonstrate.⁷ The range of approaches offered here includes theoretical as well as more straightforwardly empirical studies, and in one case the French connection that is posited is between Wordsworth's writing and

⁴ Émile Legouis, *The Early Life of William Wordsworth, 1770-1798: A Study of "The Prelude,"* trans. J.W. Matthews (London: Dent, 1897), reissued with an introduction by Nicholas Roe (London: Libris, 1988).

⁵ For texts of Annette's letters, see Émile Legouis, *William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon* (London: Dent, 1922) 124-33 ("Appendix II"). On the paucity of evidence about the relationship and the dangers of conjecture, see Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 58.

⁶ The fullest consideration of the (largely speculative) evidence for this return visit is Kenneth Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York: Norton, 1998) 378-400.

⁷ Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989).

French poststructuralist theory, a link manifest in the metaphorical texture of his poetry and theoretical concepts such as transversality. The volume opens, though, with two essays which address more literal and tangible aspects of Wordsworth's literary legacy in France. Here, too, the record is patchy and the erasure, or disavowal, of potential evidence, has, until now, retarded serious critical investigation.

Both essays confront a stark paradox. Why is it that the English Romantic poet who engaged most closely with France, to the point of living there for a year, experiencing first-hand its greatest historical event, and adding to its gene pool, commands less attention among French scholars, and has fewer readers in France, than any of the other English Romantics? What factors inhibit French appreciation of his work? The paradox deepens when the question of literary influence is raised: why is English Romantic poetry in general, and Wordsworth's in particular, not recognized ("unacknowledged," as Shelley would have had it) as a significant influence on French Romanticism, despite the manifest textual connections and the prevailing Anglomania at the time of French Romanticism's flowering?

In the opening essay, Laurent Folliot attributes the neglect of Wordsworth's poetry in France not primarily to the poet's own antipathies to French literature and his renunciation of French revolutionary politics, nor to broader Anglo-French cultural divergences in the nineteenth century, but to the specific circumstances of Wordsworth's early reception and literary mediation, including through translation. Characterising the relationship as a "history of misknowing," he explains how, after a brief period of respectful attention in French reviews, Wordsworth's poetry "was increasingly reduced to an expression of domestic piety and quiet, hazy contemplation, at odds with the more tumultuous *Zeitgeist* that characterised French Romanticism in the 1830s and 40s." Folliot pinpoints the writers, critics and translators responsible for this downsizing of Wordsworth, in particular Sainte-Beuve, who ignored the visionary and apocalyptic dimension of his work and aligned him with earlier, less ambitious English poets such as Cowper and Crabbe in an attempt to legitimize his own intimist poetics. The resultant misunderstanding was compounded by unfavourable comparisons with Lamartine, the founding hero of French Romanticism, ensuring that, by the mid-nineteenth century, "Wordsworthianism in France was confined to a few parochial coteries, playing only an insignificant part in actual literary creation." The essay concludes on a more optimistic note, citing two recent translations of *The Prelude* (by Denis

Bonnecase and Maxime Durisotti)⁸ as evidence of a new French engagement with the most ambitious parts of Wordsworth's work. This volume, it is hoped, will provide further evidence.

Alain Vaillant's essay takes a broader sweep, examining "the complex processes that have led to the almost systematic occlusion of the influence of English Romanticism on French Romanticism." He identifies many cultural factors that have contributed to this "occlusion," among them the national rivalry that coexisted with the French Anglomania in certain cultural spheres. Wordsworth, as the iconic English poet of the first half of the nineteenth century and one increasingly given to the expression of nationalistic sentiments himself, became a victim of these cultural wars. Religious factors played a part, too, as Wordsworth's Anglican Protestantism, and the "natural supernaturalism" derived from it,⁹ were deemed incompatible with the Catholic influences which, through figures such as Chateaubriand, formed the accepted genealogy of French Romanticism. The disavowal of English influence on French Romanticism was perpetuated in French scholarly circles by other, more recent developments such the impact of post-war Marxist historiography, which, while foregrounding economic explanations of literary change, cultivated a distaste for writers such as Wordsworth who, in his later work especially, seemed too aligned with the values of economic liberalism and consumer capitalism.

The remaining articles focus on Wordsworth's work itself. Three of them take *The Prelude* as their subject, examining Wordsworth's poetic representation of his "residence in France" or on more oblique traces of this experience in the narrative structuring or figurative patterning of the poem. For Christoph Bode, Wordsworth's French connection – and attempted (but failed) disconnection from France – are the driving force behind the entire poem. This is reflected in its strange compositional history, as a "preparatory" poem which endlessly defers the text it prepares for, and which becomes a site not of "recollection in tranquillity" but of a compulsive returning, retrieving and revising – a process akin to Freud's *Wiederholungszwang* (repetition urge). For Bode, the essential structure of this narrative logic is exposed by the "boat-stealing episode" in Book One, which, he argues, is emblematic of Wordsworth's processing both of the past in general and of the French Revolution in particular: "he wants to finish it,

⁸ William Wordsworth, *Le Prélude ou la Croissance de l'esprit d'un poète*, trans. Denis Bonnecase (Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2013); William Wordsworth, *Le Prélude – Croissance de l'esprit d'un poète*, trans. Maxime Durisotti (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016).

⁹ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973).

to lay it to rest, but the longer he deals with it – and deal with it he must –, the more he tries to get away from it, the larger it grows.”

Martin Procházka’s essay offers an analogous reading of the poem, invoking not Freud but Deleuze to argue that Wordsworth’s account of imagination reveals two contradictory impulses: an assimilative tendency that seeks to gather disparate experiences into a coherent and unified whole (absolute subjectivity, or motion towards it: “the growth of the poet’s mind”); and a disruptive, dispersive tendency (particularly evident in the 1799 *Prelude*) in which “imagination is an ‘effect’ of an immense quantity of differences among impressions, rather than a power synthesizing these differences.” Read in this way, *The Prelude* can be seen to prefigure important aesthetic and ethical paradigms in French poststructuralist theory, paradigms which can in turn help to show that Wordsworth’s poem is not just a genealogy of imagination but also “a history of emotional life, where the relations to nature and its symbolic substitutions (imagination, spiritual love, God) cover up the principal autobiographical themes, namely the erotic and political dilemmas.”

The interconnection of Wordsworth’s political and erotic dilemmas, and the special kind of “covering-up” (displacement and allegorization rather than total concealment) in which he engaged, is the subject, too, of David Duff’s essay, which turns from *The Prelude* to the unpublished “Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff” of 1793, Wordsworth’s first substantial composition on returning from France to England. Intended as a contribution to the ‘Revolution debate’ then raging in Britain, this was also, Duff argues, an “Anglo-French” pamphlet which adopts the satirical device of contrast to systematically juxtapose French and English values. The purpose of this strategy was not only to expose the moral inadequacy of Wordsworth’s polemical target, Richard Watson, by comparison with iconic French figures such the Abbé Grégoire and Michel Gérard, but also to provide a rationale for Wordsworth’s own political choices as a self-styled “Republican” and defender of regicide. In biographical terms, the “Letter” is a transitional text, from one life to another, but Duff shows how, rather than burying the scandalous secret of his illegitimate French child, Wordsworth makes coded reference to it via an allusion to Racine’s *Athalie*, a tragedy about king-killing, royal succession and a concealed child.

Christy Edwall’s essay examines a later phase of Wordsworth’s political and personal negotiation with France, focussing on a number of post-1816 sonnets which reflect on French history or historiography (“Various Recent Histories and Notices of the French Revolution”) or one or other of his visits to France in 1820 and 1837. On both occasions he saw Annette and his French daughter, as he had in 1802, during what was probably his first return visit to France after leaving in

December 1792. Edwall shows how, once again, personal and historical concerns intertwine, his meditation on the fate of Napoleon – occasioned, in one case, by the stranding of his cross-Channel ferry near Boulogne, in another by Benjamin Haydon's *Rückenfigur* portrait of him "arms folded, back turned" on the island of St Helena – being also an opportunity for reflection on his personal history. Edwall demonstrates how sonnet form, with its distinctive force field produced by concentration and juxtaposition – serves as a vehicle for these reflections, yielding other insights than those available from larger narrative form such as epic.

The volume concludes with a 'virtual round table' which returns to the subject of *The Prelude*, focussing directly on the 'French Books.' A number of interrelated themes are discussed, including the role of revolutionary language and speech; Wordsworth's foreigner status; his fantasies of Messianic intervention in the French political crisis; his journalistic ambitions; his literary allusions and other representational strategies; and the relationship between revolutionary excitement or fear and "spots of time." The virtual round table format was devised as "an experiment in scholarly communication" involving pre-circulated position statements and an extended email conversation between a group of six scholars over a period of six days. The discussion, of which this printed version is an edited transcript, marked the culmination of a research project on Wordsworth's French connection which began with a two-day symposium on that theme in Paris in April 2017. A collaborative, dialogic format, modelled in part on Friedrich Schlegel's "Gespräch über die Poesie" (Dialogue on Poetry, 1800), was, it was felt, an effective medium for exploration of this many-sided topic, and an appropriate one for a poem that was itself centred, in the French books, on conversations. By publishing this exchange, it is hoped that other readers may share whatever fresh light is shed on the subject, and be part of future conversations, actual or virtual, on Wordsworth's connections with (and disconnections from) France.

WORDSWORTH IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE: A HISTORY OF MISKNOWING

Laurent Folliot

Wordsworth's poetry has attracted comparatively little interest in France, beyond specialised academic circles. Although such neglect might be seen as reflecting the poet's own antipathies to French literature and politics after the Revolutionary period, as well as Anglo-French cultural divergences more generally, the present article endeavours to account for it by retracing the specific circumstances of Wordsworth's early reception across the Channel. After a brief period of respectful mentions and occasional translations in French reviews, his poetry was increasingly reduced to an expression of domestic piety and quiet, hazy contemplation, at odds with the more tumultuous Zeitgeist that characterised French Romanticism in the 1830s and 40s. To a considerable extent, this was the work of Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, who, although an attentive reader of Wordsworth, tended to align him with earlier, ultimately less ambitious poets such as Cowper in his attempt to legitimise his own intimist poetics. The resultant misunderstanding was strengthened by repeated analogies with Lamartine, with whom the English poet was unfavourably compared, ensuring that, by the mid-nineteenth century at the latest, Wordsworthianism in France was confined to a few parochial coteries, playing only an insignificant part in actual literary creation.

"On the Continent he is almost unknown," Matthew Arnold ruefully wrote in the 1879 essay he prefixed to his anthology of Wordsworth's poetry.¹ He went on

¹ Matthew Arnold, "Wordsworth" (1879), *Essays in Criticism*, 2nd series (London: Macmillan, 1888) 126.

to add, however, that a just assessment of its truest merits by the British public would not fail, in time, to elicit a similar recognition in Europe. Whether or not such a condition has been met, it seems that in France, at least, Wordsworth does remain “almost unknown,” though it might be more accurate to say, if a Gallicism is allowable here, that he is *misknown*, “méconnu”: French readers tend to know that he was a *lakiste*, that the *lakistes* dwelt by the side of lakes in the Lake District, and perhaps that he wrote a poem about daffodils, “jonquilles” (Coleridge, on the other hand, wrote “The Ancient Mariner”). Such a state of affairs is in strong contrast with the kind of popularity that Walter Scott’s novels long enjoyed with the French public, or that Jane Austen’s retain to this day, or for that matter with the tremendous prestige Hölderlin’s poetry held for at least two generations of post-war French intellectuals. One might, of course, be tempted to account for it, partly at least, by Wordsworth’s fierce if idiosyncratic patriotism: his own recoil from anything French after 1802, as well as the kind of inward-looking Englishness which would be one of the reasons for his cult status amongst the ‘Wordsworthians,’ and more recently could still prompt Geoffrey Hartman to call Wordsworth studies in the UK “a cottage industry.”² Indeed, as Stephen Gill has demonstrated, Wordsworth’s canonising in Victorian Britain occasioned a number of partial distortions, from a generically Protestant emphasis on the purity of his morals to the queasy sentimentalism of some book illustrators,³ and these pious simplifications did feed into a narrative of competing national aesthetics (or ideology) that goes some way towards explaining what might be called the non-reception of Wordsworth’s poetry in France. The aim of this article will be to show that such a reductive portrayal of Wordsworth - which, to some extent, persists to this day - was firmly established there by the middle of the nineteenth century, but also that it was, first and foremost, the result of a more specific, contingent history, ultimately rooted in the tumultuous, tentative progress of French Romanticism itself.

Wordsworth and French Literature: From Cancelled Debt to Mutual Ignorance?

Undoubtedly, Wordsworth’s realisation from 1799 onwards of “what love [he] bore to [England]”⁴ after his long period of Revolutionary infatuation went along

² Geoffrey Hartmann, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) xxvi.

³ See Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 40-113.

⁴ William Wordsworth, “I travelled among unknown men,” *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983) 103.

with a definite Francophobia, and in particular with a literary Francophobia that found vent in such pronouncements as the scathing 1802 sonnet “Great Men have been among us,” with its terse conclusion that France shows “equally a want of Books and Men,”⁵ or his declaration in *The Convention of Cintra* (1809) that “the paradoxical reveries of Rousseau, and the flippancies of Voltaire, will never naturalize in the country of Calderon and Cervantes.”⁶ This comprehensive rejection, conflating the supposed hollowness of French literature with the heartlessness of French politics, suited the mood of wartime England, and even more of post-war Toryism; it was echoed, among others, by Coleridge in the Malta Notebooks (“France is my Babylon, the Mother of Whoredoms in Morality, Philosophy, Taste”⁷), and later on by De Quincey at the outset of his 1821 *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (in a barely veiled attack on Rousseau: “the spurious and defective sensibility of the French”⁸). It was perhaps inevitable that, by laying such emphasis on the deep Englishness of his work, and by stressing so vehemently the limitations of French literature, Wordsworth should invite a similar awareness of his own ‘limitations’ in at least some French readers, for instance Hippolyte Taine, who in his *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* spoke of his “chardons métaphysiques” (metaphysical thistles) and called *The Excursion* “grave et terne [dull] comme un sermon”;⁹ and even Émile Legouis, who did so much to rejuvenate Wordsworth’s image for French and Anglophone audiences alike, sometimes betrays a sense of this contentious legacy.

Yet, as various commentators have pointed out, the poet’s wholesale condemnation of French literature only helped obfuscate, in a way that has been perennially frustrating, his own former, serious engagement with it. As David Duff incisively reminds us in the present collection, the “Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff” features an admiring – and highly-fraught – quotation from Racine’s

⁵ Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes* 166.

⁶ William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) 1: 332.

⁷ S.T. Coleridge, *Collected Notebooks*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961) 2: 407.

⁸ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, ed. Alethea Hayter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) 29.

⁹ Hippolyte Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 2nd edn., 4 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1866) 4: 318-19. On Taine and Wordsworth, see Dominique Peyrache-Leborgne, “Taine et les ‘chardons métaphysiques’ de Wordsworth,” *Romantisme*, 89 (1995): 95-100, which offers a stimulating synthesis on the question, while perhaps implicitly overstating Taine’s role in keeping French readers away from the poet; as we shall see, negative or at least lukewarm attitudes had been prevailing from some time before the 1860s.

Athalie; Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* has long been identified as a likely inspiration for the opening of *The Ruined Cottage*;¹⁰ there is an approving quote from the then-fashionable Abbé Delille in a footnote to *Descriptive Sketches*;¹¹ and Wilfred Owen has even speculated that Delille's preliminary discourse to his 1770 French translation of the *Georgics*, with its considerations on the superior energy of popular speech, influenced Wordsworth when writing his Preface to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*.¹² Most significant and elusive of all, however, has been the poet's suppressed engagement with Rousseau (himself, admittedly, no Frenchman, though seemingly treated as such in *Cintra*): Legouis already opined that "Sans qu'il le dise jamais, et qu'il le veuille ou non, Wordsworth est [...] plein de Rousseau"¹³; James Chandler has charted his early interest in, and later repudiation of, the Genevan philosopher's political theory; W.J.T. Mitchell has argued that his *Confessions* were the most likely (and deliberately elided) subtext for *The Prelude*; and Gregory Dart has convincingly made the case for the lasting, if intermittent, presence of Rousseauvian aspirations and motifs in Wordsworth's poetry, where the part-Swiss, part-Jacobin ideal of "mountain liberty" might well have been smoothly transferred to the Lake District around the turn of the century.¹⁴

To this list of plausible conjectures, one more may be added, regarding neither the *Confessions* nor the *Contrat Social*, but the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, a novel there is no actual proof that Wordsworth had read, but which was Rousseau's most enduringly popular work, and which the young Englishman in Blois was, therefore, unlikely to ignore (especially in view of the fact that Annette Vallon's elder brother was called Jean-Jacques, and that Vaudracour's fiancée is named

¹⁰ See Nelson Adkins, "Wordsworth's *Margaret*; or *The Ruined Cottage*," *Modern Language Notes*, 38.8 (1923): 460-66; Jonathan Wordsworth, *Ancestral Voices* (Woodstock: Spelsbury, 1991) 66-68; and Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 120.

¹¹ William Wordsworth, *Descriptive Sketches*, ed. Eric Birdsall (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984) 112.

¹² Wordsworth, *Prose Works* 1: 185.

¹³ Émile Legouis, *La Jeunesse de William Wordsworth* (Paris: Masson, 1896) 56. Wordsworth never acknowledges the extent to which he had imbibed Rousseau's doctrines. But, intentionally or otherwise, he makes it clear that he is steeped in Rousseau.

¹⁴ James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 93-119; W.J.T. Mitchell, "Influence, Autobiography and Literary History: Rousseau's *Confessions* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude*," *ELH*, 57 (1990) 643-64; Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 163-208.

Julia). It is, indeed, worth noting that the “Entretien sur les romans” which served as preface to the second edition of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* includes some reflections that seem highly germane to Wordsworth’s concern with the pragmatics and reception of poetry, in the paratext to *Lyrical Ballads* and beyond. Thus Rousseau’s remarks on the connection between retirement and repetition in speech (“Dans la retraite [...c]e petit nombre d’images revient toujours, se mêle à toutes les idées, et leur donne ce tour bizarre et peu varié qu’on remarque dans les discours des solitaires”¹⁵) easily finds an echo in Wordsworth’s note to “The Thorn,” while his rehabilitation of a provincial readership (“Quand on vit isolé, comme on ne se hâte pas de lire pour faire parade de ses lectures, on les varie moins, on les médite davantage ; et, comme elles ne trouvent pas un si grand contrepoids au dehors, elles font beaucoup plus d’effet au-dedans”¹⁶) strikingly anticipates the poet’s lifelong offensive against metropolitan reviews and their ‘Public.’

If Wordsworth’s possible borrowings from French sources are intriguing enough, so is his uncanny proximity – at least in some ways – to his contemporary François-René de Chateaubriand, who was born, and died, two years before him. Beyond their obvious differences (prose-writer versus poet, statesman versus “recluse”), similarities abound:¹⁷ like Wordsworth, Chateaubriand prided himself on being the offspring of a comparatively rough, secluded country, and the early recollections of *The Prelude* find a ready counterpart in the description of his own dangerous childish games along St. Malo pier in the first chapters of the (nearly equally posthumous) *Mémoires d’Outre-tombe* (Memoirs from Beyond the Grave, 1848-50); he, too, was a first-hand witness and collateral victim of the Revolution, forced into exile in London a few months before Wordsworth was prevented from returning to Blois, and his extended, liberal-conservative musings on 1789 and its aftermath, not to mention his firmness towards

¹⁵ In retirement [...] those few images perpetually recur, mixing with all ideas, and giving them that uncouth and monotonous character one often meets with in the speech of solitary persons. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *La Nouvelle-Héloïse* [1761], ed. Henri Collet, 2 vols. [Paris: Folio Classique, Gallimard, 1993] 2: 398.) All translations from the French are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁶ People who live insulated lives, being in no hurry to read so that they may parade the extent of their readings, read less varied books, but ponder them more; and, since these books do not meet with so great counter-weights without, their effect within is much more powerful. (Rousseau 2: 402).

¹⁷ The parallel has, in fact, been drawn by one of Wordsworth’s more recent French translators, François-René Daillie, in the preface to an anthology (*Poèmes*) published by Gallimard in 2001.

Bonaparte, might have seemed calculated to encourage in the English poet a more lenient view of the French spirit; finally, much like Wordsworth, the egotistic or autobiographical bent of his imagination resulted in a major contribution to the modern poetics of memory, with the spots of time finding an equivalent in the famous description of a thrush's song that Proust saw as foreshadowing the whole project of *À la Recherche du temps perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past).¹⁸

The two authors, however, never truly met: probably by the 1820s each was secure enough in his literary persona not to need or heed the other. Wordsworth's entire correspondence features a single, perfunctory reference to Chateaubriand, in an 1834 letter to Felicia Hemans, who had used a quote from *Le Génie du christianisme* as an epigraph to her poem "Elysium" (suggestively, however, he praised her for having "admirably expanded the thought" of the French author).¹⁹ As for Chateaubriand, the thrush passage in the *Mémoires* is, in all likelihood, indebted to William Cowper and Samuel Rogers rather than to Wordsworth; and although he could be passionately accurate when discussing Milton, Byron or even James Beattie, his survey of recent English poetry in the 1836 *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* (itself based on prior materials from the *Mémoires*) took such a bird's eye view of it as to give a rather hazy notion of Wordsworth's position and importance: "Après [Cowper et Burns] vinrent les restaurateurs des ballades: Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, Wilson, Campbell, Thomas Moore, Crabbe, [Samuel] Rogers, Bary [sic] Cornwall, Shelley, Barton, Clare, Cunningham, Hogg, ont amené cette poésie jusqu'à nos jours [...]. Plusieurs de ces poètes appartiennent à ce qu'on appelait *Lake School* (l'École des lacs), parce qu'ils chantaient les sites des lacs de Westmorland."²⁰ But at least Chateaubriand was, as we shall see, more guarded than his younger contemporaries about the value of his own preemptory assessments; his caveat that he might be ludicrously wrong, that "le style n'est pas, comme la pensée,

¹⁸ See Marcel Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé* (1922), *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1989) 4: 498.

¹⁹ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. 5: The Later Years*, 4 vols., ed. Ernest De Selincourt and Alan Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978-79) 2: 736.

²⁰ After [Cowper and Burns] came the restorers of balladry: Coleridge, Wordsworth [...], Hogg have brought that vein of poetry up to the present day [...]. Several of those poets belong to what was called the *Lake School*, because they sang the scenery of the Westmoreland lakes. (François-René de Chateaubriand, *Essai sur la littérature anglaise et Considérations sur le génie des hommes, des temps et des révolutions* [Paris: Furne et Charles Gosselin, 1836] 2: 339).

cosmopolite; il a une terre natale, un ciel, à soleil à lui”²¹ shows him to be refreshingly aware of the limits of translatability, at a time when French critics were still focusing on ‘universal ideas,’ – or, in other words, at a time when France still enjoyed something like cultural hegemony, on what could be ‘Frenchified,’ translated into the ‘natural’ language of mankind.

The 1830s: Romantic France’s Near-encounter with Wordsworth

As Rousseau’s strictures on Parisian smugness were taken up and amplified by Mme de Staël and her followers in the second decade of the nineteenth century, especially in the post-Waterloo years, the French literary establishment developed an unprecedented interest in English authors, which soon crystallised in the formidable success of Byron and Scott (the only British poets who would exert a major influence on the growth of French Romanticism). Thus Wordsworth, along with the ‘Lake School’ of which he was perceived as the leader, was first introduced to the French public as part of the general attempt to keep up with London fashions, and in association with Byron’s notorious sarcasms in *Don Juan*. Indeed, this was the work of Amédée Pichot, the capable translator who had produced ten volumes of Byron’s works for the Parisian bookseller Galignani, and in 1825 devoted one whole letter of his *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Écosse* to Wordsworth, duly prefixing it with lines 76-82 of “Tintern Abbey,” which he wisely noted were “difficiles à traduire”²² (significantly, as we shall see, that letter is preceded by equally lengthy accounts of Cowper and Crabbe). Stating at once that Wordsworth had “des adeptes plutôt que des lecteurs,” Pichot went on to defend him against Byron’s raillery (adding, more dubiously, that the third canto of *Childe Harold* derived its inspiration from an early Wordsworth poem entitled “Evening Sketches”). Perhaps understandably proud of his position as a cultural *passer*, he emphasised Wordsworth’s magnitude as a poet’s poet, and indeed took him on his own terms against the *Edinburgh Review*’s party line (“Sur mille personnes qui lisent lord Byron, il n’en est que dix qui lisent Wordsworth; mais de ces dix il en est six qui mettent celui-ci au premier rang”²³).

²¹ Style is not, like thought, cosmopolitan; it has its own native soil, its own skies and sun. (Chateaubriand 2: 251).

²² Amédée Pichot, *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Écosse*, 3 vols. (Paris: Ladvoat and Gosselin, 1825-26) 2: 363.

²³ Out of a thousand persons who read Lord Byron, there are only ten who read Wordsworth; but out of those ten, six award him the first rank. (Pichot 366).

In fact, Pichot's assessment was as fair and accurate as any that would follow, at least in France. He insisted on the Laker's greatness as a contemplative poet, twice referring to his "platonisme chrétien," relying on such varied descriptions as "métaphysique," "mysticisme," "panthéisme," "quaker," "méthodiste," "abstraction," "spéculation" and "sublime," and focusing especially on *The Excursion* ("Il règne dans ce poème une philosophie si calme, une simplicité si solennelle, qu'il faut apporter à cette lecture une disposition particulière; elle demande le recueillement et le sentiment religieux qu'il est nécessaire d'éprouver pour apprécier tout ce qu'a de sublime le silence d'une forêt, ou plutôt la solitude un peu monotone d'une immense cathédrale gothique éclairée du demi-jour mystérieux de ses vitraux"²⁴). More perceptively perhaps, he also praised the early, shorter poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, rebutting the usual charges of 'meanness' or ridicule ("Pour moi, je l'avoue, j'ai quelquefois trouvé un monde entier de sensations dans ces sujets indignes [...]. Il est dans les plus petits phénomènes de la création des harmonies fécondes en grands résultats"²⁵), and lauding their ability to restore in their readers an aboriginal intensity of feeling. He offered prose translations of "The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman," "The Reverie of Poor Susan," and "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic," while also recommending "Michael," "Ruth," "Hart-Leap Well," the "réveries sur les rives de la Wye," "The Brothers," "le début de l'histoire d'un homme qui gagne sa vie à chercher des sangsues" ("The Leech-Gatherer"), and even *The Waggoner* and *Peter Bell*.²⁶

Pichot's work was quickly reviewed in the Saint-Simonian *Globe* by a very young Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, who hailed Cowper and the Lake poets as offering confirmation that the fledgling French Romantic school was headed in the right direction (that of French prose since Rousseau and Bernardin, in fact), but also warned, with impressive authority, against the "mystique

²⁴ That poem is pervaded with such a calm philosophy, with such solemn simplicity, that a peculiar disposition is required when reading it; it calls for the reverence and religious devotion one must feel in order to enjoy whatever sublimity there is in the silence of a forest, or rather in the somewhat monotonous solitude of a huge Gothic cathedral, where only a faint and mysterious daylight comes in through the stained glasses. (Pichot 372).

²⁵ For my part, I confess I have sometimes found a whole world of sensation in these unworthy subjects [...]. There are, in the smallest phenomena of the Creation, harmonies that abound in great consequences. (Pichot 393).

²⁶ Pichot 334-38.

obscurité" he suspected Wordsworth of wrapping himself in.²⁷ There were few further echoes until 1828, when Galignani published a pirated edition of Wordsworth's 1827 *Poems* (with *The Excursion* added to it). Wordsworth himself thought that the book had mostly been purchased by English expatriates,²⁸ but the next year minor Romantic Antoine Fontaney offered a not unconvincing verse translation of "We Are Seven" in his *Ballades, Mélodies, et poésies diverses*: a rather logical choice, given the recurrence of the quirky and Gothic in a collection which typically included an imitation of Bürger's *Lenore*. The same Fontaney later published in the influential *Revue des Deux-Mondes* an article on Wordsworth, opening on the statement that the author of *Yarrow Revisited* was now "en pleine possession du trône poétique de l'Angleterre," and generously quoting from the more positive passages in Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age* essay.²⁹

Indeed, the early 1830s, which coincided with the full triumph of Romanticism on the French literary scene, saw a modest surge of consideration for Wordsworth in the reviews, not just in the translated papers of the *Revue britannique*, but also in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, where a series on the *Histoire biographique et critique de la littérature anglaise* by Scottish poet Allan Cunningham bestowed high praise on *The Excursion*,³⁰ and Philarète Chasles's 1835 essay on Cowper mentioned Wordsworth favourably (Chasles would later translate the "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg" in prose).³¹ Meanwhile, the ephemeral *Revue poétique du XIX^e siècle* gratified its readers with a fanciful but not uninventive adaptation of "The Old Cumberland Beggar" by tireless publicist Jean-Michel Berton.³² Significant as such accolades might seem, however, it should be noted that they implicitly tended to emphasise Wordsworth's 'domestic' and 'religious'

²⁷ S.-B. [Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve], "Voyage littéraire et historique en Angleterre et en Écosse, par M. Amédée Pichot," *Le Globe*, 197 (17 December 1825): 1027.

²⁸ See Robert Rehder, *Wordsworth and the Beginnings of Modern Poetry* (London: Croom Helm, 1981) 203.

²⁹ Y... [Antoine Fontaney], "Yarrow Revisited and Others [*sic!*] Poems (1)," *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, 4.3 (1835): 349. On the publication of the *Yarrow* poems as a turning-point in Wordsworth's reception, see Gill 19, and John D. Mahoney, *Wordsworth and the Critics: The Development of a Critical Reputation* (Rochester, NY: Woodbridge, 2001) 25.

³⁰ Allan Cunningham, "Histoire biographique et critique de la littérature anglaise depuis cinquante ans," *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, 2.4 (1833): 329-30.

³¹ Philarète Chasles, "Poètes et romanciers de la Grande-Bretagne, IV. William Cowper," *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, 4.1 (1835): 308.

³² B... [Jean-Michel Berton], "Le vieux pauvre de Cumberland. Fragmens traduits de l'Anglais de Wordsworth," *Revue poétique du XIX^e siècle, ou Choix des poésies contemporaines inédites...*, 1 (1835): 48-51.

qualities – those, in short, of *The Excursion* – at the expense of the more passionate and visionary aspects of his imagination, and that such praise could appear double-edged at a time of growing scepticism and political unrest. Wordsworth's association with a respectable brand of Anglican quietism may well have been, in the long run, detrimental to his reputation amidst the social and intellectual turmoil of the July monarchy (some radicals, like Edgar Quinet, for instance, would clearly be more drawn to Shelley's pantheism).

Crucially, it was also as the poet of domestic affection and quiet fervour that Wordsworth mostly featured in the writings of Sainte-Beuve, whose interest in him, *pace* Robert Rehder's opinion of the matter,³³ went much further than his 1825 review and his occasional allusions in the *Causeries du lundi*. The erudite and canny arch-critic of French Romanticism, in fact, was possibly Wordsworth's most influential French reader ever; but in the early 1830s Sainte-Beuve was hardly more a critic than a poet, having earned genuine recognition through the effusions of his Wertherian alter ego *Joseph Delorme* (1829) and his non-pseudonymous *Consolations* (1830). Each of these collections contained three avowed translations, or 'imitations,' from Wordsworth, most of them sonnets: *Delorme* offered versions of "The Longest Day," "Scorn not the Sonnet," and the first part of "Personal Talk," while the *Consolations* featured rewritings of "It is a Beauteous Evening, calm and free," "Not Love, not War, nor the tumultuous swell," and "There is a pleasure in poetic pains," as well as a rather faithful and noteworthy rendition of Coleridge's "Æolian Harp."³⁴ Yet Sainte-Beuve's appreciation of Wordsworth primarily lay in his use *for* Wordsworth – more or less conflated, as earlier in Pichot, with other English poets such as Cowper and Crabbe – in what must be described as a strategy of oblique, invidious self-differentiation from the 'grander' Romantics, above all Lamartine and Hugo. His regular invocation of 'lakiste' poetry is calculated to legitimise his own brand of intimate verse by the side of his elders' works, acknowledging his own secondary rank yet discreetly claiming greater sincerity and subtlety for his humble, bourgeois attempts to observe Nature and the soul in the cottage rather than the drawing-room, "cherchant à rehausser le prosaïsme de ces détails domestiques par la peinture des sentiments humains et des objets naturels."³⁵ In such a context, Wordsworth appears, along with other Sainte-Beuve favourites, as

³³ Rehder 203.

³⁴ Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Poésies complètes de Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Charpentier, 1845) 88-91, 123-24, 234-36, 262-64.

³⁵ Seeking to redeem such prosaicism of domestic detail through the depiction of human feelings and natural objects (Sainte-Beuve, *Poésies complètes* 156).

[...] Wordsworth peu connu, qui des lacs solitaires
Sait tous les bleus reflets, les bruits et les mystères,
Et qui, depuis trente ans, vivant au même lieu,
En contemplation devant le même Dieu,
À travers les soupirs de la mousse et de l'onde
Distingue, au soir, des chants venus d'un meilleur monde.³⁶

Here “peu connu” serves as a vehicle for appropriation as well as definition, while the poet in his stasis becomes another Lucy Gray, amidst a private landscape of otherworldly sweetness that has been comprehensively purged of all starker, more turbulent stirrings. Sainte-Beuve’s Wordsworth is, in many respects and perhaps deliberately, a devitalised one.

Ironically, whatever prestige Sainte-Beuve as a poet enjoyed with later French writers, notably Barbey d’Aurevilly and Baudelaire, rested less on the quiet sense of bliss here associated with Wordsworth than, as in “Les rayons jaunes” or “Le creux de la vallée,” on a note of bitter, almost Satanic despair, in tune with the sordid realities of the Parisian *faubourg* (in this, he must rather have been drawing on Crabbe’s perverse anti-lyricism, though bending it to purposes that were far from Anglican). On the other hand, the harmonious domesticity he celebrated in ‘Lake’ poets real and assumed certainly made for a somewhat reductive perception of Wordsworth’s poetry, especially if we take into account his wariness and near-suppression of its ‘metaphysical’ obscurities, in keeping with the early criticisms of the *Edinburgh Review*, as well as with his own classicising tendencies (“Une gloire poétique comme celle de Goldsmith ou Cowper serait la couronne de mes rêves,” he would later write³⁷). What this meant, ultimately, was that Sainte-Beuve’s Wordsworth, stripped of his ‘difficulties’ and ‘symbols,’ brought closer to what was really a late-eighteenth-century sensibility, came out domesticated, miniaturised – perhaps one might say ‘Cowperised’ – from the process of critical appraisal and translation. Take, for instance, Sainte-Beuve’s ‘imitation’ of the first sonnet in “Personal Talk”:

³⁶ Wordsworth, scarcely known, who knows each blue reflection, each sound and mystery of the solitary lakes, and who, having for thirty years lived in the self-same place, contemplating the self-same God, through the sighing of moss and wave at eve hears songs from a better world (Sainte-Beuve, *Poésies complètes* 243).

³⁷ Such poetical glory as that of Cowper or Goldsmith would be the crown of my dreams. (Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Mes poisons* [1926], ed. Henri Guillemin [Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1965] 126).

Je ne suis pas de ceux pour qui les causeries,
Au coin du feu, l'hiver, ont de grandes douceurs;
Car j'ai pour tous voisins d'intrépides chasseurs
Rêvant de chiens dressés, de meutes aguerries,

Et des fermiers causant jachères et prairies,
Et le juge de paix avec ses vieilles sœurs,
Deux revêches beautés parlant de ravisseurs,
Portraits comme on en voit sur les tapisseries.

Oh ! combien je préfère à ce caquet si vain,
Tout le soir, du silence, – un silence sans fin;
Être assis sans penser, sans désir, sans mémoire;

Et, seul, sur mes chenets, m'éclairant aux tisons,
Écouter le vent battre, et gémir les cloisons,
Et le fagot flamber, et chanter la bouilloire!³⁸

Where the original poem largely revolved around the central void of lines 7-8, with their startling simile and intimations of transience ("These all wear out of me, like Forms, with chalk / Painted on rich men's floors, for one feast-night"³⁹), Sainte-Beuve conscientiously fills it up, as it were, with vignettes of provincial satire that prolong his mock-heroic embroideries at lines 3-4; at the same time, he restores a fair amount of cosiness and conventional morality to the poem by omitting the adjective "barren," over-translating "such discourse" by "ce caquet si vain," rendering "without hope" by "sans désir," introducing the wind and groaning partitions as elements of indoor comfort (l. 13), and substituting such loudly positive words as "chanter" and "flamber" for Wordsworth's "kettle, whispering it's [*sic*] faint undersong." Similarly, and although somewhat less remote in mood from the original, Sainte-Beuve's imitation of "It is a beauteous

³⁸ I am not one of those for whom wintertime, fireside talk, holds much sweetness; for all my neighbours are fearless hunters, who dream of well-trained hounds and veteran packs, and farmers full of fallows and leas, and the Justice with his sisters old, two sullen beauties who speak of ravishers, portrayed as in tapestries. O how I prefer, to such vain babble, evening-long silence – endless silence; to sit without a thought, without desire or memory; and, alone on my andirons, by the light of the brands, to hear the beating winds and groaning walls, the blazing log and singing kettle! (Sainte-Beuve, *Poésies complètes* 123-24).

³⁹ Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes* 254.

evening” nonetheless presents significant departures from Wordsworth’s ample music and subtle choice of words: “calm and free” is thus rendered by the much less unusual “paisible et solennel,” and the shifting poise of quiet and power in the English text (as in “The gentleness of heaven broods o’er the sea,” l. 5, or “And doth with his mighty motion make / A noise like thunder – everlastingly,” ll. 7-8) gives way to a blander, more mechanical juxtaposition of silence (“La mer dort ; le soleil descend en paix du ciel,” l. 5) with straightforward church music (“On entend l’hymne heureux du triple sanctuaire / Et l’orgue immense où gronde un tonnerre éternel,” ll. 7-8⁴⁰). In both cases, it might be said, the intrinsic difficulties of translation have been compounded by a wilful reduction of the complex lyrical thrust in the original to (in part ideologically pre-determined) favourite significations.

To the effect of Sainte-Beuve’s somewhat diminutive presentation of Wordsworth to French readers must be added that of the parallel recurrently drawn between his works and those of Lamartine, who after emerging as the founding hero of French Romanticism in his *Méditations poétiques* (1820) had seemed to strike an ampler, more cosmic note in the 1830 *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*. Although Lamartine read English poetry in the original from an early stage (notably Milton, Pope, Gray and Thomson), and despite the powerful impression Byron made on him around 1818, he does not appear to have followed later cross-Channel developments very keenly. Yet there are almost eerily Wordsworthian touches in his works, particularly in the once immensely popular *Jocelyn* (1836), an 8,000-line verse novel about the life of a mountain curate that its author presented as merely one fragment from a forthcoming humanitarian epic, whose proportions would indeed have easily dwarfed even the completed *Recluse*. Beyond its more obvious affinities with *The Excursion* – the figure of the rural priest, the mountain landscape, the revolutionary background, the fascination with mortality and recurrent sermonising tone –, it is in its vibrant plainsong that *Jocelyn* comes closest, at times, to Wordsworth’s poetry:

On n’entend d’autre bruit, dans cet isolement,
Que quelques voix d’enfants, ou quelque bêlement
De génisse et de chèvre au ravin descendues,
Dont le pas fait tinter les cloches suspendues ;
Les sons entrecoupés du nocturne Angelus,

⁴⁰ The sea is asleep; the sun comes down from the sky in peace [...]. One hears the gladsome hymn in the triple shrine, and the huge organ where eternal thunder rumbles. (Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes* 234).

Que le père et l'enfant écoutent les fronts nus,
Et le sourd ronflement des cascades d'écume,
Auquel, en l'oubliant, l'oreille s'accoutume,
Et qui semble, fondu dans ces bruits du désert,
La basse sans repos d'un éternel concert.⁴¹

In his own footnotes to the poem, however, Lamartine never alludes to Wordsworth – whom, according to Henri Guillemin, he probably did not know at first hand⁴² –, whereas he does mention a translation of Burns's "The Cotter's Saturday Night" by Léon de Wailly (for national as well as aesthetic reasons, the Scottish bard was generally better received in France than the English poet). The family resemblance, it would seem, is purely fortuitous.

And in fact, *Jocelyn* differs from *The Excursion* in two significant ways, first as a pathetic romance full of the incidents notoriously wanting in Wordsworth's poetry (during the Terror, Jocelyn falls in love with Laurence, a murdered fugitive's daughter who, initially disguised as a boy, lives with him in a secluded Alpine valley for a year; he is subsequently torn between his priestly calling and his passion for Laurence, who dies a fallen woman after he has reluctantly decided to observe his vow of chastity); and then – more occasionally, in celebrated sections such as "Les Laboureurs" – as a progressive, humanitarian georgic. Both these aspects, ultimately, held superior appeal for the nineteenth-century French public. Sainte-Beuve, who at heart resented the great man's annexation of what he thought was his own little poetic domain, reviewed *Jocelyn* at Lamartine's own request; he welcomed its naturalising of the country-curate lyricism he saw as an English specialty (mentioning Thomson, and of course Cowper and Crabbe, to make his point), and compared its author to Wordsworth, only to conclude that the French poet excelled his English counterpart in majestic simplicity ("Lamartine va toujours par le plus droit chemin, d'un seul essor, en vue de tous [...]. Wordsworth, lui, ne procède pas de cette sorte. Pour arriver à des hauteurs égales, il se dérobe par des circuits

⁴¹ No noise is heard, in this seclusion, but of a few children's voices, or the bleat of some heifer, or goat, gone down the steep, whose step causes its hanging bells to tinkle; the intermitted sound of nightly Angelus, to which father and child listen bare-headed, and the muffled roar of foaming waterfalls, soon familiar to the oblivious ear, and seeming, blending with those desert sounds, the *restless bass* in some eternal concert. (Alphonse de Lamartine, *Ceuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. Marius-François Guyard [Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1963] 700, emphasis added).

⁴² See Henri Guillemin, *Le Jocelyn de Lamartine. Étude historique et critique, avec des documents inédits* (1936) (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1967) 587-96.

nombreux, compliqués"⁴³). Once more, then, Lamartine was not 'metaphysical'; his sublimity was easier, loftier and, we may add, more immediately topical. Such a view would enjoy lasting credit. Upon the poet's death in 1869, Théophile Gautier inveighed against those who saw him only as "un mélodieux lakiste"; in 1886, the Symbolist Charles Morice even called Wordsworth "un Lamartine diminué, minutieux et protestant";⁴⁴ and in 1906 Legouis, writing the preface to the Oxford Higher French Series edition of *Jocelyn*, could not forbear giving it the preference over *The Excursion*.⁴⁵

If Wordsworth does not seem to have materially influenced Lamartine, he did, as early comparative literature scholar Joseph Texte pointed out long ago, exert considerable fascination over at least one minor French Romantic, Hippolyte de la Morvonnais, an earnest humanitarian and pious Catholic from Brittany who was passionately fond of his native region.⁴⁶ La Morvonnais published an enthusiastic essay on Wordsworth in the *Revue européenne*, celebrating his "énergie pathétique," and claiming him as "éminemment le poète de la souffrance intérieure du pauvre" (the poet of the poor man's inward suffering).⁴⁷ This was illustrated by a number of quotes from "Ruth," a translation of perennial favourite "The Reverie of Poor Susan" (actually marred, among other things, by the fact that La Morvonnais mistook Lothbury and Cheapside for pastoral locations), an allusion to "The Leech-Gatherer" and, most interestingly perhaps, long excerpts from "The Idiot Boy," which seems to have been chosen partly in rebuttal of Byron's pronouncements. Although the latter translation is not entirely unfaithful by contemporary standards, the stanza is somewhat padded out – six lines instead of five – and the added touches are typically wide of the stark, enigmatic simplicity of the original, as the poem's opening and concluding lines may show:

On est en mars ; il est huit heures ;
La lune aux célestes demeures
S'élève belle. – On ne sait d'où

⁴³ Lamartine always takes the straightest way, in a single flight, and in sight of everyone [...]. Wordsworth does not proceed thus. To reach equal heights, he steals through many complex windings (Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, "Jocelyn, par M. de Lamartine," *Revue des Deux-Mondes* 4.5 [1836]: 624).

⁴⁴ Guillemin 588.

⁴⁵ Émile Legouis, "Le Poème de Jocelyn," Alphonse de Lamartine, *Jocelyn*, ed. Émile Legouis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906) x.

⁴⁶ Joseph Texte, *Études de littérature européenne* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1898) 189.

⁴⁷ Hippolyte de la Morvonnais, "Études sur Wordsworth," *Revue européenne*, 2.2 (1835): 331.

La chouette rejette, errante
Au sein de la nuit transparente,
Son triste *hallou*, son long *hallou* [...].

“Les coqs, dit-il, ont chanté, sombres,
“*Houhou! Houhou!* parmi les ombres ;
“Et le soleil, pâle et peureux,
“A brillé froid dans la nuit noire.”
Ce fut ainsi qu’il fit l’histoire
De son voyage aventureux.⁴⁸

The “celestial mansions” of the moon (l. 2) are certainly alien to Wordsworth’s diction (“The moon is up – the sky is blue”), and one may add that Johnny, fearless as he is, could hardly call the sun “pale and fearful.”

La Morvonnais ended his essay by noting that there was also in Wordsworth a deeper and a ‘manlier’ pathos, which he might later illustrate by translating “Michael”; yet he never did, although Sainte-Beuve – of whom he was an awed, distant friend and admirer – had publicly encouraged him in his review of *Jocelyn*. In his own *Thébaïde des Grèves*, which does abound in rural vicars, aging wanderers, crumbling granite cottages and rustling furze, it is the domestic and charitable note which again predominates, albeit adapted to a sentimental Roman Catholic context that makes for heavier moralising (“Je dirai la famille, et du toit domestique / Le modeste bonheur, le calme, les travaux; / Rien ne peut mériter le dédain du cantique; / Il doit aller partout formant des cœurs nouveaux”⁴⁹), and often tinged with an elegiac plangency redolent of Chateaubriand’s *René*. There is no doubt that La Morvonnais worships and loves Wordsworth with the intensity of a religious disciple; one may add that he probably feels more genuine sympathy for his ‘natural philosophy’ than any other of his French readers (“Il dit comment le monde et ses mille natures /

⁴⁸ ‘Tis eight o’clock in the month of March; the moon is rising fair to the celestial mansions – One knows not whence, the owl sends through the bosom of transparent night its sad *halloo*, its long *halloo* [...]. “The cocks,” he said, “quite dark they sang, *hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo*, amid the shades; and the pale and fearful sun did coldly shine in the black night.” Thus did he tell the story of his adventurous journey. (La Morvonnais, “Études” 338, 344).

⁴⁹ I will sing the family and the modest bliss, the quiet and labours under the domestic roof; there is nothing the sacred song may despise, and it shall go abroad, shaping hearts anew. (Hippolyte de la Morvonnais, *La Thébaïde des grèves. Reflets de Bretagne* [Paris: G. Roux, 1838] 5).

Forment un grand concert de toutes créatures, / Où tout répond à l'homme, et que l'homme répond / Lui-même à toute vie: et ce sens est profond"⁵⁰). Yet, as his prolix imitation of "Tintern Abbey" demonstrates (226 lines to the original's 160), he was essentially unable to achieve his great model's visionary concentration. Thus Wordsworth's meditative yet powerful opening ("These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs / With a soft inland murmur"⁵¹) is rather dismally toned down to "Cinq ans sont écoulés, cinq printemps, cinq hivers, / Avec leurs longues nuits ; et moi, dans ces déserts / Je reviens écouter ces eaux qui des montagnes, / Fleuve mélodieux, arrosent tes campagnes, / Tintern !," while the memorable "Something far more deeply interfused" passage becomes "C'est comme un sens caché, chaste, délicieux / D'une chose inconnue et résidant, sublime, / Dans les soleils," where a flatly definite, conventional French diction ("chaste, délicieux") entirely cancels Wordsworth's sense of deepening indeterminacy.⁵² It is, unfortunately, undeniable that the full tone of Wordsworth's verse was severely distorted by such bloodless, parochial renditions.

From 1850 Onwards: A Receding Perspective

Thus Wordsworth's poetry had by mid-century become firmly associated, in the eyes of the French public, with a peculiarly English, Protestant variety of quiet contemplation, with a sacred reverence for 'domestic feelings,' and with a low-keyed, humbly prosaic truth of observation; and in this, more often than not, he was, as we have seen, being aligned with slightly earlier poets, Cowper and Crabbe most notably, who probably bore more affinities with the moderate fringe of French Romanticism. What was missing, for the most part, from the various views and versions of Wordsworth and *lakisme* mentioned above was the vision and the power (including, in the case of the mournful La Morvonnais, the power of joy).

⁵⁰ He tells how the world and its thousand natures blend in one vast creaturely concert, where everything answers man, and man himself answers to all life; and the meaning is deep (La Morvonnais, *La Thébaïde des grèves* 268).

⁵¹ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James A. Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992) 116.

⁵² Five years have passed, five springs, five winters with their lengthy nights; and I am returned to these wilds, to hear those waters that, from the mountains, O Tintern! come in a delightful stream to lave thy fields [...] It is as some secret, chaste and delightful sense of a thing unknown that dwells, sublime, amid the suns. (La Morvonnais, *La Thébaïde des grèves* 271, 278).

Such an image was bound to make Wordsworth increasingly irrelevant at a time when, as Alain Vaillant has noted, the cultural mood was becoming tougher:⁵³ by 1852, in the preface to his *Poèmes antiques*, Leconte de Lisle could identify “le réalisme des Lakistes” as one of the main sources of that French Romanticism he meant to overthrow.⁵⁴ In a rather perverse irony, the first book-length translation of Wordsworth poems did not come out before the year of his death (the posthumous *Prelude*, which hardly drew any attention in France during the second half of the nineteenth century, would have to wait until 1949⁵⁵), and was, in fact, such a confidential affair that Texte seemed unaware of its existence forty-eight years later. Its author, Florent Richomme, was a local scholar who lived between Caen and Falaise, and whose main area of interest was medieval Norman history; although the book was purportedly published by Hachette and Derache (both Parisian booksellers), the copy in the Bibliothèque nationale de France was printed at Falaise and bears the stamp of the Calvados copyright registration office. A slender volume, deprecatingly entitled *Ballades et petits poèmes* and almost exclusively in prose (with the exception of “Expostulation and Reply” and “The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman”), it features no introduction and very little commentary (an indirect quote from Hazlitt, and a note mentioning the poet’s death and including Chasles’s rendering of the “Extempore Effusion”). Although Richomme’s choice of texts denotes genuine discernment as well as a clear preference for the early material – the longest or most sustained pieces are the “Matthew” cycle, “Michael,” “Ruth,” “Resolution and Independence,” and “Hart-Leap Well” –, his own translation is decidedly unambitious, as if the intrinsic virtues of Wordsworth’s simple pathos made poetic elaboration useless altogether. The opening stanza of “La fontaine du Saut-du-Cerf,” for instance, omits the striking, portentous analogy of line 2 (“The Knight had ridden down from Wensley Moor / With the slow motion of a summer’s cloud”⁵⁶), so that the result reads like a clumsy translation of Scott’s poetry rather than of Wordsworth’s: “Le cheval du chasseur ne faisait plus que se traîner depuis le marais de Wensley, à demi mort de fatigue. Le chevalier se dirige vers la porte d’un de ses vassaux, et crie qu’on lui amène un autre cheval” (a prose translator might have been expected to avoid the *cheval/chevalier/cheval* polyptoton, which has no counterpart in the

⁵³ Alain Vaillant (ed.), *Dictionnaire du romantisme* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2012) 46-47.

⁵⁴ Leconte de Lisle, “Préface des *Poèmes antiques*” (1852), *Derniers poèmes*, ed. José Maria de Heredia (Paris: Lemerre, 1895) 217.

⁵⁵ William Wordsworth, *Le Prélude*, trans. Louis Cazamian (Paris: Aubier, 1949).

⁵⁶ Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* 133.

original).⁵⁷ Laudable as Richomme's attempt may have been, it was hardly likely to make any impact on Wordsworth's reputation amongst French readers.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, as the public interest tapered off, Wordsworth's poetry became a focus for literary historians, at least as much as for critics. Of particular significance, from that point of view, was the imposing *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (1863-64) which Taine used as a testing-ground of sorts for his ideas on the influence of race, *milieu*, and social progress. Albeit in some respects a follower of Sainte-Beuve, Taine – who had a much higher estimate of Byron and Shelley – shared little of his predecessor's admiration for Wordsworth, and only those of his judgments that were most reticent or negative. The Lake poet interested him, essentially, as a symptom of the modern age – which he saw as 'philosophical,' as well as bourgeois and democratic –, and as the exemplar of a certain kind of Englishness, Anglican yet mingled with Puritanical introspection. Taine acknowledges, indeed, the radical consistency of his poetic project, which he identifies with the full expression of "l'homme intérieur," the inward man *par excellence* that is Wordsworth; but that is at the cost of underestimating the latent turbulence of the poetry (indeed, as Legouis and Texte would recognise, he tends to exaggerate the happiness of the man) and, even more negatively, of questioning the ultimate relevance of such a project. Wordsworth, in Taine's view, is only a 'crepuscular' poet, and probably not a very good one ("un nouveau Cowper, avec moins de talent et plus d'idées que l'autre"⁵⁸); and the severe *normalien* goes on to ridicule his absorption in small things like a new Francis Jeffrey:

Quand j'aurai vidé ma tête de toutes les pensées mondaines, et que j'aurai regardé les nuages dix années durant pour m'affiner l'âme, j'aimerai cette poésie. En attendant, le réseau de fils imperceptibles par lesquels Wordsworth essaye de relier tous les sentiments et d'embrasser toute la nature casse sous mes doigts: il est trop frêle; c'est une toile d'araignée tissée, étirée par une imagination métaphysique, et qui se déchire sitôt qu'une main solide essaye de la palper. La moitié de ses pièces sont enfantines, presque niaises: des événements plats dans un style plat, nullité sur nullité, et par principe. Toutes les poétiques du monde ne nous réconcilieront pas avec tant d'ennui.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Florent Richomme, *Ballades et petits poèmes* (Paris: Hachette and Derache, 1850) 5.

⁵⁸ A new Cowper, with less talent and more ideas. (Hippolyte Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 2nd edn., 4 vols. [Paris: Hachette, 1866] 4: 311).

⁵⁹ When I have rid my brain of all worldly thoughts, and watched the clouds for ten years in order to refine my soul, I shall love that poetry. Meanwhile, the mesh of

Beyond the callous harshness of the indictment, what is evident here is Taine's indebtedness to former characterisations of Wordsworth in terms of religious sentiment, 'metaphysics,' and prosaic simplicity – all integrated within a 'new' framework of cultural interpretation. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, most of his grudging respect goes to *The Excursion*, whose chaste elevation and sustained organ tones elicit the image of a "temple protestant," awful though monotonous and bare;⁶⁰ whereas the truly radical innovations of Wordsworth's poetry, such as its demise of the traditional hierarchies of subject-matter and its susceptibility to the shadowy motions of the mind, appear dangerous to Taine, who fears this will all end up in poems on worn-out tooth-brushes.

Despite this rather curt dismissal, not all late-nineteenth-century French readers were entirely impervious to Wordsworth's deeper music. In particular, the maverick, dandified Catholic Jules Barbey d'Aureville, while no enthusiastic admirer – like Taine and many other contemporaries, he clearly preferred Burns –, sometimes punctured the dominant misrepresentations with gusto, as in the 1875 review where he mocked "cette école de poésie qui ressemble à celle des Lakistes à peu près comme le lac d'Enghien ressemble aux lacs de l'Écosse."⁶¹ Still shrewder, however, is the following assessment, from his 1862 essay on the minor Breton poet Auguste Brizeux:

Wordsworth a des manières de regarder très-nouvelles, et nous nous permettrons de dire : *très-inventées*, car on invente pour arriver au vrai. On invente le chemin qui y conduit. Pointillé à nous impatienter les yeux, l'auteur du *Vieux Pauvre du Cumberland*, de *Lucy Gray*, de *L'Enfant aveugle*, ose des recherches d'originalité, souvent heureuses, et au milieu des *infiniment petits* du détail, il sait ouvrir de l'horizon. Il en met derrière les brins d'herbe qu'il compte trop!⁶²

imperceptible threads with which Wordsworth tries to link all feelings and embrace the whole of Nature breaks under my fingers; it is too brittle; it is a cobweb, woven and stretched by a metaphysical imagination, which is torn up whenever some vigorous hand attempts to probe it. Half of his pieces are childish, silly almost: dull incidents in a dull style, cypher upon cypher, out of principle. No poetics in the world shall ever reconcile us to such boredom. (Taine 315-16).

⁶⁰ Taine 319.

⁶¹ That school of poetry which resembles the Lakers about as much as the lake of Enghien [a northern suburb of Paris] resembles those of Scotland. (Jules Barbey d'Aureville, "M. Paul Bourget" [1875], *Les Œuvres et les hommes*, XI. *Les Poètes*, 2^e série [Paris: Amyot, 1889] 307).

⁶² Wordsworth has ways of looking at things that are very new, and, we will boldly add, very much invented, for one does invent in order to hit the truth. One invents the path

Offhand as they might seem, Barbey's remarks, especially on the 'opening horizons' behind the blades of grass, evince genuine awareness of a then-overlooked, yet fundamental aspect of Wordsworth's poetry: what might be called its unobtrusive spaciousness, its ability to organise vision and discourse into sparse, barely-definite, yet ample and breathing structures, whether in the composition or landscape or in the rhythms of verse itself. This quality could be illustrated from the poems mentioned here (as in "No mate, no comrade Lucy knew: / She dwelt on a wide Moor, / The sweetest Thing that ever grew / Beside a human door!" or "Let him be free of mountain solitudes, / And have around him, whether heard or not, / The pleasant melody of woodland birds"), and also, with even greater effectiveness perhaps, from "Hart-Leap Well" (e.g., the opening quoted above), "Resolution and Independence" ("Beside the little pond or moorish flood / Motionless as a Cloud the Old Man stood"), or, of course, the then-ignored *Prelude* ("when crag and hill, / The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height, / Were bronzed with a deep radiance").⁶³

Yet Barbey's own, little-known prose translation of Wordsworth ("Nous sommes sept," published in 1888 by the *Revue indépendante* according to his disciple Charles Buet⁶⁴), added nothing substantial to the existing corpus, and his isolated insight could hardly be said to have been taken up by subsequent commentators. Indeed, even Émile Legouis, with all his dedication to the literary *entente cordiale*, his deep knowledge of the poetry and his desire to 'acclimatise' it in France at last (he speculated that its lack of popularity might have to do with how difficult it was to pronounce Wordsworth's name in French), broke little new ground in his own translations, which admittedly were published by Les Belles-Lettres when the English poet was added to a national curriculum for one year, and thus could scarcely be viewed as a national literary event.

Although Legouis's selection was far more comprehensive than anything previously available, and featured major excerpts from *The Prelude* (the skating and boating episodes, as well as passages from the revolutionary books), his choice of the French alexandrine as an equivalent to Wordsworth's blank verse,

that leads there. Though so dotted he tires out your eyes, the author of *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, of *Lucy Gray*, of *The Blind Highland Boy* reaches daringly, often successfully, for what is original, and knows how to open up horizons amidst the *infinitely-small* of detail. He puts them behind those blades of grass he numbers too minutely! (Jules Barbey d'Aureville, *Les Œuvres et les hommes*, III. *Les Poètes* [Paris: Amyot, 1862] 84).

⁶³ Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* 170, 234; *Poems, in Two Volumes* 126; *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, 2 vols., ed. Mark L. Reed (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991) 1: 116.

⁶⁴ Charles Buet, *Jules Barbey d'Aureville, impressions et souvenirs* (Paris: Savine, 1891) 285-86.

combined with an all-too familiar tendency to smooth over the poet's more conspicuous idiosyncrasies, meant that he hardly made any progress over the attempts of a La Morvonnais. To give only a few examples, he translated the fourth line in "The Reverie of Poor Susan," with its solemn sense of arrested time ("In the *silence* of morning the song of the bird," emphasis added⁶⁵), into the cloyer and trivial "Dans le matin frais qui sommeille encore,"⁶⁶ and rendered the central, cosmic section of "Tintern Abbey" in plausible but second-rate Lamartinisms ("Et je sens une Vie éparsée en l'étendue, / Vie à tout mélangée et partout répandue, / Dont le soleil couchant est le trône de feu, / Dont le siège est dans l'air vivant, dans le ciel bleu"⁶⁷), while his choice of texts from *The Prelude* failed to include such a line as "The ghostly language of the ancient earth" (1805: II, 328), though for once it would have translated into a ready-made alexandrine ("le langage spectral de la terre ancienne"). One is tempted to think – needlessly invidious and unfair as it might seem – that Wordsworth's entrance into the Academy gave earlier misunderstandings a new lease of life.

It may well be, however, that just before settling down to that rather marginal place in French cultural consciousness Wordsworth found one final, fleeting, nameless apotheosis in the mature poetry of Victor Hugo. Though it is a critical commonplace that, through Sainte-Beuve – his trusted lieutenant and herald until his secret liaison with Mme Hugo and lurking jealousy turned the two men into bitter enemies –, the French Romantic leader came under *lakiste* influence as he swapped the glitter of his 1829 *Orientales* for the more intimate tones of the *Feuilles d'automne* (1831), no definite textual link has emerged between the latter collection and Wordsworth's poetry; and in *L'Âne* (*The Donkey*), Hugo's later, epic satire of dusty scholarship, there is only a flippant allusion to "Young, le pleureur des nuits, Wordsworth, l'esprit des lacs." Yet, and although such a hypothesis is essentially unverifiable, it is at least possible to detect two Wordsworthian appearances in that spectral, indeed spiritualist apex of Hugo's poetic *œuvre*, the 1856 *Contemplations* – published when the author, living as an exile in Jersey, was still unable to read English. One has been remotely suggested by Jean Starobinski in *Largesse*:⁶⁸ in "Le Mendiant" ("The Beggar"), a naturalistic encounter segues into visionary transfiguration in a way remarkably reminiscent

⁶⁵ Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* 178.

⁶⁶ In the fresh and still-slumbering morn. (Émile Legouis, *Choix de poésies bilingues* (1896), rev. edn. [Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1928] 2).

⁶⁷ And I feel one Life scattered across the expanse, a Life mingling with all, in all spreading, its fiery throne the setting sun, its seat the living air and blue heaven. (Legouis, *Choix* 59).

⁶⁸ Jean Starobinski, *Largesse* (Paris: Réunion des Musées nationaux, 1994) 107-11.

of the central section of “Resolution and Independence” (one of the poems already recommended by Pichot in 1825), since in both cases the rapt poet does not hear what the poor man is saying:

Le vieillard grelottait de froid ; il me parlait,
Et je lui répondais, *pensif et sans l’entendre*.
“Vos habits sont mouillés,” dis-je, “il faut les étendre,
Devant la cheminée.” Il s’approcha du feu.
Son manteau, tout mangé des vers, et jadis bleu,
Étalé largement sur la chaude fournaise,
Piqué de mille trous par la lueur de braise,
Couvrait l’âtre, et semblait un ciel noir étoilé.
Et, pendant qu’il séchait ce haillon désolé
D’où ruisselait la pluie et l’eau des fondrières,
Je songeais que cet homme était plein de prières,
Et je regardais, *sourd à ce que nous disions*,
Sa bure où je voyais des constellations.⁶⁹

More intriguingly still, the 700-line “Magnitudo Parvi” (“The Magnitude of Small Things,” begun in the mid-1840s) takes as its starting-point the poet’s pensive walk with his daughter along the strand – the subject of “It is a beautiful evening,” the sonnet Sainte-Beuve had imitated back in 1830, during the period of his intimacy with the Hugos – before launching into an expansive profession of natural supernaturalism, centred on the typically Wordsworthian figure of a solitary shepherd. Of course, Hugo’s poetics and metaphysics are widely different from Wordsworth’s; they are less quiescent or more obviously turbulent, showier and shriller; but the family likeness, if it is that, could be all the more convincing for those divergences, as perhaps in a half-conscious revision, again, of “Resolution and Independence”:

⁶⁹ The old man was shivering with cold; he spoke to me and I replied, *thoughtful, without hearing him*. “Your clothes are wet,” I said, “we must put them to dry before the mantelpiece.” He stepped close to the fire. His coat, all worm-eaten and once blue, broadly spread over the warm blaze, studded with holes from the ember-light, covered the hearth, seemed a black, starry sky. And, as he dried that mournful rag, running with rain- and rut-water, I reflected that this man was full of prayer, and I gazed – *deaf to what we spoke* – on his homespun frock where constellations were. (Victor Hugo, *Œuvres poétiques*, Vol. 2, ed. Pierre Albouy [Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1967] 691-92, emphasis added).

Lui, ce berger, ce passant frêle,
Ce pauvre gardeur de bétail
Que la cathédrale éternelle
Abrite sous son noir portail,

Cet homme qui ne sait pas lire,
Cet hôte des arbres mouvants,
Qui ne connaît pas d'autre lyre
Que les grands bois et les grands vents,

Lui, dont l'âme semble étouffée,
Il s'envole, et, touchant le but,
Boit avec la coupe d'Orphée
À la source où Moïse but !⁷⁰

One would like to think, at least, that Wordsworth found a kind of magnified afterlife, worthy of his own poetry, in those pages.

It would be difficult to argue that French perceptions of Wordsworth's poetry have changed significantly over the twentieth century. The academic tradition that Legouis pioneered has, indeed, been proudly kept up, from the time of the first translation of *The Prelude* by his younger colleague Louis Cazamian to more contemporary renderings;⁷¹ it has also, in conjunction with postwar schools of exegesis both Anglo-American and Continental, resulted in highly stimulating, sophisticated critical readings by, notably, Christian La Cassagnère, Denis Bonnecase and Marc Porée.⁷² Outside the field of English studies, however, Wordsworth's profile remains remarkably close to what it was in nineteenth-century France. Despite the unexpectedly topical resonance his

⁷⁰ That shepherd, that frail passer-by, that poor tender of cattle whom the eternal cathedral shelters under its black porch, that man who cannot read, that guest of moving trees who knows no other lyre than the high woods and the high winds, he, whose soul seems strangled, takes wing and, reaching the goal, drinks from Orpheus's cup at the source where Moses drank! (Hugo 629).

⁷¹ See above n. 55. See also William Wordsworth, *Le Prélude ou la Croissance de l'esprit d'un poète*, trans. Denis Bonnecase (Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2013) and William Wordsworth, *Le Prélude – Croissance de l'esprit d'un poète*, trans. Maxime Durisotti (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016).

⁷² See, in particular, *Wordsworth ou l'autre voix*, ed. Christian La Cassagnère (Lyon: PUL and Paris: Didier, 1999); Denis Bonnecase and Marc Porée, *Lyrical Ballads: La Différence en partage* (Paris: PUF, 2011).

poetry has found in the philosophical work of Jacques Rancière, who has repeatedly reminded us of its liminal importance in modern, democratic aesthetics, and despite its unobtrusive championing by playful, peripatetic poet Jacques Réda,⁷³ its more challenging beauties seem never to have been quite assimilated, or even noticed, by the wider public. Even an anthology like François-René Daillie's, the last one published by a major mainstream publisher, remains, in spite or perhaps because of its charming idiosyncrasies, rather wide of current views of Wordsworth in the Anglo-American world.⁷⁴ For such a state of affairs the fault must lie, to some extent, with the hasty judgments and tortuous literary politics of French Romanticism.

⁷³ Jacques Rancière, *Courts voyages au pays du peuple* (Paris: Seuil, 1990); Jacques Réda, *Le Sens de la marche* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990) 61-108. In his last collection of poetry (*La longue chaîne de l'ancre*, Paris: Mercure de France, 2008), Yves Bonnefoy published a sonnet entitled "Un souvenir d'enfance de Wordsworth," based on the boat-stealing episode in *The Prelude*, which, however, concludes perhaps reductively that the poet was "afraid to be more than his desire."

⁷⁴ See above, n. 17. Daillie's anthology, while featuring neither "Resolution and Independence" nor "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," includes fifty-five sonnets, largely from later collections (it must be remembered that the sonnet form has been durably associated with canonical nineteenth-century French poetry).

FRENCH ROMANTICISM AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND: AN UNAVOWABLE CONNECTION

Alain Vaillant

This essay examines the complex processes that have led to the almost systematic occlusion of the influence of English Romanticism on French Romanticism. Its first section offers a philosophical definition of Romanticism in the context of the long evolution of European societies which began with the Reformation. Three themes stand out: the utopian desire for a harmonious synthesis between the intelligible and the sensible, the ideal and the real; individualization of the feeling of the Absolute in line with the emergence of nationalism; the development of an open market for cultural goods. The second section probes the English roots of French Romanticism, highlighting French emigration to England, an increasing degree of familiarity with English lyricism and narrative fiction, and other factors. The third section explores the English "Unthought" of French Romanticism, seeking to anatomize the perplexing obliviousness to English Romanticism which has long prevailed, even amongst French scholars. The reasons are nationalistic as well as religious and political, climaxing in the condemnation of economic liberalism and consumer capitalism. The essay concludes by suggesting that the debate over which of the two revolutions has the upper hand when it comes to representing modernity – the French Revolution of 1789 or the English Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – has been won by the English.

The interconnected history of France and England in the nineteenth century prompts a speculation which, for the specialist of French literature that I am, has finally turned into an *idée fixe*. I will be addressing this *idée fixe* in what follows, but it should be said at the outset that it bears on English Romanticism only marginally or by way of ricochet, as my topic here is French Romanticism, its sources and influences and historical development, which is where my expertise lies. With that clarification, let me begin.

Romanticism: Towards a Definition

As a matter of fact, one should speak, first, of Romanticism in general, instead of either English or French Romanticism. Indeed, I have always found it suspicious that Romanticism should so easily be declined into diverse national variants (English, French, German, Italian, Russian, etc.), as if one had renounced the possibility of defining it globally. It should never be forgotten that the word will not create the thing, whether in the realm of literary history or in any other realm. Following a habit, learned at school, that consists in labelling phenomena that should be understood empathically rather than rationally, we have grown used to labelling very heterogeneous national realities as romantic, in most instances in an *a posteriori* fashion. But nothing goes to prove that the word covers an effective reality or concept. It may even be suspected that the notion of “Romanticism” frequently aims merely at designating an epoch (roughly the first half of the nineteenth century) and thus at taking for granted two postulates that are in themselves questionable – first, that every cultural event occurring in the interval be *ipso facto* considered as romantic, and second, that there can be no markedly different chronologies for national Romanticisms, despite the individual pace of change in the countries concerned.

As for me, I have adopted a simple methodological principle. Either one has to face up to the reality of essentially distinct and specific national cultures, in which case one had better dispense with the word Romanticism at once. It is well known, for instance, that certain specialists of Slavonic literature dispute the very idea of a Russian Romanticism, arbitrarily borrowed, if one is to believe their claims, from a Western reality. Or Romanticism indeed exists, and it then becomes possible to define it independently from its local variants. Such a methodological and historical stand I found myself adopting in the course of my *Dictionnaire du romantisme*, in 2013. To rub it in, I reissued the introductory essay to that dictionary under the programmatic title: “What is Romanticism?”¹ The thesis which I defended there may be summed up in a definition and in three elements of historical contextualisation. Romanticism, on the philosophical and aesthetic planes, implies the utopian desire for a harmonious synthesis between the intelligible and the sensible, the ideal and the real, the individual and the collective. It offers, if one will, the secular face of the Christian dualism (soul versus body), but a dualism mysteriously erased and overcome: Romanticism is the name given to that mysterious operation, or to the credit given to or taken by its individual or collective achievements.

¹ Alain Vaillant, *Le dictionnaire du romantisme* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2012); *Qu'est-ce que le romantisme?* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2013).

All the remarkable originalities of Romanticism follow directly from such a utopian synthesis between mind and matter. Four domains of application can be discerned. First, religion – a topic I will return to. Second, history and politics. Romantic history is thus no longer the simple chronicle of anecdotal events, nor is it a reasoned sequence of edifying and morally exemplary narratives. It is the very place where the ideal is accomplished, where the absolute is actualized and embodied (hence, incidentally, the worship of heroes and of great men). History is magnetized by a force that illuminates and transcends it. Politics is the mode of action where that concrete embodiment of the ideal is effected. Now the latter demands exceptional circumstances, lest the ideal should be crushed by the force of inertia resulting from acquired habits, by all kinds of economic and social strictures, in brief, by the continuous weight of the world. It takes a kind of deflagration, a temporary outburst that instantly deals the cards anew, that miraculously suspends the normal unfolding of cause and effect, reshapes the political space, all of this in a strange state of social weightlessness. That historical Bing Bang is called a revolution. Beyond the French Revolution, any political doctrine founded on the idea of revolution is romantic by essence, since revolution is the historical form taken, according to romantic ideology, by the conflictual encounter between the ideal and the real.

Love is Romanticism's third province, or field of sentiments, if one prefers. According to a banal cliché, made popular in Hollywood movies, all great lovers are 'romantics' and vice-versa. As it happens, however, the cliché conveys a profound reality. If Romanticism is the harmonious blend of the spiritual and the corporeal, love enacted in its plenitude, which implies the communion of two, not one, bodies and minds, is a Romanticism to the power of two. In this sense, there can be no higher goal for a Romantic than that of an ideal love. Both as a symbol and as a mythical construct, love touches upon the very nature of Romanticism.

Art is the fourth area for romantic men (or women) to act in. Indeed, a capital task awaits art, that of translating the greatness and the strength of the Idea in a sensible form, accessible to the simplest of aesthetic apprehensions. Art, therefore, is doubly synthetic: first, because it manifests the modern demand for harmony between the intelligible and the sensible, much as other forms of romantic action do; second, since the piece of created work materializes the ideal and immaterial project envisaged by its creator, in a form that is specific to each and every form of art.

It was necessary, I believe, to set out this lengthy definition before addressing the three points of contextualization which explain the chronology of Romanticism, including all of its national variants.

The first brings us back to religion. Romanticism implies the individualization of the feeling of the Absolute, an Absolute that is no longer to be experienced collectively, as in traditional theocratic societies, but within each individual consciousness. In this respect, Romanticism inscribes itself within the long evolution of European societies which began with the Reformation, leading first to religious belief becoming internalized, then to its secularization and displacement into the secular sphere – without losing its longing for transcendence, but for an increasingly blurred and improbable transcendence. This is the reason why the English critic T.E. Hulme saw in Romanticism “a split religion,” a “deliquescent or viscous religion,”² which he opposed to the firm and wholesome doctrine of true Christianity, the former acting like “treacle,” like greasy oil leaking into each and every cog of modern consciousness and forcing one to become smeared by and glued to it.

Considered next from a sociological point of view, the emergence of Romanticism proceeds from the evolution of modern societies in which individual emotions, the subjectivity of emotions and of thoughts now prevail over collective culture. From that point of view, Romanticism is an integral part of the vast cultural movement which has accompanied the irresistible rise of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes since the Renaissance, but with increased speed as from the eighteenth century, thus calling into question the prerogatives of traditional aristocracy. This sociological factor explains why Romanticism is identified now with religious spiritualism, now with the secular development of bourgeois modernity. Such ambivalence accounts for one of the main confusions generated by the notion of Romanticism. Provided one strives to keep it in historical perspective, however, it proves neither contradictory nor heterogeneous.

In any case, the most identifiable trait of romantic culture is the very strong movement of individualization of artistic practices, linked to the emergence of an open market of cultural goods that challenges or supplants the collective rituals of aristocratic culture. The ideal image of literary life in the classical age featured the conversational exchange surrounding a writer or a philosopher within the space of a private ‘salon.’ This was progressively replaced by the silent one-to-one dialogue with the book, so frequently represented in romantic iconography. The book creates intimacy and imposes the active subjectivity of the reader. What is true of literature is equally true of the fine arts. Nothing important that has happened since the eighteenth century would have taken place without the

² Hans Georg Schenk, “Le romantisme et la déchristianisation de l’Europe,” *Romantisme et religion: Théologie des théologiens et théologie des écrivains*, ed. Michel Baude et Marc-Mathieu Münch (Paris: PUF, 1980) 116.

outburst of private consumption (of painting or of music, in particular), which saw artistic pleasure shift towards the sphere of intimate emotions.

At this stage, I am still thinking in terms of a long history of Romanticism, which would read as a continuation of the Renaissance, with the development of an urban bourgeoisie in the trading cities of Europe. In reality, the true dividing line, leading to a clearly circumscribed historical era to be designated as romantic, in any European country, is the moment when the new demand for the Absolute centred itself on national identities, with the widespread conviction at the time that the essence of the peoples was to be traced to their historical origins, and, most particularly, to the primitive poetic forms in which the latter had originally expressed themselves. But it is important to underline that the quest for origins, in a Europe still dominated by dynastic monarchies, was antithetical to backward-looking nostalgia, involving on the contrary the free will of the people to claim their right to exist and to found that claim on their own historical legitimacy. This form of romantic nationalism is therefore fundamentally liberal. As a matter of fact, here is to be witnessed a process that is analogous to the one described by Jürgen Habermas with reference to the literary public space.³ According to Habermas, the latter is the archaic form of our present political sphere: everything happens as if romantic culture had preceded and prepared the institutional transformations which Europe was to undergo in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This gives us, at long last, a criterion by which to assess and delimit things clearly and precisely. For each country, either of Europe or under the influence of Europe, Romanticism corresponds to the period stretching from the emergence of the first national political longings to the establishment of a parliamentary democracy, with all its legal and administrative apparatus, and globally designates the cultural, artistic, intellectual and literary activities which developed during that period of transition. As we have just seen, the very first type of emergence supposes a favourable social context and, in particular, the existence of a sufficiently strong bourgeois elite. Hence a process that began at very diverse moments in time, in accordance with local contexts and their respective stages of political development. Such a historical characterization of Romanticism helps to establish a simple criterion and thus to account for the broad range of particular situations, and for the considerable chronological gaps, in Europe and, possibly, in other parts of the world under European influence.

³ Jürgen Habermas, *L'Espace public: Archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise*, trans. Marc B. de Launay (Paris: Payot, 1992).

The English Roots of French Romanticism

Such a socio-historical definition of Romanticism also highlights the singularity of English Romanticism. Indeed, well before the first manifestations of European Romanticism, England had experienced decisive historical events that paved the way to modern liberalism. It is quite useless, admittedly, to remind ourselves here of the overthrow, followed by the execution, of Charles I in 1649, of Cromwell's autocratic Commonwealth (1649-1660) and of the short-lived Restoration of the traditionalist Stuart dynasty (1660-1688), before the 1689 Revolution was to establish a constitutional monarchy which, if it remained profoundly anti-egalitarian until the dawn of the twentieth century, nonetheless consecrated the principles and practices of modern parliamentarism, more than a century before all the other European countries, barring the brief exception of the "Era of Liberty" in Sweden, from 1720 to 1772. If Romanticism designates, as I have just argued, the period of cultural effervescence preparatory to the establishment of political liberty, we may safely posit that no such period took place in England. In that country, there was no wide movement of opinion, clearly identifiable, manifesting strong convergences on the intellectual, literary and artistic planes, that would be comparable to what is observable in the other European nations (in France or in the Germanic world, for instance). As early as the eighteenth century, English society was absorbed, first and foremost, by the swift mutations entailed by the Industrial Revolution and by the expansion of its imperial sphere. The relative absence of an 'English Romanticism' cannot be put down to oversight or terminological negligence. It evinces a far deeper state of things, i.e., the precociousness of constitutional and political evolutions, connected to the extraordinary dynamism of commercial and industrial capitalism and the general enrichment fostered by the development of the colonial empire. Since England had the edge over the rest of Europe (politically, economically and socially) it looks as if the age of Romanticism was over before it had actually begun.

Granted, such a singularity will not prevent one from finding in England many of the traits, in scattered form, that are generally subsumed under the word Romanticism; they will be perceived as so many counterpoints to the utilitarianism which is characteristic of English society, in the eyes of the French. But it is well known that for two generations of English writers generally considered as Romantics, the influence of events taking place at the time in Continental Europe was of a determining nature – and that would of course include the French Revolution. Coleridge and Wordsworth, the joint authors of the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, the publication of which is traditionally considered to mark the birth of English Romanticism, were fervent advocates of the revolutionary

idea before becoming, like the rest of the English elite, fierce opponents of Robespierrean Jacobinism and Napoleonic expansionism. One generation later, it was outside Britain and as exiles (between Switzerland, Italy and Greece) that Shelley and Byron rose to literary eminence, in open rebellion against decent English society; all the more so since Byron, amongst his other scandals, grew into an ardent supporter of Napoleon. What is more, among the writers whom literary tradition clearly acknowledges as Romantics are a significant number of authors of Irish (Thomas Moore, Charles Robert Maturin...) or of Scottish origin (Robert Burns, James Macpherson, Walter Scott, Lord Byron...), representing minorities within the British monarchy. Generally speaking, English Romanticism feeds on contrasts or conflicts which are born out of the confrontation between rural or provincial modes of life and the urban modernity embodied by the London metropolis, whereas, in France, Romanticism is essentially a Paris-born phenomenon that only subsequently propagated itself in the provinces.

All in all, at least from a French perspective, the most conspicuously 'romantic' trait of English culture is the inclination towards religious questioning, a mix of restlessness and metaphysical quest which lends depth to the lyricism of the Lakists, or the ability to blend moral introspection and sentimental evocation that is so powerfully moving in English women novelists in the nineteenth century. But it should be admitted, too, that this latent religiosity is one of the most enduring traits of British culture, the origins of which go all the way back to the ancient conflicts between the Crown and the Pope and the ceaseless theological debates that have stirred the English clergy since the sixteenth century. Romanticism here merges with the succession of crises and soul-searching periods that followed the calling into question of Roman Catholicism, at the time of the Reformation. It should not come as a surprise that the English writer whose mark on French Romanticism was the greatest, even more so than Shakespeare or Byron, was the seventeenth-century visionary poet, John Milton.

Consequently, my subject is not so much the influence of English Romanticism on French Romanticism as the influence of English culture, *qua* culture. For, if one admits that Romanticism is the most seductive form adopted by bourgeois individualism, there is no gainsaying that in England, the economic and social evolution which enabled it to anticipate the transformations that France was to experience only in the next century, exerted a decisive influence. I should like to defend the hypothesis, needless to say scandalous from the point of view of French historiographic tradition, that our national Romanticism is partly, and largely unwittingly (in a degree that is strictly impossible to assess), the product of the indirect influence exerted by England on its neighbour on the other side of

the Channel. Let me quickly list the elements emblematic of such an influence, even if the enterprise appears somewhat vain (since a mere enumeration of items does not prove anything). The most profound influences are precisely those which it is impossible to demonstrate, as they rely on intellectual and emotional springs which, by definition, leave no palpable traces. This is why even the most carefully documented studies in the area of “cultural transfers” are bound to disappoint, for they can only hint at what they should be highlighting, namely the concrete reality of an enriching influence or of a cultural hybridization.⁴

The phenomenon of French emigration to England furnishes a good example of how irritatingly elusive the matter of influence can prove. It has been tackled in several historical studies, as early as the nineteenth century. For years, tens of thousands of Frenchmen were greeted, accommodated and taken care of in English homes. At our disposal we have plenty of objective data, testimonies and memorial narratives. The latter point to a community of withdrawn exiles, like every community of exiles, bent on asserting what opposed them culturally to their hosts, and all the more inclined to bear witness to the influence to which they were submitted as they were not truly aware of it. However, it is hard to imagine that this experience of alterity, experienced in precarious material conditions by French elites totally immersed in their own traditions, did not have powerful effects.⁵ The émigrés who returned to France in droves as from the time of the Directoire must have introduced into France new forms of thought and sensibility, artistic or literary affinities more or less shaped by the experience of exile. But no formal proof of this will ever be supplied and one has to accept that fact if one wishes to make breakthroughs in the historical comprehension of these cultural phenomena, without ever forgetting the extent to which such comprehension remains conjectural.

Tracing literary influences is equally difficult. Shakespeare is the mandatory reference in the realm of drama. But his impact was partly made via the mediation of German playwrights and the figure he cuts, in the main, is that of the universal genius, to which it is gratifying to compare oneself, as in the case of Victor Hugo. The same applies to Dante, ubiquitous amongst French Romantics. However, beyond conventional images (the Inferno, Virgil amongst the shades

⁴ On the notion of “cultural transfer,” see Michel Espagne, *Les Transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: PUF, 1999).

⁵ On the importance of French emigration, the classic book remains that of Donald Greer, *The Incidence of the Emigration during the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951). In a historiographic perspective, one should also consult Pascal Dupuy, “Grande Bretagne et France en Révolution,” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* (2002-4): 165-74.

of the dead, Beatrice, etc.), it is debateable whether Dante was closely read and truly understood. This does not mean that his influence was a feigned one: it took place at the level of myth and of individual or collective imagination, far more than on the plane of textual realities. The same can be said of Byron, who is *the* great star of European Romanticism, with the somewhat garish lustre and whiff of scandal attached to the notion of stardom.⁶ Byron may have been a star because he was a Romantic, but the opposite is equally true: Byron is romantic because he is a star – for Romanticism is historically the first manifestation of a modern culture founded on stardom and the media. After Byron, it will be the turn of Lamartine and Hugo to grow into stars.

Let us then forget these mirroring effects produced by the European celebrity of a handful of exceptional figures and return to our more immediate concern, the influence of English literature on French Romanticism.⁷ The first difficulty is that French writers very seldom discuss their English reading and the influence it may have had on them. Their silence is so shattering that it finally becomes intriguing, as if influences from abroad were not to be avowed. And yet, the material listed in the *Bibliographie de France* reveals, especially in the case of novels, an important influx of publications, both in English and in translation; the table of contents of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (which was the main French intellectual journal at the time) proves that there was a sustained and continuous interest in English culture and literature – without counting the translations of poems and, chiefly, of short stories appearing in periodicals. In the last few years, thanks to the initiative of French comparatists, the exploration of that editorial market for translation has begun, resulting, for example, in the publication in 2012 of Yves Chevrel, Lieven d’Hulst and Christine Lombez’s *Histoire des traductions en langue française, XIXe siècle (1815-1914)*, a useful reference work in the present case.⁸

The fact of the matter remains: despite the ceaseless flow of translations of which writers were the first readers, aesthetic debates remained circumscribed to the French literary sphere, thus giving the impression that, although huge, the influence in question only constituted a sort of cultural background noise, barely noticeable as such. In investigating this influence, one therefore has to make do

⁶ See *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, ed. Richard A. Cardwell (London and New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004); Peter Cochran, *Byron’s European Impact* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

⁷ See Gilles Soubigou, *La littérature britannique et les milieux artistiques, 1789-1830*, Thèse de l’université Paris I, 2016.

⁸ Yves Chevrel, Lieven d’Hulst and Christine Lombez, *Histoire des traductions en langue française, XIXe siècle (1815-1914)* (Paris: Verdier, 2012).

with vague impressions, all of which are devoid of scientific value. In the realm of poetry, the fact that two of the most illustrious representatives of the first romantic wave, Lamartine and Vigny, married British women hardly constitutes literary evidence. But that matrimonial circumstance enables one, at least, to infer the existence of an informal network of social relations and cultural exchanges between the French and English elites. It also hints at a very probable degree of familiarity, on the part of French poets, with English lyricism, all the way into the intimate sphere. One only has to read the desperately neo-classical elegies of the French eighteenth century (even at its most crepuscular, under the pen of André Chénier), and then a few poems selected at random from the Lakists (Wordsworth, in particular⁹), and last but not least the *Meditations* by Lamartine or the numerous evocations of Nature in verse collections by Victor Hugo, to be struck by an absolutely new resonance: a strange reverberation of image, rhythm and sonority, as well as a power of emotional evocation which seems to be absent from French poetry and for which English poetry offers a model, ready for use and imitation by anyone who has learned to listen to them. The same applies to narrative fiction. Whether it be the novel of adventure, the historical novel, the sea novel, the gothic novel or even the novel of manners, such innovations as are noticeable in France are always preceded, from the Restoration onwards, by the importation of their English models, thanks to the network of reading rooms that was being set up at the time. This influence of Anglo-Saxon fiction is at least probable for two of the most emblematic novelists of French narrative Romanticism, Balzac and Eugène Sue. Balzac himself analysed the influence of Walter Scott, in his Foreword to *La Comédie humaine*, in 1842, making any further demonstration superfluous. As for Sue, who spoke perfect English, he made himself known first by his tales of the sea in the wake of Captain Marryat's successful novels; he then became the literary phenomenon which we know, in 1842-43, with the international success of the first urban mystery novel, *Les Mystères de Paris* – only three years after the publication of a famous novel set in London's underworld, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens.

This English influence, not only thematic or accessory, is also perceptible beneath the level of literary genres, in the linguistic and formal tools used by writers. From that point of view, the fundamental properties of the literary aesthetic derived from French classicism, its congenital vice according to its critics, were of a rhetorical nature. As far as poetry was concerned, it all boiled down to the composition of oratorical works, ordered according to the rules of

⁹ For some specific examples of Wordsworthian resonances in French romantic poetry, see Laurent Folliot's essay in the present volume.

syllabic poetry. The novel still served as a pretext, either for the argumentative expression of convictions and confidences or for the subtle games of conversational exchange. Now, this literary art, wrought at the height of what Marc Fumaroli suggestively called “the age of eloquence,”¹⁰ was absolutely not geared towards communicating to a reader the emotions of sentiment or the pleasures of fiction, in the guise of the most efficient textual forms. Its relatively cold or wordy artificiality, grafted onto the admiring imitation of great ancient eloquence, or playing, this time in a minor key, with the intricacies of wordy dialogues, remained the obstacle that was still to be overcome for literature to undergo its romantic mutation. Structural reasons, linked to evolutions proper to the French literary sphere, account for such a mutation. I have devoted several of my historical works to them, arguing for the shift from literature as discourse, of a rhetorical nature, to literature as text, geared towards procuring pleasure for the reader.¹¹ I should now like to add another hypothesis: that the constant presence of foreign literature, whether translated or not, decisively contributed to this enterprise of “dérhétorisation,” by familiarising writers with the new aesthetic centred on fictional imagination and lyrical emotion.

But this literary influence only reflects upon the state of globally uneven relations, established during the nineteenth century between France and England on the economic, social and cultural planes. With the end of the Franco-Prussian wars of the first Empire, the opening of France to the world outside its frontiers under the Restoration, the Anglomania which characterizes the July Monarchy, and, first and foremost, with the crushing industrial superiority of the United Kingdom, English ascendancy is perceptible in every domain. It is true of the periodical press, where England plays a leading role thanks to the prestige of its journalistic norms (for the daily press and intellectual journals, essentially) and its technological advances (French Romanticism crucially owed to it the use of wood engraving). It is also true of tourism and the practice of travelling, of the industries of fashion and the fashionable, of the attention placed on improving interior spaces (including painting), the subtle mix of luxury and eccentricity which Parisian dandies tried to imitate, the aristocratic taste for horses and horse racing (the ancestor of sports, another English speciality). It is equally true of the profound transformation of the French

¹⁰ Marc Fumaroli, *L'Age de l'éloquence: Rhétorique et "res literaria" de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (Genève: Droz, 1980).

¹¹ Alain Vaillant, *La Crise de la littérature: Romantisme et modernité* (Grenoble: Editions littéraires et linguistique de l'université de Grenoble, 2005); *L'Histoire littéraire*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Armand Colin, 2017).

countryside, due to the introduction of modern methods of agriculture and farming: nature becomes an open and quiet space, where one can enjoy, with greater security and comfort than previously, a landscape that offers itself to the quiet enjoyment of the solitary walker.

Let me end my inventory here. In the constrained space of this essay, I take it for granted that, through complex processes of cultural assimilation, French Romanticism, in the concrete forms it borrowed, fed on the massive influences that came from the great Western power which England was at the time. I now move to my true subject, i.e., the equally massive and systematic undervaluation of that influence. Now, of course, there have been a number of monographs on the various aspects of this Anglomania, but there has been no broadly synthetic study that has attempted to assess its overall historical evolution.¹² It must be acknowledged that the difficulty of sizing up the English influence was already a contemporary trait in its own right. Under the July Monarchy, when English influence was at an all-time high, two contradictory attitudes governed the representation of England: on the one hand, an ever-increasing Anglomania, which betrayed the fascination of revolutionized France for the domineering aristocratism of the English gentry; on the other hand, a revengeful Anglophobia exacerbated by the recollections of the Napoleonic wars and defeats. The swift downfall of Louis-Philippe, in 1848, is to be put down to the growing exasperation of public opinion at the supposed Anglophilia, together with the pacifism, of the king and his circle. Nor is it fortuitous that Jules Michelet, the great romantic historian, should have published his book, *Jeanne d'Arc*, in 1841, thus reintroducing in the midst of current events not only the feminine incarnation of the French people, but more precisely the very character who, four centuries back, had managed to "oust the English out of France."

But it is even more startling to observe the same degree of ignorance in academic circles, particularly during the extraordinary boom in studies of French Romanticism which an entire generation of French academics benefited from during the sixties and seventies. This was the time when the journal *Romantisme*, founded in 1971, served both as a fulcrum and a catalyst for change. Two major orientations grew out of this, and their impact is still to be felt in French research, all the more forcefully as, during decades of intense epistemological renewal in terms of literary history, the nineteenth century was at the heart of the theoretical or methodological debate.

¹² Note nevertheless the odd exception that confirms the rule: Sylvie Aprile and Fabrice Bensimon (eds.), *La France et l'Angleterre au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Créaphis, 2006); and from a more general perspective, Jean Guiffan, *Histoire de l'anglophilie en France: De Jeanne d'Arc à la vache folle* (Rennes: Terre de Brume, 2004).

The first orientation, by way of chronology and in order of importance, was a spectacular fall-back on France's national space. Whereas nineteenth-century studies had benefited from results obtained thanks to a galaxy of great comparatists (Fernand Baldensperger, Paul Hazard, Paul Van Tieghem) deeply marked as they were by the European idea and, more particularly, by Germanic culture, international events (the defeat of 1940, the Occupation and the Vichy régime, followed by the uncertainties of the Cold War) produced about a sharp fall-back on a narrowly nationalistic conception of French Romanticism. Not only was the latter to be understood solely as the glorious and self-centredly autarkic extension of the French Revolution, but it was granted the privilege of spreading throughout the entire Western world along the lines of a historical mythology which found its confirmation in the communist adventure of the twentieth century, itself considered as the Marxist-Leninist variation of the 1793 Revolution.¹³ It was therefore considered as a waste of time to dwell for too long on the diverse European avatars of Romanticism since, sooner or later, the fertile traces of the great national epic were to be found in them. Such decades were marked by decisive breakthroughs both in terms of the interpretation of major works of Romanticism and of the understanding of the complex bonds between literature and society; but it went without saying that the sole social space which was deemed fit to be taken into consideration was the social space of France, the model and the paradigm of all other national spaces. By the same logic, this rampant Francocentrism went hand in hand with a decline of comparative literature, which was then considered to be the poor relation of literary studies.

Later, from the seventies onwards, the infatuation felt by French intellectuals for German philosophy and for hermeneutics triggered another powerful movement leading to a re-reading of French Romanticism in the light of the German Romantics, and, most particularly, of philosophers and writers united under the banner of the *Athenaeum*. At the time, the enigmatic aphorisms of the Jena group played, for the interpretation of French Romanticism, the same role attributed today to those of Walter Benjamin with regard to Baudelairian modernity. There is not much point in underlining the theoretical interest of such a hermeneutic move, for it speaks for itself. Conversely, though, one should not come away with the feeling that the French Romantics were effectively influenced by this German tradition. Barring a few exceptions, French writers of the nineteenth century could not understand German, at any rate they understood it much less than they understood English. Besides, German

¹³ See Christophe Charles and Laurent Jeanpierre (eds.), *La vie intellectuelle en France, Vol. 2: De 1914 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 2016).

philosophical culture, turned towards ontology and metaphysical speculation, was more or less completely foreign to them, whereas they stood much closer to the psychological inquiries into the faculties of understanding conducted by English and Scottish philosophers, common as they were to Cartesian tradition. More than ever, one is led to wonder, with increasing perplexity, why this Anglo-Saxon filiation was so grossly occluded. This brings to light a true *impensé* (unthought) of French Romanticism.

The Unthought of French Romanticism

Let me rapidly evoke, so as not to return to it later, the competitive relationship which has envenomed the relations between France and England, at least up to the First World War, and the inferiority complex nursed by the former towards the latter. The French reticence, from the Cold War onwards, towards the U.S. has been amply documented, a reticence that was frequently branded as primarily anti-American and which partly results from the super-power status acquired by the U.S. But the latter only took up the place left vacant by England before them. She was the super-power of the nineteenth century and gave rise to an equally strong Anglophobia in French public opinion. Having said that, Anglophobia did not so much generate negative comments (even if they did exist) as lead to the belittling of English (economic, cultural and diplomatic) supremacy, or to its obliteration from public debate. There have been a few exceptions. In 1985, the French historian François Crouzet (1922-2010), a specialist of English economic history and of economic relations between France and England, produced a study masochistically entitled *De la supériorité de l'Angleterre sur la France*, the conclusion of which perfectly sums up its general drift: "The history of England is a success story even in its waning phase, the history of a people which made the most of its assets. That of France, in a way, is but a sinister buffoonery, a tragi-comic rhapsody of missed opportunities and wasted chances, of adventures and disasters."¹⁴

Unconsciously, the frustrated feelings vis-à-vis England have repeatedly falsified judgments. This accounts, even on the part of the most liberal of French Romantics, for the staggering idolization of Napoleon, of his *condotierre* warfare and political totalitarianism. Nowadays, specialists still seriously discuss why and how a victory may still have been snatched from the jaws of Waterloo's disastrous rout, totally oblivious to the fact that the fate of Napoleon had been sealed the moment he landed after his stay on the island of Elba in order to regain

¹⁴ François Crouzet, *De la supériorité de l'Angleterre sur la France* (Paris: Perrin, 1985) 412.

power for a hundred days. A hundred days that were more than enough for England to get her war machine back to full throttle and bring to an end the work interrupted in 1814. France and England experienced trajectories that were both so parallel (in view of their dynamism of progress) and so symmetrical (regarding the conflicts that opposed them) during the long nineteenth century that it still seems difficult to view them with the right amount of critical distance.

This difficulty climaxes in one essential point, as was seen before, i.e., the examination of the religious origins of Romanticism. This led to a gross and systematic underestimation of Romanticism's connection with the process of religious liberalization triggered by protestant Reformation. Even if numerous nuances should be taken into the account, the essential difference between Catholicism and Protestantism is simple and capital. In Catholicism, a dogmatic and authoritarian religion, the believer renounced the idea of considering the divine sphere by himself and with the aid of his own resources; he therefore gave himself up to the temporal and spiritual power of the Church, the hierarchy of which was embodied by different echelons of the clergy, so much so that his faith finally meant absolute obedience to and total identification with the ecclesial institution. Conversely, the Protestant was entitled to think directly of the divine, to fill himself with its presence, to let the mysteries of religion resonate within himself and to transform all the moments of his life as a believer into a mystical experience. Granted, there have been multiple variants, over the centuries, of Protestantism – and likewise of Catholicism – but this fundamental difference between the two religions remains undisputed. It explains the force of propagation of the Reformed Church during the Renaissance, as well as the violence of its repression by civilian and religious authorities.

This principle being posited, it is undeniable that there exists a natural affinity between Romanticism and Protestantism, the idealism and longing for the Absolute which found a particularly congenial terrain in Calvinist territory (Rousseau's and Madame de Staël's Republic of Geneva, for instance) and in the whole of Lutheran Europe (the Germanic states and Scandinavia). On the Continent as in Great Britain, one is also struck by the great number of theologians, parsons and children or relatives of parsons amongst the major or minor propagators of Romanticism, as if Romanticism were a mundane variety of Protestantism. This does not mean, of course, that there never was a Catholic Romanticism, but it is a fact that, in Catholic countries (like France, Poland and Italy, for instance), Romanticism rapidly surrendered the religious territory which it originally owned in order to privilege political or artistic claims. This is indeed the main fault line between the two great avenues of European Romanticism, the one, Protestant, religious and individualistic, the other,

Catholic, political and aesthetic. In the Catholic sphere, Romanticism has tended to favour a form of religious indifference, when it did not claim for itself an anti-clerical form of atheism. It is the very violence of anticlericalism, nay its outspoken antispiritualism, coupled with the spirit of social and cultural protest, which, from the 1830s, constitutes the chief singularity of French Romanticism, and of its subsequent progressive mutation into modernity. For, as theorized by Balzac and Baudelaire, modernity is nothing but Romanticism, once it has renounced its metaphysical trappings and has resolutely turned towards the concrete realities of the world as they appeared to nineteenth-century man. Mind you, the metaphysical perspective was never completely forgotten. Modernity, according to Baudelaire's famous definition, consists in drawing "the eternal out of the transitory,"¹⁵ meaning something like the "transitory" (the present, in all its banality) being at long last placed at the core of art, with the "eternal" still remaining a goal to be pursued.

Now, the religious sources of Romanticism have been systematically ignored in France, particularly its original bond with the dualist ontology inherited from Christianity. With the notable exceptions of George Gusdorf¹⁶ and Paul Bénichou,¹⁷ the sole specialists of Romanticism with an interest in the religious question have invariably stemmed from a Catholic background, which meant that they spontaneously defended the very restrictive idea of a Catholic Romanticism placed in the wake of Chateaubriand or Lamartine. As for the others, all the others, they preferred to turn away from any kind of religious characterization. In all likelihood, it seems that, in the name of the principle of "laïcité" (secularism) which has constituted the bedrock of French political doctrine for more than a century, one had chosen to stick to a purely secular interpretation of Romanticism, even in the face of evidence pointing the other way. Largely because the secular motif is considered, and rightly so, as the ground material of Republican idealism and of the great social utopias of the post-Revolution era. To take my own personal case, I belong to the great school of nineteenth-century specialists with a materialistic or Marxist turn of mind which dominated the decades after the Second World War and profoundly renovated French literary history. I was therefore trained, first as a student and

¹⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne, Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1976) 2: 694.

¹⁶ Georges Gusdorf, *Le Romantisme: I, Le savoir romantique; II, L'Homme et la nature* (Paris: Payot, 1993).

¹⁷ Paul Bénichou, *Romantismes français: I, Le sacre de l'écrivain: Le temps des prophètes; II, Les mages romantiques: L'École du désenchantement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004).

then as a researcher and academic, in the idea that Romanticism was a political and aesthetic issue, the religious dimension of which was very accessory, not to say obtrusive. It is significant, in that respect, that the main studies on the Christian sources of French Romanticism were authored by American scholars (Franck Paul Bowman, Peter Brooks¹⁸) or by a French professor, Paul Bénichou, whose entire career was spent at Harvard. Now, doing away with so essential a dimension of Romanticism predetermines its interpretation and marginalizes in advance the influence of English culture, where the seal of spiritualism remains much stronger.

Obliviousness to the Anglo-Saxon roots of Romanticism can also be put down to another ideological reason. At the time of Napoleon, the authorities' hostility to Romanticism, then embodied by Mme de Staël, sprung from the fact that Romanticism mainly appeared to be an imported product. To be a romantic amounted to belonging to the party of foreigners, that is to say of enemies, either the English or the Germans. Under the Restoration, "Romanticism is Protestantism in literature" still was a kind of slogan or journalistic cliché which, in the conservative press of the time, was enough to condemn the movement without further ado. Anglophobic anti-Romanticism was a permanent feature of French Catholic right-wing nationalistic parties, and it was revived under the Third Republic, when the ideologues of Action française imagined a clash of civilizations between Anglo-Saxon nations (England and Germany being subsumed under the same category) and the great Latin tradition embodied by France. At least until the Second World War, a viscerally anti-romantic right-wing ideology flourished in France, which englobed a xenophobic nationalism, an authoritative Catholicism and a brand of anti-republicanism which the Dreyfus affair further whipped up.

Better than any other individual, Charles Maurras, whom literary criticism brought directly to politics, embodies this reactionary ideology, as someone conversant with and devoted to the great achievements of French history and literature. He believed that the key to the national continuity of France could be found in the cult of Catholicism and of Classicism. This Maurrassian mode of thinking was immensely influential on conservative circles during the second half of the nineteenth century, far beyond the circle of royalists who had joined the Action française. Against an abundant backdrop of literary and journalistic productions, the essay published in 1926 by Louis Reynaud is a case in point. Its

¹⁸ Frank P. Bowman, *Le Christ romantique* (Genève: Droz, 1973); Peter Brooks, *L'imaginaire mélodramatique – Balzac, Henry James, le mélodrame et le mode de l'excès*, trans. Emmanuel Saussier and Myriam Faten Sfar (Paris: Editions Classiques Garnier, 2010).

title speaks for itself: *Romanticism: Its Anglo-Germanic Origins. Foreign Influences and National Traditions. The Awakening of French Genius*. As early as in the Foreword, Reynaud diagnoses the ultimate disease which France is suffering from, viz. Romanticism: "In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an intellectual tragedy took place, the gravity of which it would be difficult to overstate. The soul of our literature, as it were, underwent a sea change. It rejected the aesthetic and moral principles which had hitherto inspired it with a view to adopting new, absolutely opposed, values."¹⁹ France therefore lost its soul and, by way of consequence, its leadership over Europe. The conclusion is a foregone one. France, which has allowed herself to be guided ever since by "the individualistic and naturist Germano-protestant genius of these nations (Germany and England)," must come into her own, recover the sense of her own genius, thanks to a literature that will "attune itself to the needs of life, will affirm, create and arouse energies, will forge souls anew so as to unite them under common feelings."²⁰ This anti-English Classicism was elevated to the rank of an official doctrine during the Vichy régime, before being completely banished from public debate because of its compromising familiarity with the Collaboration and the National Revolution of Maréchal Pétain. Owing to the effect of an ideological correctness which existed in France well before the infamous political correctness of the United States, it has become impossible to evoke a vital historical reality (the ties of Romanticism with Anglo-Saxon culture), because of the ideological presuppositions which would be implied by simply acknowledging the sheer facts of the matter. Later on, the very existence of that reality progressively faded from people's minds. It has taken me a long, over-cautious and carefully argued itinerary to bring back to the foreground what would have been considered as pretty obvious a century or two ago.

But it should be confessed that the long-standing quarrel between the two rival branches of European Christianity now appears to possess the quaint charm of things obsolete. In reality, the traditionalist condemnation of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, beginning in the nineteenth century, did not only target a religion but also, and principally, an economic and social model which Protestantism supposedly represented, i.e., economic liberalism and consumer capitalism. This is exactly what Max Weber would contend in his 1904-1905 essay, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. This is to be construed as a structural 'given' of French ideology, namely its enduring anticapitalism;

¹⁹ Louis Reynaud, *Le romantisme: Ses origines anglo-germaniques. Influences étrangères et traditions nationales. Le réveil du génie français* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1929) vii.

²⁰ Reynaud 283.

likewise, as far as the romantic age is concerned, the grand trauma is to be located in or around the year 1830 – 1830 marking for France the end of the dream of a return to monarchy, together with the entry into the age of liberalism.

The trauma in question can be summed up in simple terms. From the Revolution to 1830, the public debate had been essentially political. Did one have to be a monarchist (on the model of divine right monarchy)? A Republican? A Liberal? In either case, it seemed that the peoples had their destinies in their hands, and Romanticism incarnated, in the main, that ideal of liberty: barring a reactionary and counter-revolutionary Romanticism which appears, with hindsight, to be an epiphenomenon of History. But then the Revolution of 1830 came. What France then discovered, within a few years, was something which she had never anticipated and was not prepared for: the implementation of economic liberalism, which marked the grand beginning of industrial capitalism, the triumph of bourgeois individualism (based on individual enrichment) and a consumerist culture which extended itself to all types of consumer goods. At the end of the day, French elites found out that the balance of power had shifted away from politics to economics. This discovery, let me repeat this, was brutal and traumatic, for it substituted for the heroic vision of history that still prevailed the reality of what was designated by the scornful phrase “modern epoch” at the time of the Second Empire. It was in the 1830s, and not under the Second Empire with Baudelaire, that the debate over modernity was initiated in the media: the latter being mostly spurned for its mediocrity, its baseness, its ugliness, just as the figure of the Bourgeois was becoming the butt of widespread contempt.

In the face of such a trauma, the anti-English ideology of traditional nationalism is perfectly consistent. But, deep down, it is not very remote from that of nineteenth-century academics who saw fit to protect the interpretation of French national Romanticism (narrowly restricted to the political issues born of the great Revolution of 1789) from the taint of the Anglo-Saxon social model (liberal and capitalistic, to put it simply). One also understands, given the conditions, why the German sources ascribed to French Romanticism appear far more flattering and seductive than its English ones. To bring together French Romanticism and the Jena group involves making the most of its philosophical filiation with the great Germanic tradition and thus playing into the hands of the property-based elitism which characterizes French literary history. Whereas, to insist on its ties with English Romanticism, means aligning it once again with the social practices of the public and with the cultural history of bourgeois consumerism. But in all fairness there is no point in establishing a hierarchy between a philosophical type of Romanticism reserved for the elites and thriving at a remove from fashions, and a cultural type of Romanticism whose favourite

objects are the productions consumed by the public. Or rather, if a choice has to be made as to relative historical importance, it is most probably the consumerist version of Romanticism which should be retained. Putting all value judgments aside, the truth of Romanticism and the profound significance of its history reside in the irrepressible movement of democratization, and the egalitarian individualization of tastes, practices which characterize the market of cultural goods.

As a matter of fact, the alternative is stark and simple. Romanticism is either the product of the French Revolution or, beyond that Revolution, it takes its cue from another revolution altogether, the Industrial Revolution, which started in England long before the former and which spread to the whole of Europe in the nineteenth century before reaching out to the rest of the world. Either French Romanticism is the cultural extension of the Revolution, until the Romantics collided against the raw and brutal reality of liberal capitalism, after which came an age of disenchantment and of the transformation of Romanticism into 'modernity.' This was the interpretation of the protagonists themselves and it is the one which is dominant in the research conducted in French academic circles. Or Romanticism results from the progressive emergence of bourgeois liberalism, inclusive of all of its social and cultural manifestations. Within that process, which concerned all of Western Europe at first, the French Revolution opened up a singular parenthesis, glorious but short-lived and limited in its effects, one which came to a close around 1830, at the time when, fifteen years after the defeat (or the victory!) of Waterloo, the English liberal model finally imposed itself on the social and economic planes as well. The problem can also be put in the terms of a single question: Which is the true revolution that ushered in modernity – was it the Industrial Revolution or the French Revolution? It is easy to see that depending on how one answers the question, one's definition of French Romanticism is bound to change, together with one's interpretation of the history of France since the Revolution. At stake is nothing less than the vaunted political singularity of France, so regularly proclaimed in public debate.

Translated by Marc Porée.

RETURNING, RETRIEVING, REVISING: WORDSWORTH'S LIFE WRITING AS WIEDERHOLUNGSZWANG (REPETITION URGE)

Christoph Bode

This article is not about the content of 'French' Books of The Prelude or about the centrality of the French Revolution in Wordsworth's oeuvre or his life (both of which the author could not and would not possibly deny). Rather, it aims at revealing the narratological rationale of Wordsworth's dealings with the past in The Prelude by a re-reading of the so-called 'boat-stealing episode' from Book One, which is regarded as a kind of interpretive key for the rest of the epic. It hopes to show that both the watermark signature of Wordsworth's perpetual returning to the 'scene' and his idiosyncratic appropriation of 'nature' (and 'history') are already pre-figured in an episode that can be said to contain the genetic code of the whole Prelude. The article ends with an upbeat appeal to lay the haunting spectre of History to rest.

1. Returning

This essay does not constitute a return to, let alone a revision of my first book, *William Wordsworth und die Französische Revolution* (which I began when I was twenty-two and finished within six months, though it was only published in 1977).¹ No mistake: I have no regrets about that book (except that it contains one of the most embarrassing sentences I ever wrote), though I would, of course, not write the book like that again either; indeed, it would be seriously worrying – would it not? – if after forty years one wanted to repeat oneself. After all, one would wish to have changed, to have moved on. Then, I analyzed the *content* of the 'French Books' of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and argued that his much overestimated 'Godwinian phase' (overestimated both in length and in

¹ Christoph Bode, *William Wordsworth und die Französische Revolution* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1977).

importance), far from being the peak of his political radicalism, rather served as a bridge to his later apolitical quietism – and then to his increasingly conservative, if not reactionary thinking.

Here, by way of contrast, I will say something about the narratological *rationale* of Wordsworth's dealings with the past in *The Prelude*, throughout accepting, like the organisers of this symposium, that Wordsworth's 'French period' was arguably not only formative for and constitutive of his entire later *œuvre*, but that his French connection and his re-turn to England is actually the driving force behind his great autobiographical poem on the growth of his own, a poet's mind – the modern subjective epic *par excellence*, *The Prelude*. I do accept that the French Revolution is arguably *the* watershed of his life, as is already indicated by the titles of Books Eleven and Twelve of *The Prelude* (1805 – later, Eleven through Thirteen), "Imagination, How Impaired and Restored," which suggest a dialectical 'thesis – antithesis – synthesis' pattern of growth. Here, however, I will not discuss the French books of *The Prelude*, nor any other *content matter* related to the French Revolution. Rather, I am interested in a particular signature, the signature of re-turning, re-peating, *Wieder-Holen*, as *the driver* behind the whole *Prelude* project – ironically at the same time as William Wordsworth tries to steal away from the original scene. The resultant of that parallelogram of diverging forces is... *The Prelude*.

This essay is therefore essentially about the narrative processing of the first twenty-eight years of his life, though I will propose only a new reading of one of the key scenes of *The Prelude* (in story-time, long before the French Revolution), viz. the so-called 'boat stealing' episode from Book One (strategically placed there, I will argue, like the musical key to a piece), reading this episode emblematically as the key to Wordsworth's perpetual re-writing of his own life. I hope to lay bare the mechanics (as it will turn out, rather the optics) behind Wordsworth's autobiographical narrative. This is not so much an empirically based, politically oriented essay as a narratological, tropological one and a psychological one, too – though the use of the Freudian term *Wiederholungszwang* in the title should not be taken to imply that my approach is psychoanalytical.

The production history of *The Prelude* is well known, yet it bears repetition: in the spring of 1798, Wordsworth had already written some 1,300 lines of a great philosophical, epic poem on Man, Nature and Society. But other matters intervened, and at the beginning of October, when William and Dorothy found themselves in Goslar, he could not go on with it and stepped back, as it were, to inquire, poetically, whether he was really equipped to write that great philosophical poem of the age: the result of that self-inquiry into the growth of the poet's mind, as we know, is *The Prelude*. But not only was it unprecedented

that a writer should, by way of preparation for a greater task, write so much about himself, it also proved a virtually never-ending, yes, unfinishable project: the text should keep him occupied (admittedly, at intervals) until 1839, and, as Jonathan Wordsworth pointed out, there are no fewer than seventeen distinct 'layers,' or versions, of that great autobiographical poem.² William Wordsworth keeps coming back to it. He is forever returning, revising, reassessing, trying to retrieve the truth of the past *as it appears to him now*. *The Prelude* is about one movement – the growth of his mind 1770 through 1798 –, but this first movement is observed not from a stable, but from a moving point-of-view (1798 through 1839), namely the point-of-view of Wordsworth as he writes this, in various versions. So one movement is copied onto another: by necessity, he has to return to his material *as long as he moves on*, because as long as he moves on, his perspective on the first movement will change and events will appear to him differently. What we have in *The Prelude* is two movements relative to each other. This is a simple statement of fact. But there is darker matter, too.

2. Boat Stealing

In the early passage commonly referred to as the “Fair seed-time had my soul” section of *The Prelude* (I, 305ff.),³ Wordsworth mentions two powers that predominantly formed his personality, beauty and fear:

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear

(I, 305-306)

Beauty and fear are a duality that is of prime importance, a fact that is even underlined when later on he mentions other influences as well:

Nor, sedulous as I have been to trace
How nature by extrinsic passion first
Peopled my mind with beauteous forms or grand

² Jonathan Wordsworth, “Revision as Making: *The Prelude* and its Peers,” *Romantic Revisions*, ed. Robert A. Brinkley and Keith Hanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 20.

³ Throughout, references are to the 1805 version as given in William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

And made me love them, may I well forget
How other pleasures have been mine, and joys
Of subtler origin [...]

(I, 571-76)

In the following, I will trace how the fear that was once experienced by the little boy is later re-interpreted as a beneficial power that “fostered” him. ‘What is good about fear?’ is not only structurally akin to the question, ‘What is pleasing about the sublime?’ Beauty does not stand in need of such a re-interpretation. The attractions of beauty are self-evident. Beauty is always taken as a matter of course. But that which inspires fear has to be processed – psychologically, rationally, imaginatively, by way of interpretation.

One of Wordsworth’s most impressive childhood memories – possibly also his most terrifying experience – in any case, more so than the fatalities of the “dead man” and “the boy of Winander,” and also, in spite of its Gothic elements, more scary than the encounter with the “discharged soldier” – is the ‘boat stealing episode’ of Book One (I, 372ff.). One night during his school holidays, Wordsworth took a skiff to row on Ullswater. The introduction to this episode makes it very clear that this tale is meant to be an exemplum – an example of how Nature, sometimes through “gentlest visitations,” but sometimes employing “severer interventions,” educates a “favoured being” – “and so she dealt with me” (I, 362-71).

When we read these lines, we can’t help feeling that this idea of being used, being tricked by Nature is underscored by Wordsworth’s particular choice of words:

I believe
That nature, oftentimes, when she would frame
A favoured being, from his earliest dawn
Of infancy doth open out the clouds
As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
With gentlest visitation; not the less,
Though haply aiming at the self-same end,
Does it delight her sometimes to employ
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable – and so she dealt with me.

(I, 362-71)

Of course, “frame” has a positive, constructive meaning and “to frame somebody,” meaning “to deliberately make someone seem guilty of a crime when they are not guilty” (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*), to lure somebody into a compromising situation, is only twentieth-century slang. Still, I would argue, this is exactly what happens here, because it is personified Nature herself that seduces him:

One evening (surely I was led by her)
I went alone into a shepherd’s boat,
A skiff that to a willow-tree was tied
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.

[...]

No sooner had I sight of this small skiff,
Discovered thus by unexpected chance,
Than I unloosed her tether and embarked.

(I, 372-82)

The nocturnal scene is beautifully evoked:

The moon was up, the lake was shining clear
Among the hoary mountains; from the shore
I pushed, and struck the oars, and struck again
In cadence, and my little boat moved on
Even like a man who walks with stately step
Though bent on speed. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on,
Leaving behind her still on either side
Small circles glittering idly in the moon
Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light.

(I, 383-94)

“Stealth,” of course, indicates that the nocturnal silence is broken by a breach of social and moral law – for “stealth” is not only “the act or characteristic of moving with extreme care and quietness, especially so as to avoid detection,” archaically it also means “the act of stealing” (*Collins English Dictionary*; cf. German *stehlen, Diebstahl, sich davon stehlen*). And the detail that the sides of the mountain are purportedly echoing the soft sounds of rowing can either be read

as an indicator of the “extreme silentness” (“Frost at Midnight”) of the scene or as the projection of an extremely guilty conscience, like the ones we later encounter in Edgar Allan Poe (*The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Black Cat*, with a different drift in *The Fall of the House of Usher*) – prolepsis of imminent nemesis.

The rowing boy has now, so as not to lose direction, fixed his eyes upon the top of a mountain ridge, when, all of a sudden, as he rows away and the smaller ridge no longer hides what lies behind it, a huge black cliff appears, growing bigger and bigger:

And as I rose upon the stroke my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan –
When, from behind that craggy steep (till then
The bound of the horizon) a huge cliff,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And, growing still in stature, the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
With measured motion, like a living thing
Strode after me.

(I, 403-12)

Psychologically, it is easy to understand that the boy, feeling guilty, believes the mountain is after him. What is more remarkable is that this confrontation with what is “big beyond all measure” (Kant) *and* at the same time seems alive and is moving – so that it combines Kant’s mathematically-sublime with his dynamically-sublime in *one* object – has all the aspects of a truly *traumatic* experience:

and after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts
There was a darkness – call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,
But huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men moved slowly through my mind
By day, and were the trouble of my dreams.

(I, 417-27)⁴

⁴ This seems like a proleptic echo of Book X, 368ff.

Obviously, the child is incapable of coping with this experience, because the boy does not have the strategies at his disposal that would allow him to rationally convert the fearful experience into something meaningful and constructive – in other words: to sublimate it. It is the grown-up narrator who frames the children's story of crime and imminent punishment by making Nature herself the power that both first seduces and then (seemingly) punishes – and both for a higher purpose, for a greater good. Because of the conspicuous ambivalence of Nature and the gendered set-up of seduction, stealth, and traumatic threat of punishment, it is easy to engage in psychoanalytical readings of the episode. But what others have done before, I do not have to repeat.

Instead, let me focus not on that first obvious mountain ridge, but on the second one, the one that appears behind it, or rather the triangulation of the two ridges and the moving boy in the rowing boat. The boy has mistaken the effect of his own subjective movement for the objective motion of an object that in reality is perfectly static. This misunderstanding, which treats as independent life and autonomous power that which is only an *effect* of my own activity – a classic case of what Karl Marx called fetishism – leads to an absurdly inappropriate response and to uncontrolled escalation: the further I move away, the more becomes visible of what was hidden, the more I am afraid, the more I row, the more becomes visible etc. It is through my own activity, through my own fear that I create what haunts me – and it gets bigger and bigger. In fleeing the scene, I create my own pursuer and persecutor. Experiencing an effect of which I am the sole cause (in that set-up, of course), I believe I am hunted by something outside myself. The mere change of an optical or visual angle results in the illusionary exchange of subject and object positions.

This, it seems to me, is emblematic of the narrative logic of *The Prelude* as a whole – and doubly so. First, the movement of the rowing boy can evidently be seen as analogous to that of Wordsworth writing *The Prelude*. As he moves away from the period of time that he deals with (which remains objectively constant: 1770-1798/99), this period of time does not get smaller and smaller, proportionally, and more and more insignificant, but, quite the contrary, it gains more and more importance. The steady change of angle through subjective motion (Wordsworth growing older) guarantees that Wordsworth will never come to an end, trying to arrest and interpret definitively what he remembers of those early years. The movement, his leaving of the scene, guarantees that more and more will appear, more and more will surface, which then has to be interpreted and processed in the attempt to bring it under control. That in turn guarantees that the relevance of those first twenty-eight, twenty-nine years of his life can only *increase* in the course of his lifetime: the centrality of the French

Revolution is forever assured – it can only *gain* in importance. That is no whimsical paradox – you learn it by rowing.

But if that which steadily increases and which inspires fear demands constant processing and interpretive control and if the answer of the boy is the same as that of the author ('Row harder!'), then this explains not only the urgency of the *Prelude* project but also the self-empowering impulse behind it: the grown-up subject has to re-assert himself time and again and to reassure himself that it was *he himself* who acted – nothing external; it was *me* who moved; no fear: *I* was the only cause.

But the second lesson of the boat stealing episode, if we regard it as emblematical of the narrative logic of *The Prelude* as a whole, is slightly at odds with this first. Let me explain: the boy was a victim of his own imagination when he felt persecuted by the mountain as if it were a living thing of huge and mighty form, all the more, when these ideas even followed him into his dreams. The *moral lesson* of the boat stealing episode is based upon a *delusion* that the grown-up person can easily see through. That Nature sanctions social offences and misdemeanours is a *childish* idea, which an adult person knows to be a naïve error – but it is the same adult person who introduces this tale with the statement that sometimes Nature employs "severer interventions" to educate "a favoured being." The implied syllogism is: *Sometimes Nature uses an overheated imagination for higher ends, in order to make someone believe that sometimes Nature uses an overheated imagination for higher ends.* In other words: 'I believe this, but, of course, I don't believe this.' Or in a temporal triple jump: 'When I was a boy I took this as a moral lesson. Of course, I was mistaken in that. But now I believe it again.'

Possibly, the two lessons of the boat stealing episode coincide in this: the Nature in question here has to be put into heavy quotation marks, because it is the paradoxical result or product of what can easily be identified as a characteristic interpretive move – sometimes, the intentionality of a living, animate thing is attributed to this product, sometimes, the product is denied this intentionality. In case of doubt, Nature does what Wordsworth wants. No, that is not quite correct. Nature *always* does what Wordsworth wants. It's the revenge of a "favoured being": she is by the grace of William Wordsworth.

To be more fair: Wordsworth accepts the limits of interpretation, because he so ostentatiously parades his interpretation as a (paradoxical) *interpretation*. But that doesn't alter the fact that one of the greatest passages in *The Prelude* – and not only this one! – is based on the shaky foundation of a conspicuous 'as if':

The mind of man is framed even like the breath
And harmony of music; there is a dark
Invisible workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, and makes them move
In one society. Ah me, that all
The terrors, all the early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all
The thoughts and feelings which have been infused
Into my mind, should ever have made up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself. Praise to the end –
Thanks likewise for the means!

(I, 351-62)

“The calm existence that is mine when I / Am worthy of myself” not only thematizes the tension between norm and reality, which biographically can hardly be imagined without a presupposed telos, it also postulates in retrospect the logic of an evolution in which even the worst was good for something. The problem is: the example that follows for the meaning of it all – viz., the boat stealing episode – doesn’t prove this at all. You *can* imagine such a totality of meaning. But that is – if the schoolboy is to be regarded as an exemplum – nothing but a delusion. Undeniably, you *can* do this. “Praise to the end – / Thanks likewise for the means!”? In this case it is not only that the end justifies the means – trickery for your own good –, but also that the idea of an agent is pure projection – and projection that knows itself to be a projection. For the only thing that is certain is this: I know what I am meant to be (“The calm existence that is mine when I / Am worthy of myself”) and I am moving in that direction.

3. At the End of the Day

“Boat stealing” can be read as emblematic of Wordsworth’s dealing with the past in general and with the French Revolution in particular: he wants to finish it, to lay it to rest, but the longer he deals with it – and deal with it he must –, the more he tries to get away from it, the larger it grows. Read in this way, “boat stealing” contains the genetic code for the production of the entire *Prelude*. The repetition urge tries to lay to rest the haunting spectre of history – but by repetition it will only grow larger.

In the final Book, Wordsworth concludes, addressing his ideal reader, Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

[...] though (too weak to tread the ways of truth)
This age fall back to old idolatry,
Though men return to servitude as fast
As the tide ebbs, to ignominy and shame
By nations sink together, we shall still
Find solace in the knowledge which we have,
Blest with true happiness if we may be
United helpers forward of a day
Of firmer trust, joint labourers in a work –
Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe –
Of their redemption, surely yet to come.
Prophets of nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration, sanctified
By reason and by truth. What we have loved
Others will love, and we may teach them how –
instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, mid all revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men, does still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine.

(XIII, 431-52)

Understandably, this afterglow of “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive” (X, 692) was strong enough for Thomas Macaulay to privately characterize *The Prelude* as “to the last degree Jacobinical”⁵ – and he was referring, of course, to the tamer 1850 version.

As we ourselves are haunted by the striding mountain of History, we should never forget – or if we have, we should remind ourselves – that it is, after all is said and done, *us*: *we* are moving. There was never any other agent. Just us. That, it seems, is the only way in which the spectre of the past can eventually be laid to rest.

⁵ Quoted by Nicholas Roe, “Revising the Revolution: History and Imagination in *The Prelude*, 1799, 1805, 1850,” Brinkley and Hanley 88.

IMAGINING THE DIFFERENCE: PREFIGURATIONS OF POSTSTRUCTURALISM IN *THE PRELUDE*¹

Martin Procházka

Using Deleuze's concepts of "involuntary," "rhizomatic" memory, of "Essence as the highest and absolute Difference" and of expressive "intensity" based on imperceptible "differences" between innumerable sensuous impressions (Proust and Signs, Difference and Repetition, The Logic of Sense), the article demonstrates that in the 1799 text of *The Prelude* imagination is an "effect" of immense quantity of differences among impressions, rather than a power synthesizing these differences. Instead of producing a continuity of subjective consciousness, imagination transforms the material of art into a specific "style" based on what Deleuze in *Proust and Signs* calls "transversals." Similar to *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the first text of *The Prelude* thematizes heterogeneous time rather than the continuity, let alone "the growth," "of poet's mind." Later texts of the poem are characterized by tendencies to control this open and non-hierarchical concept of imagination by the dominant (individual or absolute, divine) subjectivity. Figuring imagination as a sublime, alien, unknown and mighty power, "unfathered vapour" disrupting poetic creation, they assimilate it in the Kantian way, as the moral essence of the subject. In this way, imagination may be said to create a certain scheme, whose spatio-temporal relations materialize conceptual relationships (Deleuze, Kant's *Critical Philosophy*). It ceases to be a play of effects and becomes a negative formulation of a metaphysical concept (Geoffrey Hartman), a scheme of a rational construct giving an authoritative and centralizing meaning to space, time and history. Despite this, it can still function as a transformative force, as a technique of sensation and feeling leading to self-knowledge as the realization of "active freedom" (Foucault). In this way, the genealogy of imagination in *The Prelude* may be read as a prefiguration of two important, aesthetic and ethical, paradigms in poststructuralist thought: the work of art as "machine" (Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*) and "the care of the self" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*), as alternatives to organicism and repression of sexuality emphasized by Wordsworth himself and by some of his interpreters.

¹ The first version of this article appeared as Chapter 8 in my book *Transversals* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia Books, 2008) 126-37.

In romantic thought, the Pantheist God or Deity is often identified with Nature as the overflowing fountain of goodness and creative energy. In the 1799 version of *The Prelude* Wordsworth confesses that in his youth this “soul” of Nature became an inspiration for his poetry enabling him to search for emotional flows and intensities:

From Nature and her overflowing soul
I had received so much that all my thoughts
Were steeped in feeling. I was only then
Contented with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of being spread
O'er all that moves, and that seemeth still,
O'er that all, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart
O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts and sings

(1799: II, 446-55)²

In *The Prelude* of 1799, the notion of the unifying creative power (“one life [...] joy [...] / One song”; II, 460-61) greatly differs from the preceding ideas of the Neoplatonic “Soul of the World.”³ The highest Idea and its emanations establishing a hierarchy of the forms of existence are substituted by the all-penetrating *feeling*, which does not originate in nature alone but is also *the intensity of experience* and the projection of the individual’s joy into the animate as well as inanimate world.

² All quotations from the three texts of *The Prelude* follow *The Norton Critical Edition: The Prelude 1799 1805 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York and London: Norton, 1979).

³ See, e.g., Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. Stephen McKenna and B.S. Page, 3.1.8, The Internet Classics Archive, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.3.third.html> (accessed 20 August 2017). “Soul: we must place at the crest of the world of beings, this other Principle, not merely the Soul of the Universe but, included in it, the Soul of the individual: this, no mean Principle, is needed to be the bond of union in the total of things, not, itself, a thing sprung like things from life-seeds, but a first-hand Cause, bodiless and therefore supreme over itself, free, beyond the reach of cosmic Cause: for, brought into body, it would not be unrestrictedly sovereign; it would hold rank in a series.” For a recent discussion of Neoplatonic World Soul see, e.g., David Fideler, *Restoring the Soul of the World: Our Living Bond with Nature’s Intelligence* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), especially Chapter 6.

This joy is generated by perception, “resembling more / Creative agency” (1799: II, 431), of “affinities / In objects where no brotherhood exists / To common minds” (II, 432-34). The intensity of unifying visions, the “transports” (II, 460) which do not have to be interpreted as mystical extases,⁴ is neither given by individual perceptions, nor by their sum but rather by “difference in general,” which, according to Deleuze, is a primary quality, “light, aerial and affirmative” distinguishable from mere “diversity or otherness.”⁵ This “creative disorder or inspired chaos”⁶ is metaphorized as a song heard only when the ear can no longer cope with the plethora of voices of nature. It is a cumulative *effect* of sensuous impressions of as well as emotional relations to creatures and things in nature, a sentiment spread

O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air, o'er all that glides
Beneath the wave, yea in the wave itself
And mighty depth of waters.
(1799: II, 455-59)

In the 1799 version of Wordsworth's poem, imagination is not a power unifying differences as Kant's or Schelling's *Einbildungskraft* or Coleridge's “esemplastic power.”⁷ Rather it is an “effect”⁸ of the difference in nature. Nature “speaks” to the poet “[b]y quaint associations” (1799: I, 421), which are stored in memory in a disconnected form. Their involuntary connections emerge in the traces of memory activated by repeating emotional impulses “[b]y the impressive agency of fear / By pleasure and repeated happiness – / So frequently

⁴ See, e.g., M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953; New York: Norton, 1960) 66.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (*Différence et répétition*, 1968), trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 54, 30.

⁶ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 54.

⁷ S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. John Shawcross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907) 1:107, 195.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (*Logique du Sens*, 1969), trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) 4-5: “[...A]ll bodies are causes in relation to each other – but causes of what? They are causes of certain things of an entirely different nature. These *effects* are not bodies, but, properly speaking, ‘incorporeal’ entities. They are not physical qualities and things or facts, but events. We cannot say that they exist, but rather that they subsist or inhere. [...] They are neither agents nor patients, but the results of actions and passions.”

repeated –" (1799: I, 433-35). Despite the autobiographical intent of *The Prelude* it seems that the subject of its first version, to quote Deleuze's reading of Proust, is "the localized essence of time,"⁹ rather than "the growth of the poet's mind."

Similar to modern art, imagination in the early version of *The Prelude* is a synthesis, which, however, does not produce a continuity of subjective consciousness but transforms the material of art (figures of speech and complex syntactic structures) into specific feelings and emotions. From the differences in nature, memory and speech an artistic style originates "affirming an irreducible difference [...] an individuating viewpoint superior to individuals themselves."¹⁰ And this style creates, by means of complex and opaque sentence structure, surprising "transversals"¹¹ linking emotional experience and reflexive passages of the poem, which puts an inexhaustible multitude of nature and imagination against "[t]his melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown" (1799: II, 479) of post-revolutionary Europe.

Later texts of *The Prelude* attempt to control this open and non-hierarchical structure of imagination by means of a subject, which resembles God from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, representing the unity and infinity of space and time. In the central passage of Book VI, the chaos of experiences from Alpine nature is ordered by a dominant symbolic metaphor:

Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light –
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
Characters of the great Apocalypse,

⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (Proust et les signes, 1964, 1970, 1976), trans. Richard Howard, 2nd edn. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 61. The passage quotes *A la recherche du temps perdu* III, 872: "a morsel of time, in the pure state."

¹⁰ Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* 161-62. See also Daniel W. Smith, "Deleuze's Theory of Sensation: Overcoming the Kantian Duality" (1996), *Essays on Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) 96: "One of Deleuze's philosophic aims is to show that the singularity and individuality of the diverse can only be comprehended from the viewpoint of difference itself. The Idea of sensation is constituted by two interrelated principles of difference: the differential relations between genetic elements, and the differences in intensity that actualize these relations."

¹¹ Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* 168-69. Deleuze points out that "transversality" is "the formal structure of the work" which in the process of communication establishes "unity and totality [...] for themselves, without unifying or totalizing objects or subjects" (169).

The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last and midst, and without end.

(1850: VI, 635-40)¹²

The heterogeneity of natural objects, impressions and figures of speech in the 1799 text contrasts with this identification of the multiplicity of nature with apocalyptic "Eternity," represented as the absolute personality with one mind and face and associated with a model of hierarchical organic form (the tree). Hence, the presence of God (as a single being and at the same time as a structuring power) is the only explanation of imagination and the organic metaphor. This poetic notion was later theoretically formulated by Coleridge in his learned definition of the symbol: "forma formans per formam formatam translucens."¹³

The quoted passage from the text of 1850 differs from the text of 1805, which does not yet confirm the synthetic, structuring and hierarchizing nature of imagination. In contrast to the 1850 text where imagination is first referred to as an "awful Power" inexpressible in human language and rising "from the mind's abyss" (VI, 594), in the text of 1805 the principal figure describing imagination is the catachresis¹⁴ "unfathered vapour" (VI, 527) which seems to undermine the dominant, hegemonic and organizing role of imagination:

¹² In comparison with the 1805 text it is evident that the authoritative nature of the concluding lines is emphasized by graphic means, by separating the concluding lines with semi-colon and capitalizing the word "apocalypse."

¹³ Coleridge 2:187.

¹⁴ In "White Mythology" Derrida comments on this trope discussed by Pierre Fontanier in the *Supplement to the Theory of Tropes* (Supplément à la théorie des tropes, 1830) included in *Les Figures du Discours* (The Figures of Discourse, 1821-1830): "the violent, forced, abusive inscription of a sign, the imposition of a sign upon a meaning which did not yet have its own proper sign in language. So much so that there is no substitution here, no transport of proper signs, but rather the irruptive extension of a sign proper to an idea, a meaning, deprived of their signifier." He also quotes Fontanier's description which can be directly referred to Wordsworth's catachresis: "Catachresis, in general, consists in a sign already affected with a first idea also being affected with a new idea, which itself had no sign at all, or no longer properly has any other in language." Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology" (*La Mythologie blanche*, 1971), *Margins of Philosophy* (*Marges de la philosophie*, 1972), trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 255.

Imagination! – lifting up itself
Before the eye and progress of my song
Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,
In all might of its endowments, came
Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud
Halted without a struggle to break through,
And now, recovering to my soul I say
'I recognise thy glory.'

(1805: VI, 525-32)

Whereas in the 1850 text the catachresis “unfathered vapour” is dissociated from the subject (it “enwraps [...] some lonely traveller”; VI, 595-96) and becomes almost a rhetorical ornament produced by the “sad incompetence of human speech” (VI, 593), in the text of 1805 it is thematized as an obstacle impairing the vision of the subject and checking further progress of the poem. Only when its paralyzing intensity weakens, the speaker can identify its ungraspable power with the “glory” (1805: VI, 532) of his soul, appropriating, or rather usurping,¹⁵ the immense multitude of previous experiences and proclaiming the effects of their differences products of this unconscious and suprasensuous force, which can no longer be connected with the “Nature’s soul” but reveals – in the moments when our senses fail – the greatness of “the invisible world” (VI, 536).

In the quoted passage of the 1805 text there is only a trace of Wordsworth’s early notion of imagination, transforming the multiplicity of nature and emotional experiences into a poetic style. No longer the power effecting this transformation, imagination is an obstacle of poetic creation and a discontinuity in time and space, as well as in the subject’s experience. Its difference is absolutized as the Other, an unknown counterpart of God and his “infinite,” which in turn is identified with Christian Eternity – “[o]ur destiny, our nature, and our home” (1805: VI, 539, 538).¹⁶ The difference between the “awful promise” of imagination and the infinitude of God can be overcome only by “hope that can never die” (1805: VI, 534, 540). In the text of 1850, the latter mentioned aspect is reinforced, since instead of “the flashes” showing us “the

¹⁵ On the forceful and even violent nature of catachresis, see Fontanier and Derrida in the preceding footnote.

¹⁶ Cf. St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. and ed. Albert C. Outler, <http://www.ourladywarriors.org/saints/augconf.htm> (accessed 20 August 2017), 4.15.31: “And we need not fear that we shall find no place to return to because we fell away from it. For, in our absence, our home – which is thy eternity – does not fall away.”

invisible world" (1805: VI, 535-36), we have a single "flash" of revelation (1850: VI, 601)¹⁷ merging the "awful power" (no longer "promise") of imagination and the "infinite" of God.

In brief, in the text of 1805, imagination is still heterogeneous, but is no longer linked with Nature's "soul," or – as demonstrated above – the "feeling" integrating its multiplicities. It has neither an origin, nor a fixed position in the universe created and ordered by God. It is evident that this difference cannot be an integrating component of the poetic style.

Despite this, imagination is integrated in the poem's thematic structure, where it becomes an analogue of what Kant called "the dynamic sublime." Similar to *The Critique of Judgement*, in the latter texts of *The Prelude* the unknown and infinite power of nature must be subordinated to the moral nature of man, the soul, which is experienced as "an indeterminate, suprasensible unity of all [human] faculties."¹⁸ It can be said that in this part of Book VI of *The Prelude* imagination produces neither images nor style, but a certain *schema*, whose "spatio-temporal relations [...] embody or realize relations, which are in fact conceptual."¹⁹

This is confirmed by some well-known interpretations, such as Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry*²⁰ and even by Wordsworth himself, who in his outline of late March 1804 had prefixed the above discussed passage on imagination (1805: VI, 525-32) with the lines which appeared in a completely different place in the final text of 1805, namely in Book VIII (678-711) as a part of the description of the poet's

¹⁷ See *The Prelude 1799 1805 1850*, 217n, where the editors suggest that "the lines" of the text of 1850 "can be read as referring to a single apocalyptic event [...] available" only to the speaker of the poem.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy* (La Philosophie critique de Kant, 1963), trans. H.R.E. Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1984) 51. See *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952) 127 (§ 29, "General Remark").

¹⁹ Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy* 18.

²⁰ Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (1964, 1971; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014) 237. Hartman comments on "a shift from sight, which is direct, to the ear, which catches life at a distance" in the fragment "Yet once again do I behold the forms": "The purely spatial distance between Wordsworth and the Derwent is temporalized by the evening darkness, and we realize that time, like space, is an actively mediating power. The past is not *temps perdu*." The ending of the passage brings us back to Deleuze's criticism of Kantian dualism of "sensibility" as "the form of possible experience" (based on the *a priori* forms of space and time) and of "art" as a "reflection on real experience" (Smith 89).

impressions after his arrival in London.²¹ The text, which in the draft of March 1804 expressed the otherness of imagination in relation to Alpine grandeur, refers in *The Prelude* of 1805 to the frightening and repulsive atmosphere of an unknown metropolis. In terms of power Wordsworth's London differs fundamentally from the Alps symbolizing the Divine revelation. It is an important centre of historic events and a global empire, determining "the destiny of the earth itself" (1805: VIII, 748). Moreover, it is also a place, where the speaker himself "craved for power," which he "found / In all things" (VIII, 755-56). In the final version of 1805, the sublimity of the Alps could be substituted with the vulgar ugliness of the huge metropolis only on the basis of an abstract reflection, a kind of generalizing commentary on the reminiscences of the speaker's youth: "That aught *external* to the living mind / Should have such mighty sway" (VIII, 701-702). This substitution has been made possible by a conceptual structure, which, similar to the passage on imagination in Book VI, roughly corresponds to the definition of the dynamic sublime in Kant's Third Critique.²² Similar to Book VI, the experience of the sublimity of London and its subsequent conceptualization are also described here as "a thing divine" (1805: VIII, 711). In this way, the following passage (VIII, 711-41) is singled out as more meaningful and valuable than other parts of the book.

Wordsworth's lines transposed from the draft of the passage on imagination (1805: VI, 525-32) describe impressions from a visit to a cavern (Yordas Cave in Yorkshire) explored by torchlight. This parable does not follow the well-known philosophical models, such as Plato's *Republic*, Porphyry's *De Antro Nympharum* or Bacon's *Novum Organum*. After entering the dark cavern our view is attracted by the stalactites on the ceiling:

a canopy
Of shapes, and forms, and tendencies to shape,
That shift and vanish, change and interchange
Like spectres – ferment quiet and sublime,
Which, after a short space, works less and less,
Till every effort, every motion gone,
The scene before him lies in a perfect view
Exposed, and lifeless as a written book.

(1805: VIII, 721-28)

²¹ *The Prelude* 1799 1805 1850 304, n 7.

²² "Therefore nature is here called sublime merely because it raises the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make itself sensible of the appropriate sublimity of the sphere of its own being, even above nature." (Kant 261 [§28]).

Here, the motif of the Apocalypse as the end of time and history in Book VI has an ironical analogue in the symbol of “a written book,” which is neither a sacred Scripture revealing the destiny of the world, nor a “Book of Nature” written in mystical hieroglyphs. It is a transitory fixation of the dynamic, heterogeneous multitude, produced by the fermentation of natural forms and the traveller’s images, which, however, are no realities but mere “spectres,” or, to use Deleuzian terminology, “effects.” The fixation is reversible, since the ‘letters’ of the “book” soon start moving again, changing themselves in a new multiplicity, a mixture of ideas of memory, projecting onto the chaos of rock formations characteristic images of reality in its spatial and temporal – historical – dimensions, related to the spiritual and secular power:

forests and lakes,
Ships, rivers, towers, the warrior clad in mail,
The prancing steed, the pilgrim with his staff,
The mitred bishop and the thronèd king –
A spectacle to which there is no end.

(1805: VIII, 737-41)

The metaphorization of the cave’s vault with stalactites as “a written book” and the preceding and subsequent play of the effects of imagination may be understood as two different “readings” of time pointed out by Deleuze.²³ The time called Chronos, “the living present,” “the time of bodies and states of affairs” which “embraces the entire universe,”²⁴ is arrested in the closure of the book metaphor. As a consequence, a different, “unlimited” time, called Aion, is foregrounded, “which divides itself infinitely in past and future and always eludes the present.”²⁵ It is this time which is the process of imagination, metaphorized in Book VI of *The Prelude* as “unfathered vapour”: the paralyzing emptiness, the loss of meaning of the romantic pilgrimage and of the present, the absolutization of difference in time as the Other, which is the opposite of the Cosmos created by God.

Whereas Wordsworth’s 1804 draft of Book VI contrasts these two “readings” of time, their contrast is eliminated in the text of 1805 and still further in the text of 1850. In this way, imagination is excluded from the sphere of Pantheist inspiration. It ceases to be a play of effects, a multiplicity of natural forms

²³ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 162.

²⁴ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 4.

²⁵ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 5.

animated by human emotion, and can no longer grasp the dynamic nature of existence, called “pure becoming” by Deleuze.²⁶ It is a negative expression of a metaphysical concept – “*the idea of Nature itself teaching travellers to transcend Nature*”²⁷ – a scheme for a rational construct, which can give a new, authoritative and centralizing meaning to space, time and history. Effects, phantasms and simulacra must then be excluded from the sphere of imagination as well as from nature.

Their new domain is the globalized civilisation with the depressive maze of the imperial metropolis at its centre, which is the London of Book VIII of *The Prelude* of 1805 and 1850. Nonetheless, since the power accumulated in the centre of this structure corresponds to the philosophical definition of the sublime, it can be said that Wordsworth’s London is a strange substitute for the wild sceneries of the Lake District or rugged Alpine cliffs: an interesting development of the catachresis “unfathered vapour.” However, in contrast to the Simplon Pass veiled in mist, London represents a real threshold in the process of the speaker’s maturing. Crossing it, the imagination aspires to transform the alienated waste land of civilisation and express the desire of the spiritual community amidst the anonymous crowd.

The concluding books of *The Prelude* (XI-XIII in the text of 1805 and XII-XIV in the text of 1850) can be interpreted as attempts to fulfil this desire, to find “[o]nce more in man an object of delight, / Of pure imagination, and of love;” (1805: XII, 54-55) and to gain

A more judicious knowledge of what makes
The dignity of individual man –
Of man, no composition of the thought,
Abstraction, shadow, image, but the man,
Of whom we read, the man whom we behold
With our own eyes –

(1805: XII, 82-87)

The original text of this passage in the so-called MS Y from October 1804 started with lines which in the resulting text of 1805 occur in Book VIII describing the speaker’s stay in London.

Against the Platonic concept of emanation, which can be seen as the point of departure for Wordsworth’s genealogy of imagination, the latter part of the poem

²⁶ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 1.

²⁷ Geoffrey H. Hartman, “A Poet’s Progress: Wordsworth and the *Via Naturaliter Negativa*,” *Modern Philology*, 59 (1962): 224.

sets the notion of imagination as a synthetic “intellectual power” (1805: XI, 43). Nonetheless, this faculty cannot deal with the reality of London. From MS Y it is evident that the first topic of the London section was the life of ordinary people in the city. Yet in describing it, the poem does not display a sufficient symbolic potential which could transform the waste land of London. This is for instance the case in the scene in which an artisan (or “artificer,” as Wordsworth calls him; 1805: VIII, 854) holds a “sickly babe” (849) on his knee, bending over it “[a]s if he were afraid both of the sun / And of the air which he had come to seek” (857-58) and gazing at it “with unutterable love” (859).

In the subsequent part of MS Y the speaker turns to nature again, invoking it as a power of inspiration: “breezes and soft airs that breathe / The breath of paradise [...] find your way / To the recesses of the soul” (1805: XI, 416). Nonetheless, the focus of the passage are no longer animals and natural objects, nor even diverse marginalized people, reminiscent of the characters of *Lyrical Ballads*, but the emotional unity of the individual inspired by nature.

This is especially confirmed by the earliest version of the text in MS Y, which first recapitulates the emotional and intellectual development of the individual, seen as the dialectical process based on the clashes between the positive influences of nature and the negative impact of culture and civilization. The result is a self-conscious attitude based on the correlation of the two infinite magnitudes – the “insatiate” desire of the mind striving to encompass an “inexhaustible” universe (MS Y [a] “We live by admiration”; 174). This paradigm closely resembles that in the introductory passage of Chapter XIII on imagination in Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*. While Coleridge develops this paradigm to demonstrate the creative power of imagination, Wordsworth’s text postulates a visionary unity of the poet with other poets-prophets and the whole of humanity based on the traditional Platonic model of divine love: “God, who feeds our hearts / For his own service, knoweth, loveth us, / When we are unregarded by the world” (1805: XII, 275-77).

In the concluding books of *The Prelude* this notion of imagination is further transformed. Their perhaps best-known part describes the speaker’s nocturnal ascent of Mount Snowdon, during which a “universal spectacle” (1805: XIII, 60) opens in front of him. The multitude of shapes of mountains and clouds resembling ocean waves has an immaterial emptiness at its centre: “a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour [...] / That dark deep thoroughfare” into which “Nature [had] lodged / The soul, the imagination of the whole” (1805: XIII, 55, 64-65). It may appear that the intensity of a vision expressed by this symbolic image of difference, still seen as something absolutely other, “the homeless voice of waters” (1805: XIII, 63), an analogue of “unfathered vapour” from Book VI.

However, in the following meditation, this difference is subordinated to unity as a manifestation of the synthetic, sublime power present in the speaker's unconscious as well as in the whole world:

The perfect image of a mighty mind,
Of one that feeds upon infinity,
That is exalted by an under-presence,
The sense of God, or whatsoever is dim
Or vast in its own being –

(1805: XIII, 69-73)

The text of 1850 calls this opaque force “transcendent power” (XIV, 75) which can be understood in the context of Kant's notion of the sublime as the way to the discovery of the moral purpose of nature and humanity. In contrast to this, the text of 1805 emphasises “the express / Resemblance” (XIII, 86-87) between the power of nature transforming the world of the senses and imagination, “the glorious faculty / Which higher minds bear with them as their own” (XIII, 89-90). This resemblance is not Kant's analogy, which is defined as a cause-effect relationship abstracting from specific differences among things.²⁸ It is the reason justifying the existence of imagination. As an activity of imagination, poetry is legitimized only when it is an evident replica of Divine Creation, or in Coleridge's phrase “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.”²⁹ Unlike Coleridge, who points out the unity of the creative and receptive nature of imagination as the capacity of human beings to resemble God, Wordsworth's text puts an emphasis on the power of the resemblance between poetry and creation “the fullness of its strength” (1805: XIII, 87). This power is the *intensity* in the world of the senses and simultaneously the *identity* of individual and absolute spirit. The mind is not subdued by sensuous impressions but activated and stimulated by them “[t]o hold communion with the invisible world” (1805: XIII, 105). Despite all Kantian features and Coleridge's influence the unity created by imagination in the conclusion of *The Prelude* is given a firm Platonic framework.

Imagination represented in this way is not only the source of the soul's self-sufficiency but guarantees its “sovereignty within and peace at will” and “cheerfulness in every act of life” (1805: XIII, 114, 117). It is the only “genuine liberty” (1805: XIII, 122), even in the political sense. All these certainties are

²⁸ See Kant 290-95 (§ 90).

²⁹ Coleridge 1: 189.

based on the faithfulness of the individual to the “divine and true” world, whose condemnable antithesis is “a universe of death, / The falsest of all worlds” (XIII: 143, 141-42), a simulacrum confused with reality only when one relies on the “laws of vulgar sense” (140).

Whereas the purpose of imagination is to liberate humans from this pseudo-world, the aim of the Neoplatonic spiritual love, the “love more intellectual” (1805: XIII, 166) which is an indivisible part of imagination and “the prime and vital principle” is “to complete the man, / Perfect him” (XIII: 194, 202-203). Rather than fostering a free, organic community, which, as Friedrich Schlegel wrote, is “a higher life of the human being, which is related to the whole,” and creating the only Book, “the Eternal Gospel,”³⁰ this “feeling intellect” (1805: XIII, 205) leads to the emotional cultivation of individuals and also to the overcoming of gender differences.³¹ As a result, the aim of Wordsworth’s project is not a romantic utopia, building a new society by means of romantic art, but the deployment of poetry as a power transforming the human psyche and anticipating Foucault’s “technologies of the self.”

As Foucault pointed out, in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, *maniā* is linked with the dominant theme of problematization of erotic desire and the necessity of its regulation by means of spiritual struggle, which leads to the self-knowledge as the realisation of “active freedom.”³² In this context, *The Prelude* can be read not only as a genealogy of imagination, but also as a history of emotional life, where the relations to nature and its symbolic substitutions (imagination, spiritual love, God) cover up the principal autobiographical themes, namely the erotic and political dilemmas.

³⁰ Friedrich Schlegel, “Lectures on Transcendental Philosophy,” in *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, trans. and ed. Frederic C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 145, 140; “Ideen” (Nr. 95, *Athenäum*, Bd. 3, 1800), in *Werke in zwei Bänden*, ed. Wolfgang Hecht (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau Verlag 1980) 1: 274.

³¹ “And he whose soul hath risen / Up to the height of feeling intellect / Shall want no humbler tenderness, his heart / Be tender as a nursing mother’s heart; / Of female softness shall his life be full, / Of little loves and delicate desires, / Mild interests and gentlest sympathies” (1805: XIII, 204-10).

³² See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2, The Use of Pleasure* (L’Usage des plaisirs, 1984), trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1985) 86-92.

WORDSWORTH'S ANGLO-FRENCH PAMPHLET: PUBLIC ARGUMENT AND PRIVATE CONFESSION IN "A LETTER TO THE BISHOP OF LLANDAFF"

David Duff

*Wordsworth's first substantial composition on returning from France in December 1792 was his "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff," an intended contribution to the British pamphlet war in which he declares himself to be a Republican, an egalitarian and a defender of regicide. Wordsworth adopts a Painite stance and prose style, continuing the polemic against Burke and confronting Richard Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff, with the betrayal of his former liberal values. Yet he also brings to bear first-hand knowledge of revolutionary France, citing Watson's French counterpart, Abbé Grégoire, the revolutionary Bishop of Blois, and the Breton peasant-politician Michel Gérard ('Père Gérard'), another iconic figure of the Revolution, who may have been some kind of role model for Wordsworth. He includes, too, as a comment on "the present period," two striking quotations from Racine's *Athalie*, a tragedy about king-killing, royal succession and a concealed child. Analysing these references and Wordsworth's public self-fashioning as a French revolutionary eyewitness entering the fray of British political debate, this article also uncovers coded allusions to Wordsworth's scandalous personal life. Left unfinished and unpublished, Wordsworth's outspoken "Letter" reveals the ultra-radical political views that were one (temporary) legacy of his French experience but it also holds clues about his inner state of mind as he resumed his English life separated, seemingly by his own volition, from his French mistress Annette Vallon and their new-born love-child. By examining its polemical tactics, its strategic use of Anglo-French comparison and its interweaving of public and private codes, the article shows that the "Letter" is a more significant and revealing document than has previously been recognised.*

In what state of mind did Wordsworth return to England in December 1792, after his momentous, life-changing year in revolutionary France? Many of his later writings bear traces of his French experience and testify to the complexity of

any answer to that question, but the most direct evidence comes not from retrospective accounts such as *The Prelude* but from an unpublished pamphlet he wrote probably during February and March 1793. Entitled "A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff on the Extraordinary Avowal of his Political Principles contained in the Appendix to his late Sermon," this was his first substantial composition after returning from France, drafted while he was living in London with his brother Richard at Staple Inn. Though unpublished and, to judge from the sole surviving manuscript, unfinished,¹ the pamphlet sheds light on both Wordsworth's political convictions and his sense of personal identity as he made the transition from revolutionary France to the very different world he found back home. His movement between French and English discourses, and between public and private themes, produces a strangely hybrid text which makes his first venture into political pamphleteering a more significant and revealing document than has previously been recognised, though, paradoxically, its greatest personal revelation – once we learn to decode it – is that he had something important to conceal.

As a work of polemical prose, due to be published anonymously under the signature "By a Republican," the "Letter" stands in marked contrast to the two long poems which Wordsworth did publish at this time, *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, released together, in quarto editions, on 29 January 1793.² The first of these dates from his time as a student in Cambridge; the second is a record of his walking tour through France and the Alps in 1790 with his college friend Robert Jones, though it was mostly composed in 1792, when he was living in Blois and Orléans. Preparing them for publication and seeing them through press was the first task he undertook on returning from France: in career terms, an important step, since these were his first published volumes. On the title pages, he presents himself to the public as a respectable, university-educated poet, "W. Wordsworth, B.A. of St. John's, Cambridge," writing topographical poetry in establishes genres – the "epistle" and the verse "sketch" – about

¹ The manuscript, held by the Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere (DCMS 8), is a fair copy with unfinished authorial amendments and a missing passage marked by asterisks. It lacks a final page, breaking off mid-sentence; how much text is lost is conjectural. Subsequent references in parentheses in the text are to the annotated edition in vol. 1 of *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

² William Wordsworth, *An Evening Walk. An Epistle. In Verse. Addressed to a Young Lady, from the Lakes of the North of England* (London: J. Johnson, 1793); *Descriptive Sketches. In Verse. Taken during a Pedestrian Tour in the Italian, Grison, Swiss, and Savoyard Alps* (London: J. Johnson, 1793).

fashionable locations: the English Lakes and the “Italian, Grison, Swiss, and Savoyard Alps.” In *Descriptive Sketches*, epigraphs from Virgil and Lucretius and a formal dedication to Jones, now ordained and a fellow of St. John’s College, complete the impression of conventionality and conformity. The authorial self-fashioning could hardly be more different from his self-presentation on the title page of the “Letter.” By declaring himself “a Republican,” Wordsworth was positioning himself on the radical extreme of British politics, signalling his support for the French republic and opposition to the British constitution, and using a term which by February 1793 had become, as Joseph Priestley observed, “one of the most opprobrious in the English language.”³

What prompted this provocative, though anonymous, display of radicalism was the publication on 30 January 1793 of Richard Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff’s appendix to a sermon he had delivered in Westminster eight years earlier and was printing for the first time. The *Sermon* itself was one target of Wordsworth’s polemic, since Watson had used it to defend God’s infinite wisdom in creating both rich and poor, and to give reasons why the poor should “be perfectly contented with their conditions, and be satisfied that things could not have been better ordered.”⁴ The damaging effects of poverty and the injustice of the economic system that perpetuates it are major themes of Wordsworth’s pamphlet and he takes Watson to task for adopting what he sees as a fundamentally unchristian position. But it is Watson’s *Appendix* that is the focus of his attack. Watson had previously been a supporter the French Revolution – he was known, Wordsworth reminds him, as the “levelling prelate, bishop of the dissenters” (1: 31) – but the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January had occasioned a complete change of heart and a renunciation of his liberal principles. Watson

³ Joseph Priestley, *An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the Riots in Birmingham, Part II* (London: J. Johnson, 1792) 113. For early influences on Wordsworth’s republicanism, see Zera Fink, “Wordsworth and the English Republican Tradition,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 47 (1948): 107-108; and Leslie F. Chard, II, *Dissenting Republican: Wordsworth’s Early Life and Thought in their Political Context* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972). Both studies, however, underestimate the French resonance of the word and the political dangerousness of Wordsworth’s self-identification as a “Republican” at this moment, just months after the declaration of the French republic, and with Britain and France now at war. Wordsworth, too, may have underestimated this, and his decision not to publish the pamphlet may reflect the advice of others – possibly his publisher Joseph Johnson and/or his lawyer brother Richard – in a better position to judge.

⁴ Richard Watson, *A Sermon Preached Before the Stewards of the Westminster Dispensary at Their Anniversary Meeting, in Charlotte Street Chapel, April 1785. With an Appendix. By R. Watson, D.D. Lord Bishop of Llandaff* (London: T. Cadell and T. Evans, 1793) 3.

denounces the execution of the king as an act of savagery, declares republicanism "the most odious of all tyrannies,"⁵ rejects the French doctrines of Liberty and Equality as total perversions of those principles, and, while admitting that the British constitution is not perfect, insists that is "far too excellent to be amended by peasants and mechanics."⁶

In framing his reply, Wordsworth takes in, too, Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), the source for most of Watson's loyalist rhetoric and the prototype for the "extraordinary" act of apostasy involved in what Wordsworth sarcastically terms Watson's "political confession of faith" (1: 32). Much of the critical commentary on the "Letter," including Owen and Smyser's in the standard Clarendon Press edition, has been concerned with identifying Wordsworth's own sources, placing his pamphlet in the context of the French Revolution debate in Britain, and gauging the precise level of Wordsworth's political radicalization. Though the exact date of composition is not known, it is now accepted that the "Letter" was composed soon after Watson's pamphlet, whilst the "modish lamentation" (1: 32) for the executed king, to which Wordsworth refers, was still widespread.⁷ Most commentators now agree, too, that Wordsworth's stance on most political issues (parliamentary reform, universal suffrage, social equality, the absurdity of titles, primogeniture) is Paineite rather than Godwinian.⁸ Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, published on 14 February 1793, was once considered a possible source, but Wordsworth's engagement with it appears to postdate the "Letter," whereas he draws continuously, without naming Paine, on the two parts of *Rights of Man* (1791, 1792) and Paine's earlier tract, *Common Sense* (1776).⁹

In a pattern of Anglo-French cross-reference we will see replicated on other levels, the echoes of Paine are balanced by extensive citation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This includes a direct quotation from the *Contrat social* (1762) and allusions to other Rousseau texts as well as to the strongly Rousseauvian *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789.¹⁰ Where Wordsworth diverges most markedly from Paine is over the execution of Louis Capet. Paine

⁵ Watson 19. Wordsworth quotes this passage in his reply (1: 35).

⁶ Watson 26.

⁷ For other examples of "modish lamentation," see Owen and Smyser 1: 52.

⁸ Owen and Smyser 1: 23; Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography. The Early Years 1770-1803* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) 255.

⁹ For echoes of Paine, see Edward Niles Hooker, "Wordsworth's 'Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff,'" *Studies in Philology*, 28.3 (1931): 522-31.

¹⁰ For Rousseau's influence on the "Letter," see Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 163-67.

who, as a Quaker, did not believe in capital punishment, had voted against this sentence in the trial of Louis in the National Convention, thus incurring the wrath of Marat, but Wordsworth condones the execution, dismissing Watson's exaggerated concern for "the personal sufferings of the late royal martyr" (1: 32) and insisting that, had Watson "attended to the history of the French revolution as minutely as its importance demands," rather than bewailing the king's death he would instead "have regretted that the blind fondness of his people had placed a human being in that monstrous situation which rendered him unaccountable before a human tribunal" (1: 32). In justifying the regicide, Wordsworth takes, as Gregory Dart notes,¹¹ the Montagnard line, a position that few British radicals would openly espouse and one which shows he is still thinking in French terms, though writing for a British readership.

When he turns to the more general question of revolutionary violence, he takes a similarly radical line, arguing that "a time of revolution is not the season of true Liberty" since "the obstinacy & perversion of men is such that she is too often obliged to borrow the very arms of despotism to overthrow him, and in order to reign in peace must establish herself by violence. She deplors such stern necessity, but the safety of the people, her supreme law, is her consolation." (1: 33-34) This rationalization of political violence closely anticipates that of Robespierre in his famous speech on the principles of political morality, where he defines revolutionary government as "le despotisme de la liberté contre la tyrannie."¹² Such arguments from extreme expediency, which led in April 1793 to the formation of the Committee of Public Safety and later to the Terror, were increasingly common in France from mid-1792 onwards, but rarely heard in England. In invoking them, Wordsworth again shows himself to be still immersed in French revolutionary discourse, adopting positions and using language that would almost certainly have been considered seditious in an English context.

Wordsworth offers a second justification of political violence by arguing that, such is the level of oppression people suffered "in all the old governments," it is inevitable that once they gain their liberty, they will initially abuse it: "The animal just released from its stall will exhaust the overflow of its spirits in a round of wanton vagaries, but it will soon return to itself and enjoy its freedom in moderate

¹¹ Dart 164.

¹² Maximilien Robespierre, "Sur les principes de morale politique," *Ceuvres de Robespierre*, ed. Auguste Vermorel (Paris: Cournol, 1866) 302 (speech to the Convention, 5 February 1794). For Wordsworth's "rehearsal of the Revolutionary poetics of violence" in the "Letter," see Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989) 184-85.

and regular delight." (1: 38) The 'liberated animal' metaphor was a familiar one in both French and British writing on the Revolution: Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, in her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794), compares the French people to a "wild elephant," goaded in captivity until it finally breaks free, then "treading down with blind fury friends as well as foes."¹³ Wordsworth's more homely version of the metaphor, of a farm animal released from its stall, is notable for its euphemism: "a round of wanton vagaries" is an oddly benign description¹⁴ of acts of violence that included the September Massacres of 1792, whose immediate aftermath he had experienced at first hand in Paris, and about which he was later to write in such shocking terms in *The Prelude*.

As his private correspondence shows, Wordsworth was soon to take a very different line on revolutionary violence. By June 1794, while reaffirming his support for democracy and his opposition to the British constitution, he was telling William Mathews: "I recoil from the base idea of a revolution [...] I am a determined enemy to every species of violence."¹⁵ The contradiction is stark, and, as many critics have pointed out,¹⁶ his altered view on this matter is clearly an important stage in the process of political realignment by which the radical extremist of early 1793 became the liberal moderate of 1798 and the Tory apologist of 1814. I want to make a different point, however, by emphasizing how, in the "Letter," while entering the fray of British political debate, Wordsworth positions himself as an expert on *French* politics, a "Republican" with first-hand experience of revolutionary France, knowledge of its key events and locations, and personal insight into the thinking of the French people, including prominent politicians as well as ordinary citizens.

He was by no means the only such expert. The leading British commentator on revolutionary France was the expatriate poet and novelist Helen Maria Williams, whom Wordsworth had hoped to meet in Orléans or Paris but had missed. As he was drafting his "Letter," she was preparing a third volume of her

¹³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (London: J. Johnson, 1794) 32.

¹⁴ The manuscript shows Wordsworth worrying at the wording here: the phrase initially reads "commit a thousand vagaries" (1: 38n).

¹⁵ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. 1, The Early Years 1787-1805*, 2nd edn., ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 124.

¹⁶ Eugene L. Stelzig, "'The Shield of Human Nature': Wordsworth's Reflections on the Revolution in France," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 45.4 (1991): 415-31 (423); James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

best-selling *Letters from France*, first published in 1790.¹⁷ Collaborating with her on this volume was the co-founder of the *Analytical Review*, Thomas Christie, who had previously published his own *Letters on the Revolution in France and on the New Constitution* (1791), a polemical reply to Burke which, like Wordsworth's "Letter," drew on first-hand knowledge of France. Another influential eyewitness account, with an opposite political message, was Arthur Young's *The Example of France: A Warning to Britain*, published in London four days before Watson's *Sermon and Appendix*. Like Watson's, this was a recantation text, reversing the largely sympathetic account of the Revolution Young had given in his *Travels in France* (1792). The year 1793 also saw the first publications from the "English Press," a radical publishing house launched in Paris by Williams's partner John Hurford Stone.¹⁸ Among these was John Oswald's *The Government of the People; or, a Sketch of the Constitution for the Universal Common-wealth* (1793), a follow-up to his *Review of the Constitution of Great Britain* (1791). As such titles suggest, preoccupation with constitutions was key feature of this phase of the Revolution debate, reflected both in Watson's *Appendix* and in Wordsworth's reply. Like Christie and the self-declared "Anglo-Franc" Oswald,¹⁹ Wordsworth writes from both French and English perspectives, countering Watson's defence of the English constitution with reference to French constitutional theory.

Wordsworth's use of Williams's *Letters* for source material for *The Prelude* is well documented²⁰ and his knowledge of Young's *Example of France* pamphlet is also likely, given its prominence and timing. His familiarity with more marginal "Anglo-Franc" publications such as Oswald's remains conjectural. So too does his level of contact, if any, with the radical émigré circles out of which the "English Press" and other expatriate publishing ventures emerged. When in Paris in October to December 1792, did he form links with the newly formed

¹⁷ For the publication history, see Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England; Containing Various Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution*, ed. Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001) 20-25.

¹⁸ See Madeleine B. Stern, "The English Press in Paris and Its Successors, 1793-1852," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 74 (January 1980): 307-59; and Simon Macdonald, "English-Language Newspapers in Revolutionary France," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36.1 (2013): 17-33.

¹⁹ The phrase "Anglo-Franc" appears to be Oswald's coinage, applied to himself on the title page of several of his publications. See David Erdman, *Commerce des lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris, 1790-1793* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986) 189.

²⁰ Deborah Kennedy, "Revolutionary Tales: Helen Maria Williams's *Letters from France* and William Wordsworth's 'Vaudracour and Julia,'" *Wordsworth Circle*, 21.3 (1990): 109-14.

"British Club," of which Stone was president and other British and American writers including Paine, Williams, Wollstonecraft, Joel Barlow, Sampson Perry, John Oswald and Robert Merry members or affiliates?²¹ Was he present, as Kenneth Johnston and others have speculated,²² at the Club's "English Civic Feast" at White's Hotel on 18 November at which the French republic was toasted to the tune of "Ça ira," and at which a series of other toasts were proposed: among them, to "[t]he speedy abolition of all hereditary title and feudal distinctions;" to "[t]he Ladies of Great Britain and Ireland, particularly those who have distinguished themselves by their writings in favour of the French revolution;" and to "the new mode of advertising good books by proclamation and the court of King's Bench"²³ – an ironic reference to the Royal Proclamation against Seditious Writings of May 1792 and to Paine's forthcoming trial *in absentia* for seditious libel, publicity for which had served to boost the already huge sales of *Rights of Man*? If not, what else was he doing that evening? Tossing and turning in his Parisian garret, having Shakespearean nightmares about the September Massacres "a little month" earlier, as he tells us in *The Prelude* (1805: X, 65)²⁴ Not according to the "Letter." Nobody loses sleep over "a round of wanton vagaries," and there is no sign in the "Letter" that in 1793 Wordsworth regarded the recent killings as anything other than part of the "stern necessity" of the revolutionary situation.²⁵

Whatever Wordsworth's contacts in Paris and whatever his knowledge of the émigré publishing scene, the "Letter" is an Anglo-French pamphlet, shaped as

²¹ See Rachel Rogers, "White's Hotel: A Junction of British Radical Culture in Early 1790s Paris," *Caliban: French Journal of English Studies*, 33 (2013): 153-72; and John G. Alger, "The British Colony in Paris, 1792-1793," *English Historical Review*, 13.52 (1898): 672-94.

²² Kenneth Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York: Norton, 1998) 325; Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 82.

²³ "Account from the Newspapers of an English Civic Feast at White's Hotel in Paris, on the 18th of November, 1792," *Annual Register, 1792*, reprint edn. (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1798) 2: 153-55. Based on reports in, e.g., *Journal de Perlet*, 2.61 (21 November 1721): 485-87.

²⁴ *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979). Subsequent references in parentheses are to this edition.

²⁵ This was a view widely held by the French revolutionists and shared by an Englishman Wordsworth claimed to have met regularly in Paris, James Watt, Jr, son of the famous engineer. Watt wrote home in a letter to his father on 5 September 1792 about his "involuntary horror" at the scenes he was witnessing but added: "at the same time I see the absolute necessity of them." Quoted in Eric Robinson, "An English Jacobin: James Watt, Junior, 1769-1848," *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 11.3 (1955): 353.

much by French thinking about the Revolution as by the British 'Revolution Debate' to which it was ostensibly contributing. Its most distinctive and effective manoeuvres are, precisely, comparative ones. Consider, for a moment, how Wordsworth develops his point about the "idle cry of modish lamentation" (1: 32) over the execution of the king. Having referred to the "monstrous" nature of a political system in which a monarch was deemed unaccountable to a human tribunal (i.e. the doctrine of the "divine right of kings"), he then does what no other British pamphleteer does when addressing this topic: quotes the Abbé Henri Grégoire, who, at the opening of the National Convention, had declared that there was not a citizen present at the *journée* of 10 August 1792, the bloody confrontation at the Tuileries, "who, if he could have dragged before the eyes of Louis the corpse of one of his murdered brothers, might not have exclaimed to him, Tyran, voilà ton ouvrage" (Tyrant, that is your handiwork).²⁶ The citation is a bold rhetorical move, underlining Wordsworth's point about the difference between genuine heart-felt sorrow for the victims of a ruthless tyrant and the shallow, conventionalized sympathy expressed by Watson for the king. But it is also a brilliant deployment of what Roland Barthes calls *écriture révolutionnaire*. In defining this mode of writing, a distinctive product of the 1789 Revolution, Barthes cites Baudelaire's remark about "the grandiloquent truth of that gestures on life's great occasions" and gives as an example the defiant words of the Girondin deputy Guadet as he was arrested and about to face the guillotine: "Executioner, do your duty. Go take my head to the tyrants of my country. It has always turned them pale; once severed, it will turn them paler still."²⁷ Grégoire's "Tyran, voilà ton ouvrage," as quoted by Wordsworth, captures the same sense of theatrical amplification, confirming Barthes's point that *écriture révolutionnaire* was an exact writing, life-size and adequate to the occasion, though now seemingly turgid and overblown.

As Nicholas Roe has noted, Wordsworth's citation of Abbé Grégoire has a special appropriateness here because he may well have known him personally.²⁸ Grégoire had been elected Bishop of Blois in February 1791 and presided at meetings of the Blois branch of the Friends of the Constitution which Wordsworth may also have attended. Wordsworth, though, is not name-

²⁶ Owen and Smyser 1: 32. Grégoire's speech, delivered on 15 November 1792 (not the opening of the Convention, which took place two months earlier, but the day he was elected president, after calling for the king to be tried) was reported in *Le Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel* and elsewhere.

²⁷ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (*Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, 1953), trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 21-22.

²⁸ Roe 66-67; cf. Johnston 307-309.

dropping, he is citing Grégoire for rhetorical effect. Part of the force of that rhetoric is contrastive, since he sets Grégoire directly against Watson, as a "bishop, a man of philosophy and humanity as distinguished as your Lordship" (1: 32), but of an opposite moral and political character. Contrast was a familiar device in literary and visual satire, given new currency by George Rowlandson's much-reproduced caricature *The Contrast 1792*, juxtaposing "British Liberty" and "French Liberty," variations on which became a staple of loyalist propaganda.²⁹ Wordsworth borrows the technique to opposite political effect, to juxtapose the qualities of two bishops, the lapsed liberal of Llandaff who defended monarchy and preached the necessity of inequality, and the ardent republican of Blois who coined the memorable saying "les rois sont dans l'ordre moral ce que les monstres sont dans l'ordre physique" (kings are in the moral world what monsters are in the natural world)³⁰ – a saying to which Wordsworth probably alludes in his reference to the "monstrous situation" (1: 32) of royal unaccountability.

An analogy to Wordsworth's polemical tactics here is the anonymous pamphlet, *Paine and Burke Contrasted* (1792), which performs textually the kind of binary opposition Rowlandson and others were using in visual satire.³¹ By 1793, the point at which Wordsworth joined the pamphlet war, the comparative principle was a familiar enough device to make possible the publication of an anthology entitled *A Comparative Display of the Different Opinions of the Most Distinguished British Writers on the Subject of the French Revolution*.³² Though not strictly binary, since it includes a range of views on each topic, this book is a striking illustration of the self-consciousness of the Revolution debate in Britain, which was being anthologized even as it unfolded. By 1793, the intertextual tactics of the debate had acquired a level of finesse which meant that writers operated through a kind of short-hand, mobilizing well-established arguments in an abbreviated form, alluding glancingly (and often playfully) to other positions, and using a heavily ritualized form of intellectual combat.³³

²⁹ See David Bindman, *The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution*, exhibition catalogue (London: British Museum Publications, 1989) 118-22 (nos. 71-76). The original design, engraved by Rowlandson, was by Lord George Murray.

³⁰ Speech at the opening of the Convention, 21 September 1792.

³¹ See David Duff, "Burke and Paine: Contrasts," *The Cambridge Companion to British Writing of the French Revolution in the 1790s*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 47-70.

³² [Anon.], *A Comparative Display of the Different Opinions of the Most Distinguished British Writers on the Subject of the French Revolution*, 2 vols. (London: J. Debrett, 1793).

³³ On this aspect of the pamphlet war, see Marilyn Butler, "Introduction," *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and Revolution Controversy*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Cambridge: Cambridge University

In this context, what is notable about Wordsworth's "Letter," if we examine it for its discursive and stylistic properties, rather than simply its doctrinal content, is its assimilation of the codes both of the British pamphlet war and of French *écriture révolutionnaire*. The device of contrast is one such code, and Wordsworth's juxtaposition of Burke and Paine is as strategic as his contrasting of Watson and Grégoire. Another code is radical irony, a device Wordsworth learned from Paine, whose writing is full of insolent ripostes intended to subvert and mock his opponents' arguments. There are several attempts at this kind of writing in the "Letter." One of the most strongly Painite sections is where Wordsworth gives his own version of the "governing beyond the grave" passage in *Rights of Man*, where Paine ridicules Burke's rewriting of Rousseau's theory of social contract as an inviolable compact between the living, the dead and the yet-to-be born.³⁴ Like Paine, if somewhat more clumsily, Wordsworth presents Burke's theory as a form of Gothic, Oriental grotesquerie, "a refinement in cruelty superiour to that which in the East yokes the living to the dead," in which, "by the indissoluble compact of a dead parchment, we are "bound to cherish a corse at the bosom, when reason might call aloud that it should be entombed." (1: 48) The technique of reductive analogy is similar to Paine's but the sentence is too laboured to be fully effective. Paine's wit is an art of concision (e.g., "governing beyond the grave") which Wordsworth reaches for but does quite match.

Another piece of quasi-Painite irony that slightly misfires and is in fact deleted on the manuscript of the "Letter" is where Wordsworth takes Watson to task for "faults of omission" (1: 48), namely passing over in silence two topical issues that were directly relevant to his argument: the campaign for parliamentary reform and the popular struggle for greater liberty and equality. "Your Lordship's conduct" in not mentioning "the two grand causes of this working of the popular mind," says Wordsworth, "brings to mind the story of a company of strolling comedians who gave out the play of Hamlet as the performance of the evening," but then tell the audience that "from circumstances of particular convenience it was hoped they would dispense with the omission of the character of – Hamlet"

Press, 1984) 2; Steven Blakemore, *Intertextual War: Edmund Burke and the French Revolution in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, and James Mackintosh* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997); and James T. Boulton's foundational study, *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).

³⁴ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings*, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 92; Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 194-95.

(1: 48 n). This seems to be a cumbersome – and not especially funny – reworking of the *'Hamlet without the prince'* joke, which rightly gets edited out of the fair copy.

Wordsworth makes a further attempt at humour in the subsequent paragraph when he pretends to ponder over the question of how to explain Watson's inconsistency. "In some parts of England," he writes,

it is quaintly said, when a drunken man is seen reeling towards his house, that he has business on both sides of the road. Observing your lordship's tortuous path, the spectators will be far from insinuating that you have partaken of Mr Burke's intoxicating bowl; they will content themselves, shaking their heads as you stagger along, with remarking that you have business on both sides of the road.

(1: 49)

The use of humorous idiomatic expressions for satirical effect is another of Paine's techniques: Wordsworth deploys it here, switching from the earnest tone of earlier parts of the "Letter" to restate the charge of apostasy by means of a figurative joke. His uneasiness with this playful register, however, is signalled by the awkward repetition of the punchline and by his clumsy attempt to intensify the metaphor of drunkenness through a reference to "Mr Burke's intoxicating bowl" (meaning the seductive power of Burke's prose). Rather than strengthening, the elaboration dulls the metaphor, as do the superfluous details about spectators "observing," "insinuating" and "shaking their heads." The basic analogy is an apt and amusing one and but the delivery of the joke is flawed.

Wordsworth comes closest to mastering the laconic Paineite manner in the final (extant) paragraph of the "Letter," where he links the question of political consistency with that of transparency. Here, once again, he juxtaposes English and French examples, remarking that outright enemies of Liberty are far less dangerous than the enemies "lurking in our ranks," the false friends such as La Fayette or Mirabeau who assume "the insidious mask of patriotism" while plotting against the cause they profess to support (La Fayette and Mirabeau, heroes of the early phase of the Revolution, had been subsequently exposed as closet royalists, in the pay of or sympathetic to Louis). In his open hostility to the revolutionary cause he had previously supported, Watson had displayed an admirable transparency which leads Wordsworth to declare, with heavy irony: "we thank you for your desertion" (1: 49). Interestingly, in condemning furtive duplicity, he uses the metaphor of masking that was a ubiquitous trope of French

revolutionary rhetoric,³⁵ but then uses a distinctively British form of rhetoric – deadpan humour – to ridicule the opposite, flagrant self-contradiction.

Elsewhere in the “Letter” Wordsworth uses other polemical devices that had become staple features of the British pamphlet war: ironic reversal, for example, where an opponent’s arguments or images are turned back on themselves, as in the many ripostes to Burke’s “age of chivalry” passage in the *Reflections*.³⁶ Wordsworth offers another variation on this well-worn theme, referring sarcastically to Burke’s “philosophic lamentation over the extinction of Chivalry” (1: 35) while mocking the “fatality by which the advocates of error furnish weapons for their own destruction.” (1: 35) The banter quickly subsides, however, when he turns to address Burke directly (“infatuated moralist!”) before resuming his reply to Watson, whom he accuses of “labouring under the same delusion” (1: 36).

Wordsworth provides his own version, too, of another set-piece of the Revolution debate, mockery of Burke’s reference to the “swinish multitude.” This ill-advised metaphor for the working class, gleefully adopted by Burke’s opponents, inspired numerous radical publications with ironic titles like *Pig’s Meat*, *Hog’s Wash*, and *The Rights of Swine*, all of which were devoted to educating ordinary people about their political rights in exactly the way Burke was objecting when he used the phrase.³⁷ In Wordsworth’s case, it is not so much Burke’s insulting metaphor that triggers the response, as Watson’s reprise of Burke’s argument in the *Appendix*, where he insists on the exclusion of “peasants and mechanics” from political representation on the grounds that their “utility [...] ceases when they affect to become legislators; when they intrude themselves into concerns, for which their education has not fitted them.”³⁸ Rather than confronting this egregious snobbery and discrimination by highlighting the plucky resolve of the British working class, as Thomas Spence, Daniel Isaac Eaton and other popular radicals did in their replies to Burke, Wordsworth draws instead on his French experience and invokes the counter-example of “Père Gérard.” This was the sobriquet of the Breton peasant-politician Michel Gérard who, as Deputy for Rennes from 1789, had played an important role in the establishment of the National Assembly by lending popular legitimacy to the largely middle-class Third Estate. Widely respected for his honesty, integrity and

³⁵ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1986) 39 (chapter “The Rhetoric of Revolution,” 19-51).

³⁶ Burke 169-70. For polemical responses to the “age of chivalry” passage, see David Duff, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 21-30 (section “Antithesising Burke: Paine, Godwin, Mackintosh”).

³⁷ For these and other examples of this motif, see Duff, “Burke and Paine” 59-62.

³⁸ Watson 26-27.

plain-speaking eloquence, Gérard had retired from politics in 1791 but his fame was perpetuated by the publication that year of Collot d'Herbois's *Almanach du Père Gérard*, a cheaply priced almanac which borrows his name and ideas to popularize the precepts of the new constitution.³⁹ A highly effective piece of revolutionary propaganda, the *Almanach* depicts Père Gérard returning from Paris to his native Brittany and explaining to the local people the principles of the constitution through a series of twelve easily-understood conversations.⁴⁰ The *Almanach* went through numerous editions and was translated into several languages, including an English translation by John Oswald, jointly published in Paris and London.⁴¹

In contemporary illustrations,⁴² Père Gérard was shown as the embodiment of the democratic ideal, a politician addressing ordinary people not *de haut en bas* but as "a man speaking to men" (and women and children). As such, he may have served as an important role model for Wordsworth, many of whose poems, including the French Revolution sections of *The Excursion* (1814), feature Gérard-like versions of himself engaged in earnest political discussion in country settings much like the one in the *Almanach*. Despite the brief description of Père Gérard in Williams's *Letters Written in France*,⁴³ his name was not well known in England in 1793, which makes Wordsworth's reference to him in the "Letter" all the more revealing. Père Gérard's "blunt honesty," Wordsworth writes, "overawed and baffled the refinements of hypocritical patriots," and his name "will long be mentioned with admiration and respect through the eighty-three departments" (1: 39). His example serves not only to refute the argument of Watson that a peasant or mechanic could never be a useful legislator, but also as

³⁹ Jean-Marie Collot d'Herbois, *Almanach du Père Gérard, pour l'année 1792* (Paris: Buisson, 1792). For the publication history, see Michel Biard, "L'Almanach du Père Gérard, un exemple de diffusion des idées jacobines," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 283 (1991): 19-29.

⁴⁰ For the political function of almanacs, see Lise Andries, "Almanacs: Revolutionizing a Traditional Genre," *Revolution in Print: The Press in France 1775-1800*, ed. Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 203-22.

⁴¹ Jean-Marie Collot d'Herbois, *The Spirit of the French Constitution, or the Almanach of Goodman Gérard, for the Year 1792*, trans. John Oswald (London: Ridgway; Paris: Printing Office of the Social Circle, 1791). For Oswald's collaboration with Collot, see Erdman 126-27. The original and translation were published simultaneously in late November 1791.

⁴² Most editions of the *Almanach* carried an engraved frontispiece by Nicholas de Launay, *Le Père Gérard tient le livre de la Constitution et l'explique a ses concitoyens*.

⁴³ Williams 86 (Letter VII).

a French foil to “hypocritical” British (or Irish) patriots like Burke, who put their rhetorical “refinements” at the service of anti-democratic values. Barthes, in his analysis of *écriture révolutionnaire*, singles out the newsletters of the foul-speaking stove mechanic “Le Père Duchesne,” pseudonym of the radical Parisian journalist and revolutionary leader Jacques Hébert, to illustrate a special mode of discourse – full of expletives – that marked the revolutionary situation.⁴⁴ *Père Gérard*, with his more wholesome discourse, is *Père Duchesne’s* rural counterpart, and Wordsworth’s citation of him in the “Letter” is an important strand in his own, Anglo-French version of *écriture révolutionnaire*.

In the last part of this essay, I want to highlight another thread in this rich intertextual weave which will throw light on the personal dimension to Wordsworth’s pamphlet and on the daring way in which he uses literary allusions in both English and French to encode sensitive biographical information. One of the key themes of the “Letter” is public reputation: this is vital to his political argument, insofar as much of the pamphlet consists of a sustained attack on the probity of his antagonist, Richard Watson. As with much political polemic from this period, the method of argument is unashamedly *ad hominem*, the validity of ideas being measured in part by the credibility of the people who hold them. Watson’s apostasy is presented not simply as a shift of opinion but as a fall from grace, an indelible stain on his once-impeccable reputation. The importance of this theme is signalled in the very first paragraph of the “Letter,” which opens with the word “reputation” and contains an extended allusion to Addison’s “The Vision of Mirza,” a “sublime allegory” about a perilous bridge full of trapdoors through which we can fall at any moment.⁴⁵ In Addison’s original allegory, the bridge signifies human life and its moral and psychological pitfalls; Wordsworth’s version is specifically about “public life” and the danger of losing one’s reputation, imaged here as plunging through a trapdoor into “the tide of contempt” (a pointed reworking of Addison’s phrase “Tide of Eternity”). The applicability of the allegory to Watson becomes all too clear as the argument proceeds.

By starting to publish, however, Wordsworth himself was entering public life, and he harboured a personal secret which, if known, would have destroyed his reputation and undermined his ability to take others publicly to task. I refer to his illegitimate daughter Anne-Caroline, born to his French mistress Annette

⁴⁴ Barthes 1.

⁴⁵ [Joseph Addison], “The First Vision of Mirzah,” *The Spectator*, ed. D.F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) 2: 121-26 (No. 159, 1 September 1711). As Owen and Smyser note (1: 50-51), Wordsworth had translated this paper into Italian while at Cambridge.

Vallon on 15 December 1792, but as yet unseen by Wordsworth, who had left Annette in Blois two months earlier. Whatever his intentions towards Annette, the scandal of this relationship had already ruled out his hopes of a curacy – the career path he had at one point contemplated – and alienated him from his uncles, his former legal guardians. The fact that Britain was now at war with France had deepened the scandal – he had slept with the enemy – and reduced the possibility of his resolving it through marriage, by making travel to France more difficult as well as severely interrupting postal communication (the two extant letters from Annette to Wordsworth and his sister, both dated 20 March 1793, survive only because they were intercepted by the French authorities and preserved in a public record office in Blois;⁴⁶ other letters from her got through but are now lost, as is the Wordsworths' side of the correspondence). The necessity for concealment was evident and Wordsworth's success in doing this is attested by the fact that his relationship with Annette and the existence of their child were known to only his closest friends and members of his family throughout his lifetime and beyond.

Yet Wordsworth is a confessional writer, and the "Letter" is a tract about moral integrity and transparency, Rousseauvian virtues which he explicitly extols in it. Understandably, modern biographers, now in possession of at least some of the facts, have scoured the "Letter" for traces of Annette and Caroline. The closest that any has come to identifying an autobiographical thread is a pattern of images referring, as Kenneth Johnston puts it, "to the naturalness of passion in a time of the pregnancy, labor, and birthpangs of a new social order," metaphors which are counterpointed by a second group of images referring to the "unnatural (that is, illicit) sexual practices to which the poor are driven by economic hardship."⁴⁷ Wordsworth could have employed neither set of metaphors, Johnston argues, "without having his own situation in mind." Just how tangled and uncomfortable his thinking on this front may have become is suggested by the strangely convoluted passage where he refers to the "miseries entailed upon the marriage of those who are not rich," and the "promiscuous intercourse" to which "the bulk of mankind are [...] are impelled by the instincts of nature, and the dreadful satisfaction of escaping the prospect of infants, sad fruit of such intercourse, whom they are unable to support" (1: 43).

The oddness of this statement resides not only in the oxymoronic nature of the phrase "dreadful satisfaction" but also in the self-contradiction of simultaneously

⁴⁶ For (untranslated) texts of the letters, see Émile Legouis, *William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon* (London: Dent, 1922) 124-33 ("Appendix II").

⁴⁷ Johnston 338.

“escaping” the prospect of unwanted children and being confronted with them as the inevitable “fruit” of promiscuity. One possible explanation⁴⁸ is that “dreadful satisfaction” is a reference to contraception, crude forms of which were available in Wordsworth’s time; the implication would then be that men turn to prostitutes, using contraception, in order to avoid having children in their own marriage which they are then unable to support. The statement, though, is also open to the interpretation, proposed by Johnston, that it is not about men avoiding conception but about them fleeing from the sight of their illegitimate children whom they are unable to support.⁴⁹ On this reading, the relevance to Wordsworth’s own predicament is obvious, and it must have been painfully so to the author himself, whose uneasiness may be betrayed by the awkwardness of the syntax and phrasing.

Perhaps, though, a third and more scandalous reading is possible. Is the “dreadful satisfaction” referred to here – of conceiving and then abandoning a love-child – a foretaste (not chronologically but in the order of autobiographical revelation) of the “act of stealth / And troubled pleasure” described in the boat stealing episode of *The Prelude* (1805: I, 383-84), an episode that Christoph Bode has suggested is “emblematic of Wordsworth’s dealing with the past in general and with the French Revolution in particular”?⁵⁰ Is this strange, symptomatic phrase in the “Letter” a first, probably unconscious, indicator that this seemingly respectable English poet liked, in his youth, to live dangerously, and that the truly formative experiences in his life were not the ones in early childhood but the ones in early adulthood: the promiscuous, wanton, terrifying, guilt-inducing, imagination-inflaming experiences of revolutionary France, on the blood-stained streets of Paris and in the arms of Annette Vallon – or indeed on the run from her?

Such readings must remain speculative, and there is clearly a danger of over-interpretation of what remains an enigmatic passage. There is, though, one final piece of evidence, not thus far considered by biographers or critics, that the “Letter” contains, in a coded form, a reference to his own situation. It has been overlooked probably because it is contained within a literary reference which appears to be serving other purposes and which involves a canonical French text from which we might least expect a coded personal allusion. The text in question is Racine’s *Athalie* (1691), his last and greatest tragedy, a play for which Wordsworth made an exception to his general dislike of French literature,

⁴⁸ I am grateful to Christoph Bode for this suggestion, made in conversation.

⁴⁹ Johnston 338.

⁵⁰ See Christoph Bode’s essay in the present issue, 61.

retaining an admiration for it which he expressed to Thomas Moore nearly thirty years later when they met in Paris.⁵¹

The ostensible purpose of the reference to *Athalie* in the "Letter" is to underline his point that, with the execution of Louis Capet, the French monarchy has ceased to exist. "In France, royalty is no more; the person of the last anointed is no more also" (1: 33), he says bluntly, cutting through the sentimentality of Watson's lament (not only "modish" but also "irrational and weak") and demonstrating through his terseness the uncompromising republicanism he has been professing from the start. As in his justification of the "stern necessity" of revolutionary violence in the paragraph that immediately follows, the tone he strikes here is a recognisably French one. It is appropriate, then, that he chooses this moment to introduce an allusion to French literature, referring to a passage from Act I, Scene 2 of *Athalie*, where Joad, the High Priest, prophesies that, despite the attempt of Athalie to eliminate the entire bloodline of the house of David by murdering all of her own grandchildren, one of them will escape that fate, overthrow Athalie, take up the throne and "reillumine the torch of extinguished David" (1: 33). Lest we miss the reference, as most of his English readers doubtless would have done, he spells out in parenthesis that "I allude to a striking passage of Racine," then supplies a footnote which quotes (in French) the passage in question and adds a further quotation from the same speech which, he says, "applies so strongly to the present period that I cannot forbear transcribing it" (1: 33 n).

Interestingly, to make the allusion serve his purpose and fit the present circumstances, Wordsworth has to contradict Joad's prophecy and express the hope that it does *not* "please the almighty" to "raise his posterity to the rank of his ancestors" and reillumine the torch of David, since that would mean restoring the monarchy, Wordsworth has just declared extinct. Yet, in the play, that is precisely what happens: the child Joas has been rescued from the slaughter, kept hidden for eight years, then, in the final scene, in a masterful coup de théâtre, is presented sitting on the throne in the Temple to his murderous grandmother Athalie, who is promptly arrested and executed. Historically speaking, too, that is approximately what happened in France: contrary to Wordsworth's assertion that "royalty is no more," the defeat of

⁵¹ Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 114. The meeting with Moore took place on 24 October 1820; significantly, Wordsworth told him that he did not wish to see *Athalie* acted, "as it would never come up to the high imagination he had formed in reading it" (quoted in Wu 114).

Napoleon in 1814 led to a restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, with Louis XVI's brothers successively coming to the throne.

Wordsworth was not to know, of course, in 1793 what would happen in France twenty years later, but the inappropriateness of the analogy between the plot of *Athalie* and the trajectory of the French Revolution begs the question of why Wordsworth chose to make the comparison in the first place. The answer, I suggest, lies not in the political but in the personal coding of the "Letter." Despite his claim in his footnote about the topicality of Joad's speech, Wordsworth's reference to this play about a concealed child-king does not support his republican argument about the permanent eradication of the French monarchy. It does, on the other hand, throw out a coded hint – in the most dramatic way possible – that there was a secret child in Wordsworth's life who would carry his bloodline into France and be part of that country's future. If this secret had been revealed openly, it would have destroyed Wordsworth's reputation, just as surely as Joas destroys the fortunes, and the life, of *Athalie*. A more perilous trapdoor – to revert to the Mirzah allegory – could hardly be imagined. But the secret was not revealed openly; it was revealed covertly, encoded in a French literary allusion. Nobody, it seems, knew how to decode the reference, and, in any case, the "Letter" remained unpublished. Even when, eventually, it was published, in modern critical editions, it remained under-interpreted, refusing to yield up till now its biggest, and, in personal terms, its most devastating secret.

For all its clumsiness, then – its phrasal infelicities, misfiring jokes and misplaced analogies – the "Letter" presents a remarkable interweaving of public and private codes, and of literary and non-literary discourses. Wordsworth's use of *Athalie* suggests a method of encoding sensitive personal material which points forward to the strategy of displacement in Book IX of *The Prelude*, where the story of Vaudracour and Julia stands in lieu of an account of his relationship with Annette. The "Letter" is a political pamphlet, not an autobiographical poem, but personal experience breaks through the surface of the political argument, revealing (to himself if not to others) important parallels between his political and personal dilemmas as he made the transition from his French life, with its unresolved complications, to his uncertain new life back in England (it is no coincidence that the pamphlet opens with the metaphor of a bridge). To an extraordinary degree, the argument of the "Letter," and its intertextual patterning, are structured through a sequence of binary oppositions, its English references systematically juxtaposed with French ones: Watson versus Grégoire, Watson versus Gérard, monarchy versus republicanism, the English constitution versus the French constitution, Paine versus Rousseau, Shakespeare versus

Racine, the burning of the Priestley house (1: 38) versus the Diamond Necklace affair (1: 35) – and many more. To recognise these pairings, and the strategic interweaving of codes, is not to make claims for the “Letter” as a major work of literature but to recognise that it has more to tell us about the “growth of the poet’s mind” than may be apparent from a casual reading.

“ARMS FOLDED, BACK TURNED”: WORDSWORTH’S LATE SONNETS AND THE REVISION OF HISTORY

Christy Edwall

While The Prelude is an undeniable resource for Wordsworth’s account of the French Revolution and its aftermath, this article will focus on the tracking of history by a smaller perceptual unit, the sonnet. Saluted by the poet as a consoling prison for those “[w]ho have felt the weight of too much liberty,” the sonnet might seem like an odd choice of form to indict a liberator-turned-tyrant and subsequent threats to national liberty. Yet the sonnet is a form built for reversal, just as Wordsworth’s political opinions altered with time, as he became a kind of political Rückenfigur. While Wordsworth’s political sonnets of 1802-16 have been well served by critics, this essay addresses the means by which French history is re-encountered and revised in later sonnets such as “On Being Stranded Near the Harbour of Boulogne” (1821), “To B.R. Haydon, On Seeing His Picture of Napoleon Buonaparte on the Island of St. Helena” (1831), and “In Allusion to Various Recent Histories and Notices of the French Revolution” (1839). These sonnets show Wordsworth to be aware of other men’s revisions as well as his own: revisions which continue to activate his own remembering and reconstitution of history within the sonnet’s “scanty ground.”

In his essay on Milton’s sonnets, published in the second volume of *Table Talk* (1822), Hazlitt’s praise of Milton’s predecessors is notably stingy. Sidney’s offerings are “more like riddles than sonnets.”¹ Shakespeare’s, with a few exceptions, are “overcharged and monotonous.”² After Milton, Thomas Warton’s sonnets earn the compliment of being “undoubtedly excellent, both in style and matter,” though not up to the Miltonic mode. Finally, Hazlitt considers “Mr.

¹ William Hazlitt, “On Milton’s Sonnets,” *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998) 9: 157.

² Hazlitt, “On Milton’s Sonnets” 157.

Wordsworth," whose sonnets he concedes are "finely conceived and high-sounding." He continues:

They mouth it well, and are said to be sacred to Liberty [... but] [t]he beauty of Milton's Sonnets is their sincerity, the spirit of poetical patriotism which they breathe. Either Milton's or the living bard's are defective in this respect [...]. It would be no niggard praise to Mr. Wordsworth to grant that he was either half the man or half the poet that Milton was. He has not his high and various imagination, nor his deep and fixed principle. Milton did not worship the rising sun, nor turn his back on a losing and fallen cause.³

To "mouth it well" is to be suspected of pompous oratory: charges which were not far from the pens of Wordsworth's detractors.⁴ Hazlitt is suspicious of lip-service, that which is "proffered but not performed" (*OED*). Like Shelley and Byron, he was dismayed by Wordsworth's disavowed radicalism and the trajectory of his steadily deepening conservatism. The Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland was the counter-example to his sonnet-master Milton, who, although employing a poetic form built for reversal, Hazlitt celebrates for constancy. Hazlitt did not know, or did not think it worth mentioning, that Milton's most radical sonnets to Fairfax, Cromwell, Sir Henry Vane the Younger and the second sonnet to Cyriack Skinner were omitted in his 1673 *Poems*, and therefore even the work of the earlier poet – he of the "deep and fixed principle" – was open to canny repackaging.⁵

By implicit comparison with Milton, who "did not worship the rising sun, nor turn his back on a losing and fallen cause," Wordsworth is accused by Hazlitt of political revisionism by means of two common metaphors: for his fickle allegiance to the sun's cycling fortunes, and for reversing his physical stance. Both metaphors are employed by Wordsworth's own sonnet, "To B.R. Haydon,

³ Hazlitt, "On Milton's Sonnets" 157-58.

⁴ Consider Francis Jeffrey's comment in his review of *The Excursion*, which takes exception to Wordsworth's "laudable zeal for the efficacy of his preachments, [which] he very naturally mistakes for the ardour of poetical inspiration... and the mystical verbiage of the Methodist pulpit is repeated, till the speaker entertains no doubt that he is the elected organ of divine truth and persuasion." *Edinburgh Review*, 24 (November 1814): 1-30. Robert Woof (ed.), *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2001) 385-86.

⁵ John Milton, *The Complete Works of John Milton, Vol. 3: The Shorter Poems*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski and Estelle Haan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) xlix.

Esq. On Seeing his Picture of Napoleon Buonaparte on the Island of St. Helena," which confronts, and revises, the poet's earlier poetic encounters with the satanic hero of the age, the man Byron once called the "Thunderer of the scene!"⁶ Painted between 1830 and 1831, Haydon's painting was itself a re-visioning of the mythic despot fifteen years in his grave, the first of twenty-three compositions on the same subject.⁷ In Hazlitt's formulation, Wordsworth becomes what Haydon paints in his picture of Napoleon: a *Rückenfigur*, a figure with his back towards the viewer.

Wordsworth's lifelong capacity for revision, which Hazlitt understands in his essay on Milton's sonnets as political and moral inconstancy, is well known. He was, as Stephen Gill has said, a poet who "let nothing go," a poet of "frugal imaginative husbandry," with a compulsion to revisit, not only landscapes of past association, but his previous work.⁸ Despite critical concern at possible textual primitivism, the Cornell editions have made it possible to approach Wordsworth's poems as re-visionary documents rather than stable, canonical, given, prophetic utterances.⁹ These poems now seem less to "mouth it" than Hazlitt had allowed in 1822. Of Wordsworth's decision to begin his residence in France in 1791, the published *Prelude* (1850) proclaims "France lured me forth" (IX, 34).¹⁰ In the 1805 version, however, Wordsworth ascribes his decision to a "personal wish / To speak the language more familiarly" (IX, 36-37). An insignificant alteration, one might argue, for a poet whose revisions are legendary and continuous. But this local emendation allows two extrapolations: first, France becomes a significant location for Wordsworth's revisiting and revisions; and second, poetic motivations are evidently vulnerable over time to reattribution.

⁶ *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, III, 324, Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, Vol. 2, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 89.

⁷ *Napoléon Bonaparte* by Benjamin Robert Haydon (NPG 6266), National Portrait Gallery, available at www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw04614/Napolon-Bonaparte (accessed 30 August 2017). This is not the picture Haydon painted for Sir Robert Peel between 1830 and 1831 but rather the smaller picture on the same subject he painted for Thomas Kearsley in 1829.

⁸ Stephen Gill, "'Affinities Preserved': Poetic Self-Reference in Wordsworth," *Studies in Romanticism*, 24.4 (1985): 533.

⁹ Jack Stillinger, "Textual Primitivism and the Editing of William Wordsworth," *Studies in Romanticism*, 28.1 (1989): 3-28.

¹⁰ All references to *The Prelude* are to William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995). Book and line numbers are given in parentheses in the text.

Wordsworth's revisions in *The Prelude* have attracted particular attention not least because the revisions continue as he ages, as he travels farther away from the primary impulses of his youth, even as the process of aging authorises the poet whose formation the poem describes or "half-creates." Wordsworth's youthful experiences in France, and his youthful republicanism, are played out in blank verse, and are vulnerable to the reformation of opinions that age enacts, even, in 1805, from a distance of twelve years. By contrast, the Wordsworthian sonnet is seldom investigated as a tool of or for self-revision, despite the fact that the five hundred or more sonnets he wrote – mostly between 1802 and his death in 1850 – provide ample evidence of his changing position towards history and towards his own past. The sonnets become a means of anchoring Wordsworth's present political convictions in response to unfolding historical events, but they are also capable of revising the strength of past feelings which, for whatever reason, have lost their validity. By taking the later sonnets of the 1820s and 1830s and reading them alongside the early political sonnets of 1802 and 1803, it is possible to trace the impress of time confronting the obstacles of form as well as history. That is, just as events and opinions are reconstituted in time, so the sonnet's progressions and its revolutions through rhyme have implications for how time works.

The sonnet is particularly salient as a form for confrontation: a form which, as Alan Liu has written, is "especially suited to reifying turns of mind,"¹¹ allowing for almost doctrinal revisionism. It is also a genre which draws attention to its own position within time: its deployment invites reference back to its historical poetic authority in the hands of Petrarch, Sidney, Shakespeare and Milton. It is a form in which cultural memory is embedded: its success or failure is taken against the measure of its forbears. It is, by nature, conservative.

The sonnet also works within a different order of compositional time than blank verse or lyric. The sonnet can be composed in a sitting, since its narrow rhyme-scheme binds it together in order from the first: unlike blank rhyme, which can continue ad infinitum, the sonnet keeps its measure. Wordsworth's letter to Haydon containing the poem on picture of Napoleon at St. Helena testifies to this compositional cohesion: "What I send you is not 'warm' but piping hot from the brain," he wrote on 11 June 1831, "whence it came in the wood adjoining my garden not ten minutes ago, and was scarcely more than

¹¹ Alan Liu, *Wordsworth and the Sense of History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989) 428.

twice as long in coming.”¹² The sonnet could be packaged for speed – for a more immediate response to its stimulus. It is both historical and momentary; cool and “piping hot.”

While much attention has justly been paid to the sonnets Wordsworth wrote between 1802 and 1816, in particular the political sonnets which ask to be read as encounters with history-in-the-making, criticism has overlooked later political sonnets which look back on this period, scattered as they are through sonnet sequences and miscellanies. If mentioned, they are referred to in terms of Wordsworth’s political convictions rather than as poems. Partly this is because of the narrative of decline which attends Wordsworth’s career; partly it is because they are lost in the ocean of sonnets composed through his life. Nevertheless, these sonnets show how the poetic form can be a site of re-encounter and re-vision.

James Chandler noted that in the verses dedicated to Christopher Wordsworth preceding *The River Duddon* sonnet sequence, the poet refers to the subsequent sonnets as “agitations” (“agitations less severe”; 76¹³), and if the early political sonnets can be considered artillery – the poet’s contribution to the war effort – the later sonnets continue to echo earlier fire.¹⁴ From among these “agitations,” I will explore three sonnets: an 1821 sonnet confronting the French coast at Boulogne, which returns to the ground of Wordsworth’s Calais sonnets of 1802; Wordsworth’s sonnet on Haydon’s painting of Napoleon, which re-encounters the figure that strode so boldly across sonnets the poet wrote in the first decade of the nineteenth century; and finally, his sonnet in response to Thomas Carlyle’s three-volume *French Revolution* (1837), which covers ground he had personally trod between 1790 and 1792. Close reading of these sonnets will demonstrate internal, compositional revisions; revisions and reversals offered by the sonnet form itself; and revisions of personal and political history which the sonnets encounter as subjects. Together, these late, overlooked sonnets will provide valuable lenses on the question of history and its uses.

¹² *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. 5, The Later Years, Part II, 1829-1834*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Alan G. Hill, 2nd rev. edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 396. Subsequent page references are marked LY and are in parentheses in the text.

¹³ William Wordsworth, *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845*, ed. Geoffrey Jackson (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2004) 80. Subsequent page and (occasional) line number references are marked SSIP and are in parentheses in the text.

¹⁴ James Chandler, *Wordsworth’s Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 169.

Revisiting Place: The Coastal Sonnet

In 1820, the Wordsworths' passage back to England after their Continental tour led them to the northern coastal French town of Boulogne-sur-Mer, where a storm stranded, and nearly sunk, the packet boat on which they travelled. William Wordsworth's sonnet, "On Being Stranded Near the Harbour of Boulogne," written at the end of 1821, and published in *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820* (1822), recalls the family's inconvenient delay on the French coast.

ON BEING STRANDED NEAR THE HARBOUR OF BOULOGNE

WHY cast ye back upon the Gallic shore,
Ye furious waves! a patriotic Son
Of England – who in hope her coast had won,
His project crowned, his pleasant travel o'er?
Well – let him pace this noted beach once more,
That gave the Roman his triumphal shells;
That saw the Corsican his cap and bells
Haughtily shake, a dreaming Conqueror!
Enough; my Country's Cliffs I can behold,
And proudly think, beside the murmuring sea,
Of checked Ambition – Tyranny controuled,
And Folly cursed with endless memory:
These local recollections ne'er can cloy:
Such ground I from my very heart enjoy!

(SSIP 396)

Wordsworth's coastal sonnets are alert to boundaries, particularly between nations drawn into "frightful neighbourhood," as he put it in "Near Dover, September 1802."¹⁵ Such boundaries trigger the flag-waving gestures of patriotism – on might note that the English language pilfered the word "patriotic" from the French – and John Wyatt judges this performance a "nationalistic poem par excellence."¹⁶ Thus the "furious waves" detain a grandiose "patriotic Son / Of

¹⁵ William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared R. Curtis (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1983) 163 (l. 4). Subsequent page and (occasional) line number references are marked *P2V* and are in parentheses in the text.

¹⁶ John Wyatt, *William Wordsworth's Poems of Travel, 1819-42: 'Such Sweet Wayfaring'* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) 62.

England" (SSIP 396, 2-3) on the "Gallic shore," raging unlike the "waves breaking on the chalky shore" at Dover as the poet described in 1802 ("Composed in the Valley near Dover, On the Day of Landing"; P2V 162, 5). The poet's delay leads him to jokingly elevate himself to the imperial mode – "her coast had won, / His project crowned" (SSIP 396, 3-4) – in the completion of the journey he had made "in hope" rather than in fact.

In contrast to the poet's success, the shore at Boulogne is a monument of Napoleon's failed ambition, a hollow monument, like Wordsworth's sonnet on Waterloo earlier in *Memorials, 1820*, which bleakly reverses much of the triumphal verse of 1816, with an eye to those "monuments that soon may disappear."¹⁷ Later, that equivocal "may disappear" was revised to a surer "must disappear," both examples of the present tense intruding on a recollected past, but with different urgings. *Memorials, 1820* celebrates another Napoleonic monument whose present meaning quarrels with its historic intent in "The Column Intended by Buonaparte for a Triumphal Edifice in Milan, Now Lying by the Way-Side on the Semplon Pass," which seizes upon a site of great personal monument-making for Wordsworth.

There is much to say about these sites and relics, these remnants of "Vanity's hieroglyphic[s]" which cut through public and private histories in *Memorials, 1820*.¹⁸ But to return to Boulogne: here, Wordsworth, like Napoleon on St. Helena, "pace[s]" the beach. Deprived of his name in the sonnet, though "the Corsican" (7) contains the same number of syllables, Napoleon is recognisably himself as both "dreaming Conqueror" (8) and jester ("the Corsican his cap and bells"; 7). In line 9 ("my Country's Cliffs I can behold"), Wordsworth nets the sonority of past verse as the English coast across the Channel mirrors his 1798 salute to the Wye Valley: one of those acts of poetic revisiting of which Stephen Gill writes so eloquently. The figures of Wordsworth and Napoleon – shadowed by the ghost of Caligula ("the Roman"; 6) – blend as Wordsworth thinks "proudly [...] beside the murmuring sea / Of checked Ambition" (9-10).¹⁹ A revision for the 1836 volume replaces "murmuring" with "chafing," tightening his hypermetric line to perfect iambics, as though the poet remembers the furore of the waves he has apostrophised which fence him in: he is as much a prisoner of French territory as "the Corsican" was of the British.

¹⁷ "After Visiting the Field of Waterloo," SSIP 361, 9.

¹⁸ "The Column Intended by Buonaparte for a Triumphal Edifice in Milan, Now Lying by the Way-Side on the Semplon Pass," SSIP 387, 8.

¹⁹ Both the figures of Napoleon and Caligula are borrowed from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal, which records the walk to "Buonaparte's Pillar." *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. 2*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (London: Macmillan, 1941) 332-33.

The sonnet, Liu writes, is a "tyrannical" form.²⁰ Wordsworth himself argued that "the prison, unto which we doom / Ourselves, no prison is" (*P2V* 133, 8-9), an odd claim made from within a form he would use in passionate advocacy for national liberty. The Boulogne sonnet is tightened further by twelve of its fourteen lines being end-stopped. Like the regular pulse of the eleventh line ("Of checked Ambition – Tyranny controuled"; *SSIP* 396, 11), Napoleon's imperialism is constrained by poetic form. The twelfth line ("Folly cursed with endless memory"; 12) loosens its grip on its subject, as Wordsworth entertains the purgatorial regurgitations of the imprisoned Napoleon's thought. It is curious to see Wordsworth – the great developer of self-knowledge and human sympathy through memory – putting memory to tortuous usage. Had he heard rumours of Napoleon's prodigious memory?²¹ Here memory without check is a malediction.

The sonnet closes in a couplet customary for Shakespearean sonnets but which is here an act of unusual jingoism for Wordsworth. As Henry Crabb Robinson said of Wordsworth's telling analysis of the Miltonic sonnet form:

Wordsworth does not approve of uniformly closing the second quatrain with a full stop, and of giving a turn to the thought in the tercines. This is the Italian mode; Milton lets the thought *run over* [...] Wordsworth does not approve of closing the sonnet with a couplet, and he holds it to be absolutely a vice to have a sharp turning at the end with an epigrammatic point.²²

Similarly, in a letter sent to the polymath William Rowan Hamilton in 1831, Wordsworth speaks with less than fulsome praise of the Shakespearean sonnet as "merely quatrains with a couplet tacked to the end" (*LY* 454-55). Since Wordsworth is estimated to have used terminal couplets only in approximately one-fifth of his sonnets, its employment here invites speculation as to its purpose.²³ In this sonnet, the couplet "checks" the roving expansion of the poet's memory as, good tourist that he is, Wordsworth converts a foreign beach to use as private "local recollection," imitating the prowling pace of the Corsican who tried but failed to leave his permanent mark at Boulogne just as he was unable to

²⁰ Liu 434.

²¹ Andrew Roberts, *Napoleon the Great* (London: Allen Lane, 2014) 11.

²² 26 January 1836. Henry Crabb Robinson *On Books and Their Writers*, Vol. 2, ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Dent, 1938) 484-85. Subsequent page references are marked *OBTW* and are in parentheses in the text.

²³ Lee M. Johnson, *Wordsworth and the Sonnet* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1973) 183.

stamp his will on England through invasion. To “cloy” is to satiate with richness or surfeit and thus to disgust and to weary, but an earlier sixteenth and seventeenth-century usage is to “clog, obstruct, or impede” (*OED*): for all Napoleon’s isolated constriction and imperial frustration, dramatized within the heavy end-stoppage of the lines, Wordsworth is merely delayed, not cloyed or impeded. This border is grounds for a lingering that emphasises his liberty. While the earlier Calais sonnets of 1802 and 1803 were forged in the historic moment of uncertain national dramas (consulship, the fear of invasion, expulsion), this later sonnet – set slightly south of Calais – is a re-encounter with imperial shadows.

Revisiting the Man: The Napoleonic Other

Along with his own geographical revisitings, the revisions of other men continue to activate Wordsworth’s own remembering and reconstitution of history within the sonnet’s “scanty ground.” Haydon’s monumental painting of Napoleon at St. Helena was commissioned by the future prime minister, Sir Robert Peel, in December 1830. Wordsworth saw the painting when visiting Haydon at his London studio on 12 April 1831 and sent his sonnet, “hot from the brain,” two months later, just before the painting’s completion, on 11 June. The resulting sonnet shows the continuing glamour – however disputed or resented – of the subject, recalling earlier sonnets printed in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) as “Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty.”

TO B. R. HAYDON, ON SEEING HIS PICTURE OF NAPOLEON
BUONAPARTE ON THE ISLAND OF ST. HELENA

HAYDON! Let worthier judges praise the skill
Here by thy pencil shown in truth of lines
And charm of colours; *I* applaud those signs
Of thought, that give the true poetic thrill;
That unencumbered whole of blank and still,
Sky without cloud – ocean without wave;
And the one Man that laboured to enslave
The World, sole-standing high on the bare hill –
Back turned, arms folded, the unapparent face
Tinged, as we may fancy, in this dreary place
With light reflected from the invisible sun

Set, like his fortunes; but not set for aye
Like them. The unguilty Power pursued his way,
And before *him* doth dawn perpetual run.²⁴

In "I griev'd for Buonaparte" (1802), the poet wondered "the vital blood / Of that Man's mind what can it be?" – his own grief at Napoleon's accession "unthinking" (*P2V* 157-58, 2-3). In the sonnet to Haydon, nearly thirty years later, Wordsworth is evidently still interested in Napoleon's contours of thought. It is thought (the "true poetic thrill"; *LP* 222, 4) – the deposed emperor "cursed with endless memory" as Wordsworth put it in the sonnet at Boulogne (*SSIP* 396, 12) – which is central to both Haydon's painting and Wordsworth's response to it.

In his autobiography, Haydon imagined Napoleon "standing on the brow of an impending cliff and musing on his past fortunes – sea-birds screaming at his feet – the sun just down – the sails of his guardship glittering on the horizon, and the Atlantic calm, silent, awfully deep and endlessly extensive."²⁵ In the ekphrastic lines which follow his address to the painter in the first quatrain, Wordsworth reaches towards the brooding vacancy of the scene – "That unencumbered whole of blank and still" (*LP* 222, 5). Stresses and slacks ripple along the metre – "Sky without cloud – ocean without wave" (6) – parallel motion gesturing at the nullity of infinite repetition. From within the seascape rises a colossus enticed by but divided from the World by the limit of the poetic line. The man is buoyed by alliteration ("sole-standing high on the bare hill"; 8) and by the wave-like hush of sibilants and aspirants but he is, for all his prominence, a secretive figure. The position of Napoleon "sole-standing high on the bare hill," recalls a sonnet of 1809, "Look now on that Adventurer who hath paid," where a satanic Napoleon "hath gained at length a prosperous Height."²⁶ Simon Bainbridge has written

²⁴ William Wordsworth, *Last Poems, 1821-1850*, ed. Jared R. Curtis, Apryl Lea Denny-Ferris, Jillian Heydt-Stevenson (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1999) 222. Subsequent page and (occasional) line number references are marked *LP* and are in parentheses in the text.

²⁵ In the paragraph above this, Haydon writes, "It was impossible to think of such a genius in captivity, without mysterious associations of the sky, the sea, the rock, and the solitude with which he was enveloped: I never imagined him but as if musing at dawn, or melancholy at sunset, listening at midnight to the beating and roaring of the Atlantic, or meditating as the stars gazed and the moon shone on him." *The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. Tom Taylor (London: Peter Davies, 1926) 506-507.

²⁶ William Wordsworth, *Shorter Poems, 1807-1820*, ed. Carl H. Ketcham (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1989) 55, ll. 1, 6. Subsequent page and (occasional) line number references are marked *SP* and are in parentheses in the text.

about Wordsworth's debt to Milton in this line, noting the allusion to *Paradise Lost* which Wordsworth also used in a "condensed" form in his tract *On the Convention of Cintra* (1809), his "epic prose offensive that seeks to drive Napoleon from his 'strong-holds in the imaginations' and so hasten his fall from the 'hideous precipice.'"²⁷

Yet the later sonnet to Haydon is written upon a subject whose height is as bare of victory as the hill on which he stands. "Back turned, arms folded" (*LP* 222, 9): Haydon's Napoleon takes the form of *Rückenfigur*, the subject with its back to the viewer, turning aside, in Wordsworth's excellent phrase, his "unapparent face" (9). This line gave Wordsworth some difficulty: were the arms "knit" or "close folded?" (*LP* 222n) He tried "averted" before settling on "unapparent" face: and the distinction between the two words is one which determines agency: the figure who turns his face away, or the viewer who cannot quite make it out. By deploying negative prefixes ("unencumbered," "unapparent"; 5, 9) – not an uncommon strategy for this poet – Wordsworth raises "the cancelled presence of the opposite term," to quote Geoffrey Hartmann (rephrasing Michael Riffaterre).²⁸

Wordsworth described his view of the sonnet's tripartite structure to Alexander Dyce in 1833: it should seem, he wrote, like a syllogism, made up of a beginning, middle, and end (*LY* 603-604).²⁹ In this poem, we might divide the sonnet into the salute to Haydon's powers (*LP* 222, 1-4), the description of the painting (5-10), and the image of the sun (11-14). Yet, this is not quite right: in the same letter to Dyce, Wordsworth states his admiration for the "overflow[ing]" of Milton's sense in his sonnets, the "running over" of which he told Robinson, which spills over the strict limits, pleasing by the "variety and freedom of sound," and lending a "pervading sense of intense Unity" of which the sonnet consists. "Overflow" is an important word for Wordsworth, recalling most readily the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings [...] recollected in tranquillity."³⁰ In this sonnet to Haydon – unlike the Boulogne sonnet – only five lines are end-stopped: the sonnet has a larger expansiveness, the enjambment

²⁷ Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 116-19.

²⁸ Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987) 208.

²⁹ Letter of 22 April 1833.

³⁰ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, Vol. 1*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) 148. Subsequent page references are marked *PW* and are in parentheses in the text.

over the lines allowing for an overflow of ambition which is consonant with the predominating image of the ocean, if not the coast.

Wordsworth's engagement with the *Rückenfigur* in this poem suggests that, however despised by the poet (and Wordsworth is quite clear in his letter to Haydon about this dislike), the "dreaming Conqueror" continues to be, as he is for Haydon, a subject of tantalising if not unwilling sympathy (LY 397).³¹ Recalling Haydon's diary, this sympathy extends to the landscape itself: "Napoleon never appeared to me but at those seasons of silence and twilight when nature seems to sympathise with the fallen."³² As Joseph Leo Koerner writes of Caspar David Friedrich's command of the *Rückenfigur* in this period, "such turned figures are not foes but reflective foils of both artist and viewer."³³ The viewer is forced to see the landscape through the *Rückenfigur*'s eyes. The summoning of the poet's imaginative powers is evident by his imagining ("we may fancy"; LP 222, 10) the "unapparent face/ Tinged" (9-10) with the last rays of sunset. This darted aside ("we may fancy") allows for the poet-viewer's imaginative inference.

Later in the sonnet, the poet tries a sleight of hand: "Set like his fortunes; but not set for aye / Like them." In the pause after "aye," that brief crossing between the twelfth and thirteenth lines, the sonnet invites the reader to first consider the temporariness of Napoleon's setting fortunes: his fortunes "not set for aye" (12). The conjunction after the semi-colon ("but"; 12) allows the Emperor's fortunes a brief respite until the devastating continuation ("Like them"; 13) assigns each word its due semantic anchor. For a second, the possibility of a second escape – the escape from St. Helena Napoleon's captors dreaded – hovers before definite banishment. The sun, "unguilty Power" (13), another negative prefix asking for a second look in addition to being what Christopher Ricks might call an anti-pun, is free to follow its will as the *Rückenfigur* is not.³⁴

The fact that the objective pronoun "*him*" is italicised in the final line of the sonnet, just as "*I*" is the only other italicised word, further amplifies the sympathy – however resisted – between poet-viewer and object. The thwarted admiration of earlier sonnets like "I griev'd for Buonaparte" and "When looking

³¹ See Wordsworth's letter to Haydon of 11 June 1831.

³² Haydon 507.

³³ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (London: Reaktion, 1990) 163.

³⁴ The anti-pun is guilt/gilt. "[W]hereas in a pun there are two senses which either get along or quarrel, in an anti-pun there is only one sense admitted but there is another sense denied admission." Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 265.

on the present face of things," returns, attenuated by time and historical perspective.³⁵ The *Rückenfigur*, Koerner tells us, "confers upon a landscape an aspect of pastness or belatedness." It is proof of a failed confrontation with history.³⁶

Revisiting History

Not all kept encounters with history, however, are commendable. In December 1838, Isabella Fenwick lent Wordsworth her copy of Carlyle's recently published *French Revolution*, from which he had heard Robinson read excerpts. Robinson later wrote that Wordsworth pronounced a "harsh judgment" of Carlyle's third volume: "It is not only his style that he condemns, but his *inhumanity*. He says there is a want of due sympathy with mankind. Scorn and irony are the feeling and tone throughout" (*OBTW* 566). Robinson, however, had a different impression as he was making his way "slowly" through it: Carlyle's book

should be called Rhapsodies – not a history – Some one said – a history in flashes of lightning – And provided I take only small doses and not too frequently – it is not merely agreeable but fascinating. [...] It is not English, but a sort of Original Compound from that Indo-Teutonic primitive tongue which philologists now speculate about, [...] Wordsw: is intolerant of such innovations And cannot & will not read C.³⁷

Wordsworth's tonal critiques of Carlyle's book led to his composition of a sonnet triptych, "In Allusion to Various Recent Histories and Notices of the French Revolution," first printed among his *Miscellaneous Sonnets* in the poetic collection of 1842.

IN ALLUSION TO VARIOUS RECENT HISTORIES AND NOTICES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

PORTENTOUS change when History can appear
As the cool Advocate of foul device;

³⁵ While in the sonnet "When, looking on the present fact of things" (1803) the poet admittedly calls Napoleon "one Man, of Men the meanest too!" (*P2V* 170, 2), the next lines "Rais'd up to sway the World, to do, undo, / With mighty Nations for his Underlings" (3-4) are packed with seductive power. "Nothing is left which I can venerate" (7) the poet continues: his is a disappointed love.

³⁶ Koerner 233, 244.

³⁷ Letter of 19 January 1839 to 'T.R.'. *The Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle, Vol. 1, 1808-1843*, ed. Edith J. Morley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927) 377.

Reckless audacity extol, and jeer
At consciences perplexed with scruples nice!
They who bewail not, must abhor, the sneer
Born of Conceit, Power's blind Idolater;
Or haply sprung from vaunting Cowardice
Betrayed by mockery of holy fear.
Hath it not long been said the wrath of Man
Works not the righteousness of God? Oh bend,
Bend, ye Perverse! to judgments from on High,
Laws that lay under Heaven's perpetual ban
All principles of action that transcend
The sacred limits of humanity.

(SSIP 906-907)

In this first sonnet, Wordsworth's own tone is hardly settled as he shifts between a critique of History as "cool Advocate of foul device," which despite its sangfroid "extol[s]," "jeer[s]," and "sneer[s]" (SSIP 906-907, 2-3, 5). History, as it is embodied here, is unsettled. The sonnet is choked with nouns – nearly each of which in the octave is adverbially skewed – and one rhyme in the second quatrain (sneer / Idolater / fear) amidst a regimented Petrarchan form shows the warp. The problem, evidently, is stylistic ("foul device") as much as moral, and the violent thrust of the verbs (extol, jeer, perplex, bewail, abhor, born, sprung, betrayed) absorbs Carlyle's stylistic energy as well as his use of the present tense. That the "cool Advocate of foul device" had been, in earlier drafts "keen Advocate" revised still earlier from "With prurient levity on [to] foul device" shows that at its first conception, the poet took umbrage at the discordant tone of Carlyle's rhapsodies ("levity") as well as its mode of rolling coverage. Yet he had himself observed the theatrical nature of the Revolution in 1791-2, having, as the Prelude describes, "abruptly passed / Into a theatre of which the stage / Was busy with an action far advanced" (1805: IX, 94-96).

If the voice of the octave is displeased, the mode of the sestet is thunderingly vatic: "Hath it not long been said the wrath of Man / Works not the righteousness of God?" This rhetorical question sits oddly alongside Wordsworth's own troubled poetic history from the infamous lines of the *Thanksgiving Ode* (1816):

But thy most dreaded instrument,
In working out a pure intent,
Is Man – arrayed for mutual slaughter, –
Yea, Carnage is thy daughter!

(SP 188, 279-82)

Duncan Wu has recently advised critics to treat contemporary reception of the poem – and the infamous line taken out of context by Hazlitt, Byron and Shelley – with a degree of caution.³⁸ Ever the reviser, Wordsworth would change these lines for his 1845 edition of his collected poems, but at the point at which “In Allusion to Various Histories” was composed (1839), these two sentiments – the putatively Carlylean Ode versus the scriptural quotation of the sonnet, taken almost verbatim from James 1:20 – confront each other across the divide of fifteen years. The Biblical injunction may have “long been said” (*SSIP* 906-907, 9), but Wordsworth has not long been preaching it.

This sonnet, like the *Memorials*, 1820 sonnets which refer to Napoleon, and like the sonnet to Haydon, is concerned with limits, checks, and laws. Like the sonnet at Boulogne, this sonnet reinvests in end-stopped lines. Historians must submit to divine judgment, so as to not to infringe the “the sacred limits of humanity” (*SSIP* 906-907, 14). And if there is an odd pressure between the command “to bend” and the injunction to observe “sacred limits,” then that tension is inherent in Wordsworth’s understanding of the sonnet. This last phrase, however, brings the ear back to a younger Wordsworth, to “the still, sad music of humanity” of *Tintern Abbey*. Even at such a distance, then, Wordsworth recalls an earlier music, from a time when his political revisionism had already begun; by 1839, many years later, he has turned his back in exactly the way Hazlitt accused him of, and folded his arms: a political *Rückenfigur*. One might suggest that as he argues with Carlyle that he has displaced his guilt at his former radical sympathies – or of the inconstancy of his views – onto the Scottish historian. By using Carlyle (or the Revolution’s “Advocate” *SSIP* 906-907, 2) as his antagonist, he disavows his own youthful republicanism. And yet both Robinson’s account and the sonnet itself seem to be more aware of Carlyle’s pitch rather than his politics. Historical interpretation, this sonnet suggests, and its stylistic qualities, have a moral dimension. He criticises Carlyle not for his politics but for a lack of right and proportional feeling.

Several months earlier, in a miniature sonnet sequence on Roman history published in his *Memorials of a Tour to Italy* (1842),³⁹ Wordsworth lamented the lapsing of “old credulities” (“At Rome”; *SSIP* 758, 1) and “Complacent Fictions” (“Continued”; *SSIP* 759, 1) with the rise of modern historiographical method (or “[s]evere research” “At Rome”; 12) practiced by the Danish-German historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr. Dispassionate and sceptical history is as disappointing

³⁸ Duncan Wu, “Wordsworthian Carnage,” *Essays in Criticism*, 66.3 (2016): 341-59.

³⁹ The three sonnets are “At Rome. – Regrets. – In Allusion to Niebuhr, and Other Modern Historians,” “Continued,” and “Plea for the Historian.”

to the poet – though perhaps not as morally dangerous – as Carlyle’s near-camp narrative method. The poet takes refuge in the vivid histories that were available in the years of his youth, since youth is inspired by the proof of “inward evidence” (“Continued”; 3): for the young, “Assent is power, belief the soul of fact” (“At Rome”; 14).

This strong terminus teeters on the dangerous edge of sloganeering. Taken in isolation, it demonstrates the vulnerability of language to enthusiasm, which is hardly a lesson that a historian of the French Revolution could have avoided confronting. It is a line which allows for and justifies any later personal or editorial revision. One’s own “history” is proved by “inward evidence.” Hence the mobility of the poet’s self-positioning. In using one’s own history as evidence, revision continues to substantiate, if not collude with new truths. In his mature years, Wordsworth’s presence in France at the time of the Revolution acts as authority for his political assertions: so he perpetually reads contemporary British events (e.g., the Reform Bill, the Catholic question) through the lens of recent history.⁴⁰ The danger of such substantiation is that it has the capacity to lead not only to foresight but to fabrication.

In the third sonnet on allusion to recent histories of the French Revolution (“Long-Favoured England! be not thou misled”; *SSIP* 907-908), a sonnet drenched in apocalyptic fluids with a strict Petrarchan division between the octave and sestet, the poet takes refuge “Among thy youth, / My Country!” (9-10), who, if they should heed the warning for temperance, rather than taking “frenzy” at “monstrous theories” of “alien growth,” promises that “a Veteran’s heart” shall “be thrilled with joy” (11). Wordsworth’s choice of self-reference, “Veteran,” was a laboured one. MS 143 first had “old mans heart” before “veteran’s heart” (*SSIP* 908). “Veteran,” is of course, an odd choice. Despite enlisting in the Grasmere militia in 1803, Wordsworth hardly qualifies as old soldier, unless one counts his political sonnets of 1802-16 as ordinance.⁴¹ This may seem to be the closest to his felt position as eye-witness of the Revolution, which is raised so frequently in his letters. Yet it is, in a strict sense, a fiction. Moreover, in the final lines the poet-as-Veteran expresses his wish to

⁴⁰ For examples of this, see Wordsworth’s letters to Lord Lonsdale of 14 March 1818 and 23 December 1831; to Christopher Wordsworth, 1 April 1832; to his publisher Edward Moxon, 11 January 1835; and to Henry Thomas Liddell, 30 March 1835.

⁴¹ Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 233.

gather from eternal truth,
For time and season, rules that work to cheer –
Not scourge, to save the People – not destroy.

(SSIP 908, 12-14)

In these lines, Wordsworth converts himself from future poet laureate into an elder even Miltonic statesman and law-giver, authorised by his long history observing the course of events. Although this claim is an aggrandisement, a fiction, an “old credulity,” it is consistent with the didactic stance he took in an earlier letter to Sir George Beaumont in February 1808: “Every great Poet is a Teacher. I wish either to be considered as a Teacher, or as nothing.”⁴²

Michael O’Neill has marvellously said that Wordsworth’s “notion” of the sonnet is as a “place where freedom might be purchased with concentration of power.”⁴³ “Power” is a significant word for Wordsworth, but its currency is difficult. “I felt a kind of sympathy with power,” he wrote in the 1805 *Prelude* (X, 416). In “I griev’d for Buonaparte,” “True Power” is the organic fruit of degrees of development (*P2V* 157, 14). In “London, 1802,” he hails Milton to ask for the gift of “manners, virtue, freedom, power” (*P2V* 165, 8). Yet in “In Allusion to Various Recent Histories and Notices of the French Revolution,” Wordsworth shames the “sneer / Born of Conceit, Power’s blind Idolater” (*SSIP* 906, 5-6).

“The language of poetry,” wrote Hazlitt in his review of *Coriolanus* for the *Examiner*, “naturally falls in with the language of power.” Wordsworth’s poetic investment in power clarifies his conservative turn, for, as Hazlitt perceives, poetry is “right-royal,” monarchical rather than republican.⁴⁴ My question is, then, whether memory and power can co-exist. In the Boulogne sonnet, a dispossessed emperor is cursed with “endless memory,” suggesting an incompatibility between a mode of acting and reacting, or to quote an earlier sonnet, “to do, undo.”

Revision is not just a mode for the blank verse of *The Prelude*. While Wordsworth revisits the French landscape of his former years as on the French coast at Boulogne, characters like the French emperor who drew out his early political poetic gifts, and the historical events like the French Revolution which

⁴² *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. 2, The Middle Years, Part I, 1806-1811*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Mary Trevelyan Moorman, 2nd rev. edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 195.

⁴³ Michael O’Neill, “The Romantic Sonnet,” *Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet*, ed. A.D. Cousins and Peter Howarth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 197.

⁴⁴ *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt* 1: 125-26.

caused his political compass to swivel, the powerful mode of the sonnet rarely allows for such revisions in the course of print. I'd hoped to find a common lexicon between the early and later sonnets: an old word turned to new uses. Manuscripts tell different stories: introducing notes of hesitancy or uncertainty that the page stifles. Although the sonnet allows for reversion, for contradiction, and the "reified" turn, as Liu puts it, the later sonnets of Wordsworth featured in these pages are hesitant to surrender the power of performance to do so. This is not to agree with Hazlitt's charge of Wordsworth's sonnets as "mouth[ing] it well" but rather to ask what lessons in style Wordsworth, like Carlyle, learnt from the "language of power" and what such lessons demanded in exchange.

THE 'FRENCH' BOOKS OF *THE PRELUDE*: A VIRTUAL ROUND TABLE

David Duff, Marc Porée, Christoph Bode, Martin Procházka,
Laurent Folliot, Christy Edwall

The following dialogue reproduces, in a lightly edited form, a round table discussion that took place via email over six days in late November and early December 2017. It began with opening statements by Marc Porée, Christoph Bode and David Duff, circulated in advance, followed by shorter response statements by all six participants and then by a third, 'stichomythia' phase of interactive dialogue. Word limits and deadlines were agreed for each phase of the discussion (labelled here Parts 1, 2 and 3). This experiment in scholarly communication was intended to recapture something of the heteroglossic energy of Friedrich Schlegel's "Gespräch über die Poesie" (Dialogue on Poetry, 1800), a famous theoretical text from the literary magazine *Athenaeum* modelled on the conversations, lectures and seminar papers of the Jena circle who formed the nucleus of early German Romanticism. Reference to this illustrious precedent – itself a self-conscious re-enactment of Plato's *Symposium* – was not meant to raise unreasonable expectations but to offer a historical model for a type of critical dialogue, and of collaborative publication, that would allow the juxtaposition of different viewpoints and show the development of ideas over the course of a carefully prepared but open-ended conversation. The choice of format seemed appropriate to *The Prelude*, a conversational poem addressed to Coleridge and centred, in the books discussed here, on Wordsworth's verbal encounters in France. Unlike Schlegel's "Gespräch," the present dialogue is an international affair, with contributors from four countries whose different academic traditions, and differing relation to the historical experience of political revolution, are important factors in the discussion. For the participants, the virtual round table

was a novel and exciting experience, and no attempt has been made, in editing it for publication, to remove traces of the enthusiasm, disagreement and occasional puzzlement that marked the progress of the conversation. The aim in making it public is that other readers may share whatever light is shed on this fascinating and many-sided topic, whose centrality to the theme of Wordsworth's French connection will be immediately apparent. Annotation has been kept to a minimum. There are a few cross-references to papers delivered at the Paris symposium, printed versions of which can be found elsewhere in this volume. Unless otherwise indicated, references are to the 1805 *Prelude*.¹

Part 1

Opening statement: Marc Porée (Paris)

At the start of this statement, a two-fold fascination on my part. The first concerns the astonishing, wondrous, ease with which Wordsworth and his fellow-traveller are swept into French territory, paraded over its vine-clad hills, woods and farms and orchards, its deep and stately vales, etc., at the outset of Book VI, and for most of its duration. Their sailing or gliding forth, their being flown on the wings of the river Rhone, as it were, in a mood of thespian celebration ("Dances of liberty, and, in late hours / Of darkness, dances in the open air"; VI, 381-82), partakes of romance as well as of magic. The magic of French Revolutionary Romance, no doubt, gathering momentum as it proceeds in this most unhampered and uninhibited kind of way, which belongs to the realm of fairy tale alone. As a result, every potential obstacle likely to stand in the way has been removed, almost miraculously ("like a fragrance everywhere"; VI, 369). Should they have flown on a flying carpet, the result would not have been any different. At this inaugural, and commemorative, stage (13 July 1790, on the eve of the Fête de la Fédération), France, for what transpires to prove the briefest of pleasingly wonderful interludes, has been turned into a benevolent Neverland, a place where children never grow up and where Englishmen are voted the Frenchmen's best friends. Needless to say, the glory involved ("As their forerunners in a glorious course"; VI, 412) is politically oriented, harking

¹ As given in *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979). The 1799 and 1850 versions are also quoted from this edition. The 1804 version is quoted from *The Five-Book Prelude*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). Subsequent references to this edition are in parentheses in the text. The text used for other Wordsworth poems is *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, rev. edn., ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952-1959).

back to England's Glorious Revolution of 1688; such a concept, anything but transferable, is fraught with many future political misunderstandings and bodes very ill indeed for Wordsworth's construction of the events that are to follow.

The second has to do with the similar amount of supernatural swiftness involved in the breaking away from that initial spell, by way of the equivalent of a narrative sleight-of hand. The scene, for it is a scene, takes place in Book X, when the disenchanting speaker has returned from France to Britain and happens to be journeying "Over the smooth sands / Of Leven's ample aestuary" (X, 474-75), with the "great sea" far retired "at safe distance" (X, 528-29). A traveller chancing to pass, Wordsworth learns from him "[t]hat Robespierre was dead" (X, 535). This is enough to cause the speaker to enthuse and rave, at the top of his lungs, in what deserves to be construed both as a blatant instance of *Schadenfreude* ("great my joy / In vengeance, and eternal justice"; X, 539-400 – how's that for impossible, paradoxical oxymorons?) and as a form of jubilant ejaculation, in the religious and sexual sense of the word ("forth-breathing on those open sands"; X, 542). There is no time, here and now, to dwell on the symbolism of that quintessentially English place and space which sees the ebbing of the sea coincide, far too partly it would seem, with the receding tides of Robespierrean Terror. The obstacle between "mighty renovation" (X, 556) and France is now fully removed ("swept away"; X, 549; again by a conjuror's trick!), it is (all too fondly) believed. The two events are linked, from beginning to end, forming a narrative as well as a mythic arch – leaving much of the political or ideological terrain overlooked, elided – swept under the carpet, as it were. At least at first sight, but that's not counting the Blois sequence... More of that later.

Now, needless to say, the figure of Robespierre, even in French Revolutionary historiography, is a pretty contentious one, leading to heated and fractious debates, and it would be pointless of me to accuse Wordsworth of the kind of facile Robespierre-bashing which still continues, today, to occlude some of the seminal issues of yesterday. May I bring to the attention of our colleagues that the latest researcher and public figure, in France, to rehabilitate the doomed cause of Robespierre is Jean-Claude Milner. That Milner should make that kind of move will not come as a real surprise from a former Maoist (at the time when he was affiliated to "La Gauche prolétarienne," in the wake of May '68). In his latest piece of work, entitled *Relire la Révolution* (2016), the somewhat sobered-up philosopher and Lacanian linguist achieves something that is possibly more surprising, as he seems, at least on the face of it, to be adopting a quasi-Wordsworthian take on French revolutionary matters. In *Relire la Révolution* everything boils down to language, to speech, not in the abstract sense of freedom of speech, but in the concrete sense of bodies, firstly; of speaking bodies,

secondly. A point also made by Sophie Wahnich (whom Milner enlists), for whom the greatest contribution of the French Revolution is the constitution of an "espace délibératif."² Politics, Milner contends, has only one object: the survival of speaking subjects (or "corps parlants" – speaking bodies).³ Their ability to speak (up) must needs be protected by hook or by crook. To put it in Miller's pithy and terse French: "Les droits des sujets parlants sont les conditions premières des sujets civiques" (248; The rights of speaking subjects are the primary conditions allowing for the existence of civic subjects.). "Si la révolution française touche au réel," Milner claims, "ce n'est pas par la mise à mort, mais par le corps parlant, non pas par la Terreur, mais par les discours, non par le sang versé, mais par les mots" (244). In that respect, the French Revolution is not the starting point of a protracted revolutionary saga, but a pure event, after which history can no longer be the same. Politics, he continues, is "une technique de survie des corps parlants" (244; a survival technique for speaking bodies); as such, it saves one from having to kill one's political foes or gag them into silence – something which radicality has no qualms proposing: "Il n'y a de radicalité que létale" (244; radicality is lethal or is not – clearly Milner has Muslim fundamentalism in mind, for reasons which we will not be going into presently). According to Milner's a posteriori reconstruction (his "relecture"), Robespierre does not fall into the category of radicality.

What matters more to us, as Romanticists, is Milner's endorsement of the Declaration of Human Rights, which Milner sees as fundamental in identifying the "corps parlant" as an inalienable human right on a par with the right to private property. Milner's axe to grind – to distinguish between the Declaration and the Terror, so as to save the former without having to write off the latter – may not quite be our own. But his identification of speaking bodies' rights is Wordsworthian, at least in inclination, as evidenced in the early summer of 1792 sequence at Blois (Book IX), in the course of which Wordsworth chats, converses, speaks with and to Royalists, pretty sectarian at that, before his encounter, and sustained friendship, with Michel Beaupuy, a follower of Rousseau. "A Patriot," Beaupuy is stirred by the sight of a hunger-bitten girl into exclaiming: "'Tis against that / Which we are fighting" (IX, 519-20). His belief that "the people" should have "a strong hand / In making their own laws" (IX, 531-32) is one that Wordsworth never abjured, in his post-Radical, Tory, years. For one good reason, it seems in light of Milner's arguments, namely that it grew out of sundry and

² Sophie Wahnich, *La Révolution française: un événement de la raison sensible (1787-1799)* (Paris: Hachette, 2012) 156.

³ Jean-Claude Milner, *Relire la Révolution* (Paris: Verdier, 2016) 244. Subsequent page references are in parentheses in the text.

protracted conversations sounding very much like philosophical discourses or dialogues between two *speaking bodies* voicing their shared concern over the plight of other *bodies*, hungry bodies, reduced to and imprisoned within “a mood / Of solitude” (IX, 517-18), i.e., speechlessness.

That language, and words, should feature as the moot question of the French Books of *The Prelude* is the proposition that is made in my statement. As is well known, it was largely, nay, “chiefly,” for linguistic purposes that the young Wordsworth was led “thither,” i.e., to France,⁴ in the first place: “To speak the language more familiarly” (IX, 36-37). In similar fashion, several years after the exorcism on Morecambe Sands, in 1828, one of Wordsworth’s correspondents, a certain Thomas Colley Grattan, was to remark that the poet now spoke French very badly – something which his interlocutor could only confirm – “for too long he had not read or spoken a word of it.”⁵ A fact which Wordsworth put down to his “abhorrence of the Revolutionary excesses”⁶ causing him to want to forget the language altogether. This quasi-Freudian insight into Wordsworth’s almost wilful suppression of the French language squares well with Christoph’s forceful reading of the episode of the stolen boat.⁷ May I suggest that it makes full sense, too, *politically*? It is almost as if the italicized phrase “*Robespierre was dead*” (in reported speech, at a remove, it should be noted, instead of the expected first-hand, straight-from-the-horse’s-mouth idiolect which the parenthesis – “In the familiar language of the day”; X, 534 – was meant to announce), far from having the liberating effect which it is claimed to have had, virtually silenced the speaking body of Wordsworth, placing him at too great – too “safe” (X, 529) – a distance from the survival of speaking and civic subjects which was part and parcel of his daily concerns and fluent conversations of yore. For such was the true magic of Wordsworth’s stay in France: in the impression given, at least in those early stages, that mouths, minds and hearts spoke transparently and intelligibly, without the need for translators or translation. A linguistic prowess, of Babelian or Pentecostal magnitude, on the private level, sounding at one with a major political statement conducted publicly, at the level of the nation, with regard to the universality of speaking rights.⁸

⁴ “Au pays du peuple” (to the land of the people), as Jacques Rancière was to put it, in *Courts voyages au pays du peuple* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

⁵ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. 4, The Later Years, Part I 1821-1828*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd rev. edn., ed. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 616.

⁶ Marcus Tomalin, *The French Language and British Literature, 1756-1830* (London: Routledge, 2016) 13.

⁷ See this issue, 53-62.

⁸ Now, the divergence on how to enforce such speaking rights was to prove the most contentious of issues...

Opening statement: Christoph Bode (Munich)

There is a note, I hear, over Philip Pullman's writing desk in Oxford which says, "Do not be afraid of the obvious." *Alors*: the centrality of 'France' in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, manifest even in the titles of its Books, which present the outline of the argument – how everything leads up to 'France,' is then summarized in Book VIII ("Retrospect: Love of Nature Leading to Love of Mankind"), before the France Books IX and X (in the Thirteen-Book *Prelude*) or IX through XI (in the Fourteen-Book *Prelude*) seemingly introduce a counter-movement, which, in turn, cries out for a reconciliation (Books XI and XII or XII and XIII, respectively, "Imagination [and Taste], How Impaired and Restored"), which is eventually achieved in the culminating final book. And, to add another commonplace, how this structure, in the later version, follows that of a sonnet, with the implied break between Books VIII and IX, corresponding to that between the octave and the sestet, the *volta* between lines 8 and 9, and the summing up, in Book XIV, to in the final line of a sonnet.

And narratologically, too: arguably the most important parameter for the weighing of the importance of a passage, an event, or an episode in any tale is the relation between narrative time and narrated time, or, to put it more neatly, the relation between story time and discourse time. Discourse time (a) is the time it takes to relate a story or to read it; story time (b) is the time that is actually covered in the narrative. $a < b$ is the default position for most 'realist' narratives: it takes less time to narrate a story than to actually live through the events of the story (in *Robinson Crusoe* several hours vs. several decades). If $a = b$ (as in dialogue), then we're mostly facing a dramatization. If $a > b$ (as sometimes in Henry James or James Joyce), then the re-presentation of (mostly inner) processes takes longer than these processes themselves would take in real life. Generally speaking, whenever the relation between a and b moves closer to equal (or even into $a > b$), then a greater importance is attached to what is presented in the discourse – time is 'stretched.' If the narrative speed, however, accelerates, if something is summarized or paraphrased, then, obviously, time is compressed: what happens is not so important. By that measure, no other period of his life was as important to Wordsworth when he wrote *The Prelude* as his stay in France, November 1791 through November / early December 1792.

And this, it seems to me, is a safer indication of the relevance of 'France' than the narrative suggested by the Book titles or by the supposed sonnet structure of the whole. For, as Marc points out, what is striking about the representation of Wordsworth's first visit to France (July through October 1790 – Book VI is ideologically a *prolepsis* of the proper France Books, as the Arras episode in X, 448ff is a narrative *analepsis* triggered by "Robespierre") is how *natural* the

French Revolution seemed to Wordsworth not only in the summer of 1790, but also in the following years. The break of the coda that is *suggested* by the overall organization of *The Prelude* simply cannot be found in the text, in the tale itself: there is no evidence for it. Quite on the contrary, we have *continuity* instead of *discontinuity*. Time and again, Wordsworth underlines the fact that, because of his background, he found it very easy to identify with the revolutionaries (see, for example, IX, 218ff, 289ff, 433, 511ff; X, 126ff, 345ff, etc.), most prominently so in IX, 250-53: "If at the first great outbreak I rejoiced / Less than might well befit my youth, the cause / In part lay here, that unto me the events / Seemed nothing out of nature's certain course." In this whole period, which not only covers his twelve months in France, but also their repercussions after his return to England, his processing of this period and his observation of later events in France, there is only *one* event that truly shocks him: it is Britain's declaration of war against France on 10 February 1793 (following that of France by ten days): "No shock / Given to my moral nature had I known / Down to that very moment – neither lapse / Nor turn of sentiment – that might be named / A *revolution*, save at this one time: / All else was progress on the self-same path" (X, 233-38, emphasis added; see also X, 767ff.). Take a load of that: the French Revolution is "nothing out of nature's certain course," but the declaration of war against France is "a revolution."

In the France Books of *The Prelude*, there is one single day that is *singled* out more prominently than even that – unerringly identified by Marc in his opening statement as central – and it is the very day when Wordsworth learns (on 20 or 21 August 1794, i.e., with a delay of more than three weeks) of the execution of Robespierre: "O friend, few happier moments have been mine / Through my whole life than that when first I heard / That this foul tribe of Moloch was o'erthrown, / And their chief regent levelled with the dust. / *The day was one which haply may deserve / A separate chronicle*" (X, 466-71, emphasis added). And the chronicle of that one day he then gives us. Up until that point Wordsworth had been content to excuse even the wildest excesses of the revolutionaries with the standard gambit that they had nothing to do with the revolution as such: rather, "it was a reservoir of guilt / And ignorance, filled up from age to age, / That could no longer hold its loathsome charge, / But burst and spread in deluge through the land" (X, 436-39). See also X, 776-79: "assured / Of this, that time would soon set all things right, / Prove that the multitude had been oppressed, / And would be so no more." Or: "In the people was my trust / And in the virtues which mine eyes had seen, / And to the ultimate repose of things / I looked with unabated confidence" (X, 577-80). What a relief to no longer have to find any excuses. The burden is lifted.

Which brings me to Marc's key proposition, "that language, and words, should feature as the moot question of the French books of *The Prelude*." It is exactly *the lack* of language and *the lack of fluency* in a foreign tongue (but not that only, I will argue) that defines Wordsworth's experience of France – and this has wider repercussions. It is because of his "half-learned speech" (IX, 195) that he shuns direct confrontation with his royalist acquaintances, who tolerate him. Later, he thinks of how often the course of history was changed by "single persons" and dreams of how *he* could have been the one in France, in 1792, if only he had had the language: "Yet did I grieve, nor only grieved, but thought / Of opposition and of remedies: / An insignificant stranger and obscure, / Mean as I was, and little graced with powers / Of eloquence even in my native speech, / And all unfit for tumult and intrigue, / Yet would I willingly have taken up / A service at this time for cause so great, / However dangerous" (X, 128-36, emphases added). Sure, there had been one, a native speaker of French, who had stood up against Robespierre on 29 October 1792 (Wordsworth may well have been in Paris at the time, on his way back to London!): Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvray. But "Louvet was left alone without support / Of his irresolute friends" (X, 102-103). Speechlessness and/or isolation that are mirrored in the self-description of a Wordsworth, who, having returned home, inwardly "rejoice[s] / [...] When Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown" and sits silently in church on Sunday, "When in the congregation, bending all / To their great Father, prayers were offered up / Or praises for our country's victories, / And, 'mid the simple worshippers perchance / I only, like an uninvited guest / Whom no one owned, *sate silent* – shall I add, / Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come!" (X, 258-74, emphases added).

What I am trying to say is that being a stranger, an alien, an uninvited guest, is not a question of nationality or residence; it is a question of not having a language (yet), of being ineffectual, which, in turn, carries a heavy burden of ethical failure, especially if you feel: one *should* have spoken out, but *could not*. Recalling his time in Paris only a few weeks after the September massacres, Wordsworth speaks of himself as looking upon sights "as doth a man / Upon a volume whose contents he knows / Are memorable but from him locked up, / Being written in a tongue he cannot read" (X, 49-53). A few lines later, Wordsworth muses on what his status would have been ("well assured / That I both was and must be of small worth, / No better than an alien in the land") had he "perished too", then and there, as many of his Girondist friends did (X, 191-95). His brutally honest answer: "A poet only to myself, to men / Useless" (X, 199-20). That is what he was.

I guess what I'm trying to get at is this: we know that the whole *Prelude* is an attempt on Wordsworth's part to test out whether he really had it in him to write that great poem on man, nature, and society that Coleridge had requested him to write. Can I do it? Do I have a language for that? Can I be "man speaking to men"? The France Books of *The Prelude* are emblematic for the whole enterprise in that they show: *it all seemed only too familiar, but then it turned out that I lacked a language*. The never-ending project of *The Prelude* is the project of trying to find that language (which need not be a foreign tongue) so that one can speak out – even though the historical moment when it would have been most timely is long past.

Opening statement: David Duff (London)

Like Christoph, I am struck by the messianic impulse displayed by Wordsworth in the French books, and by the strange contradictions in his report of those fateful weeks he spent in Paris between October and December 1792. Critical attention has tended to focus on the apocalyptic lines in which, lying awake one night in his Parisian garret just "a little month" after the September massacres, Wordsworth prophesies further bloodshed ("The earthquake is not satisfied at once") and imagines a Shakespearean voice warning the whole city to "Sleep no more!" (X, 70-77). Less often noticed is his preceding admission that this rooftop vigil was not "wholly without pleasure," despite the "substantial dread" he felt (X, 60, 66). It is the very next morning, walking through the arcades of the Palais d'Orléans, that he hears the news of Louvet's denunciation of Robespierre, an announcement which, as Christoph notes, triggers his fantasy that, despite being "an insignificant stranger," he might be that "single person" destined to set the Revolution back on course (X, 130-38). Given the linguistic obstacles of which Marc and Christoph speak, it is no coincidence that this utterly extraordinary thought is accompanied by another wish, for a Pentecostal "gift of tongues" (X, 121), to be given not only to him but – good democrat that he now was – to all souls "throughout earth" who are "worthy of liberty" (X, 118-19): a wish for, specifically, a *foreigners'* crusade in which men might "arrive / From the four quarters of the winds to do / For France what without help she could not do" (X, 121-23). Fanciful though it might seem, this is exactly what the British and American "friends of liberty" assembled at White's Hotel in Paris in late 1792 were offering to do (with plenty of *fraternité* but without the gift of tongues). Whether Wordsworth made contact with his fellow British enthusiasts in Paris is not clear – there is no mention of them in *The Prelude* – but it is Wordsworth's own sense of mission, of vocation, that is so revealing, not least because of the emphasis he places on the sheer dangerousness of what he contemplated: a "work of honour" (X, 124) that would be anything but a "work of safety" (from

such thoughts of personal safety, "I was thus far as angels are from guilt"; X, 124-27). A corrective, no doubt, to any suggestion that Wordsworth left France out of fear. And in fact it may be wrong to assume, as we usually do, that the visit to Paris in late 1792 was simply a staging post on his return to England. Fully converted now to the Revolutionary cause, he was, he tells us, "enflamed with hope" (X, 38) and full of eagerness, in marked contrast to the "indifference" (IX, 91) he had felt on his first visit to Paris a year earlier.

Eager for what, though? One wonders what course of action the impecunious young writer had in mind when he conceived such "desires heroic" (X, 146). What we know, though he doesn't tell us in *The Prelude*, is that, soon after returning to England, he entered the British political fray by writing his "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff," fashioning himself as an Anglo-French revolutionary pamphleteer. That pamphlet was never published, nor was the republican journal *The Philanthropist* (Greek: "lover of mankind") he planned with William Matthews the following year. *The Prelude* does, however, leave some traces of his journalistic ambitions, or at least of his intense interest in the transmission of news. It is notable, for instance, that the two 'Robespierre' moments Marc and Christoph discuss – Louvet's denunciation of Robespierre's crimes and the announcement a year and a half later of his death – both take the form of a newsflash, the first bawled by "hawkers" in the Palais d'Orléans, the second given in response to his casual question whether "any news were stirring" to a passing traveller on Leven Sands (X, 533-35). Equally striking is the portrait he gives, in the Blois section, of the royalist officer who, tormented by the ever-changing political situation to the point where his once-handsome physique was ravaged and "contracted" by anxiety, would await "the hour, / The most important of each day, in which / The public news was read," nervously fingering his sword "like an uneasy place / In his own body" (IX, 156-64). Of all the scenes of reading in the historiography of the French Revolution (to take literally Jean-Claude Milner's injunction to "read," or reread, the Revolution), this is the most haunting. It's hardly an advertisement for a career in journalism but it does give a startling insight, as do the Robespierre moments, into the devastating power of "public news," and of those who disseminate it. If, as Ezra Pound said, literature is news that stays news, this sets a very high bar for Wordsworth's literary ambitions: what literature can compete with this, either in its immediate effects or its lasting consequences? More prosaically, we might note that one of the reasons Wordsworth gives for his relative indifference to Revolutionary affairs on his arrival at Blois, apart from his limited command of French, was that he "never chanced / To see a regular chronicle [...] / If any such indeed existed then" (IX, 100) which might explain to him exactly what was

going on. There were in fact many such chronicles – mostly Paris-based – but it is significant that Wordsworth feels the need to record his sense that this was something lacking. The wannabe journalist is definitely part of the subtext of Wordsworth's autobiographical poem.

This takes us to another of Christoph's insights, that the challenge of narrating the Revolutionary experience – of finding both a language and a form for it – was inseparably connected with the question of Wordsworth's progress on *The Recluse*. Until he could explain, in terms of his own trajectory, how "Love of Nature" led to "Love of Mankind," what chance was there to write a philosophical poem "on Man, on Nature, and on Human Life" in which that connection would be writ large? In 1804 things were looking very unpromising, because the pivotal experience of Wordsworth's life – the French Revolution – was not even mentioned in *The Prelude* as it then stood. The "preparatory poem" was already starting to look like a Miltonic epic, but it was a *Paradise Lost* without the Fall, and indeed without the Paradise – the "blissful dawn." His decision, in March 1804, to expand the then Five-Book *Prelude* into a Thirteen-Book version pivoting on the Revolution experience did not solve the *Recluse* problem, but it did show that he now recognised the need for a fuller and more honest account of how he came to be the person that he was.

The question I want to ask, though, is what are the implications of Wordsworth's repositioning of the "spots of time" sequence after this newly narrated material, in Book XI? The sequence originates in Part I of the 1799 Two-Part *Prelude* and describes, as originally formulated, those experiences by which "our minds – / Especially the imaginative power – / Are nourished and invisibly repaired" (1799: I, 292-94). Nourishment is a theme we would expect in a poem about mental growth. But, on the evidence of the 1799 version, what was there to repair? Minds "depressed / By trivial occupations and the round / Of ordinary intercourse" (1799: I, 291-92) might need some TLC but they are hardly in need of the extensive "restorations" offered by the "spots of time." The 1804 version of this passage, in Book V of the Five-Book *Prelude*, hints at further psychological damage by referring to a "malady" caused by false aesthetic taste and the misapplication of reason (1804: V, 269). These new lines also include, significantly, the one and only mention of France in the Five-Book poem: "when through the gorgeous Alps / I roamed" (V, 267-68). Reed conjectures that it was the precise moment when Wordsworth reached this point in the 1804 *Prelude* that he knew he had more to say – a great deal more, namely the whole story of his French Revolution experience and the ensuing crisis. In the Thirteen-Book version, which finally includes that story, this passage forms part of Book XI, entitled (picking up the repair metaphor from the "spots of time"), "Imagination, How

Impaired and Restored." It is only now, in the 1805 version, that we learn how extensive the damage was, and what caused it. The "malady" of 1804 becomes the much stronger "degradation" of 1805 (XI, 242), an acknowledgement that the aberration referred to previously was in fact a full-blown psychological crisis, the list of contributory factors now including the pressure of history itself ("aggravated by the times"; XI, 247).

The "spots of time" passage is also expanded in 1805 to include, alongside "trivial occupations" and "ordinary intercourse," more powerful causes of depression, namely "false opinion and contentious thought / Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight" (XI, 260-61): a reference to the prolonged mental conflict and turmoil he has just narrated in his account of the Revolution and the spiritual crisis that followed. In short, the "spots of time," thus repositioned, must now bear the weight of Wordsworth's entire Revolution experience, and make good the damage that, by his own admission, nearly destroyed him on his return from France.

What then, in this new location and context, are "spots of time," and how can they possibly carry such a redemptive therapeutic power? The minimalist interpretation available in the 1799 *Prelude*, which confines spots of time to experiences in early childhood, is no longer available in the 1805 version, where Wordsworth assures us that spots of time are "scattered everywhere" (XI, 274). The description of the repair-work they perform is also significantly modified: their "renovating virtue" is now said to involve an enhancement of "pleasure" which "enables us to mount / When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen" (XI, 265-67). An essential paradox nonetheless remains, which is that these renovating, enhancing, elevating experiences were, at the time, profoundly disturbing. The first example he gives in 1805 is of his encountering, at the age of six, a mouldering gibbet and a nearby mound of earth on which a murderer's name is inscribed, permanently visible; after which, frightened and alone, he experiences the "visionary dreariness" of a girl with a pitcher on her head battling against the winds on that desolate landscape. Disturbing though it is, that visionary dreariness – his capacity to apprehend and imagine it – is a foretaste of his adult creative power, just as, in the ninth stanza of the "Intimations Ode," which explains the paradox whereby childhood trauma can be imaginatively formative, it is the "Fallings from us, vanishings; / Blank misgivings [...]" (145-46) – not "Delight and liberty, / The simple creed of Childhood" (139-40) – that are the "fountain-light of all our day" and the "master-light of all our seeing" (153-54).

The question that therefore arises, and it is the one I want to conclude with, is: could it be that some or all the disturbing experiences and encounters

described in the French books of *The Prelude* – including the sleepless vigil after the September Massacres, the sight of the royalist officer ravaged by anxiety – are themselves “spots of time”: traumas that proved imaginatively formative, both the cause of psychological damage and the means of repairing it? If so, that is news indeed, not for the *journaliste manqué* in Wordsworth but for the Romantic visionary poet, the other vocation he discovered in Revolutionary France – without yet fully realising it.

Part 2

Response: Laurent Folliot (Paris)

It's difficult to make a beginning when all three opening statements are so packed with insight, but I'll start with Marc's spot-on remark on the romantic, fairy-tale quality to Wordsworth's early French adventures. I'd like to suggest that it was, perhaps, in keeping with a certain (bookishly romantic) view of France as a carefree, pastoral garden, to be found in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, or in parts of Goldsmith's *Traveller* where the country seems to stand for a sociable state of nature (“Gay sprightly land of mirth and social ease, / Pleased with thyself, whom all the world can please, / How often have I led thy sportive choir, / With tuneless pipe, beside the murmuring Loire!”).⁹ A land, too, we might hazard, of comparative *sexual* ease: hence, possibly, a distinctly *adolescent* quality to these pages, as when the forests of Sologne turn into those of romance, and especially when the mention of Chambord, with its Ariostan architecture and beauties, makes Francis I and his regal amours at home within Wordsworth's text (IX, 481-503); and we might, of course, remember that the speaking subjects of Milner's “rereading” also were, in all probability, speaking *bodies* that didn't always stand in need of a translation, bodies expressive of pain yet also of pleasure.¹⁰

⁹ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Traveller, or, a Prospect of Society, The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Longman, 1976) 645 (ll. 241-42).

¹⁰ Shortly before the emphatic conclusion to *Descriptive Sketches*, Wordsworth evokes a ramble along the Loiret in lines where a series of comparatives suggests that hopes of social regeneration make for a visionary heightening of common sensation (1793, ll. 760-73). Interestingly, this follows close upon a reference to the “maids” who, because of the war, have ceased, for the time being, to suit their voices “to the low-warbled breath of twilight lute” (ll. 748-49), an image which itself echoed the more ambivalent eroticism suffusing the evocation of Lake Como and its “fair dark-ey'd maids” earlier in the poem (l. 94); the promise of sensuous bliss is, one might say, simultaneously suspended by the necessity of ‘manly’ virtuous action and re-inscribed as a submerged

Here we may observe that Jean-Baptiste Louvet – who, as Christoph so shrewdly notes, gets singled out by Wordsworth as a virtual *Doppelgänger* – was, before he “spoke out” for revolutionary principles and against Robespierre’s ascendancy, the author of a highly-popular, softcore libertine novel, *Les Amours du chevalier de Faublas* (1786-90): a kind of wish-fulfilment fantasy whose voluble and very young narrator goes through a long series of happy erotic encounters without (initially at least) seriously endangering his virtue or sensibility. There’s no evidence whatever that Wordsworth had read Louvet’s novel, yet it’s interesting to notice that Faublas’s adventures, despite the jauntiness which marks them as the late product of carefree *ancien régime* patriarchy, nevertheless lead to emotional crisis and, for some of the women, death (Louvet himself, broken by his tribulations, died in 1797). Without dwelling overmuch on the Annette theme, which David has startlingly revisited in Paris last spring, it is tempting to see Wordsworth’s revolutionary experience as, simultaneously, adolescent fantasy and its traumatic ending – the kind of break that calls for a new language, perhaps for a new (more disciplined?) articulation of body and language; hence the taciturnity that Marc alludes to, and hence, if we follow, as I do, Christoph’s hint that the France Books are ultimately about Wordsworth’s ability to speak out, the deferral of the kind of full articulation that must be kept in *reserve* for the coming *Recluse*. From that point of view, we may observe that Louvet finds a possible counterpart in the person of Thomas Gray, some lines from whose *Elegy* (that greatest of paeans to unfulfilled potential) had been engraved on the tombstone of Wordsworth’s former teacher not far from Leven Sands (X, 495-99). For the mature Romantics, as for Arnold, Gray was essentially the poet of failure (the failure to “speak out,” precisely), but in this highly ambiguous scene of apostolic succession he could still be the master of sparse, reticent, sublime utterance the late eighteenth century overwhelmingly saw in him – a complex tutelary figure for Wordsworth’s post-Robespierre hopes.

Chances are, of course, that it was partly because of Gray that Wordsworth in 1790 visited the Continent and the Grande Chartreuse in the first place. And, since I fully adhere to David’s suggestion that Wordsworth’s experience in France was rich in “spots of time,” that is, both traumatic and imaginatively formative (just as the “volume [...] locked up, / Being written in a tongue he cannot read” of the September massacres [X, 50-52] seems to call for a possibly endless gloss), I’d like to conclude on the description of the Jacobin-desecrated monastery that only surfaces in the 1850 *Prelude* (VI, 414-88), in heavily

yet vital element of the landscape. See *Descriptive Sketches*, ed. Eric Birdsall (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) 112-14 and 146.

rationalised/ideological form, after being nearly elided in the 1805 version. In *Descriptive Sketches*, Wordsworth had actually written a lengthy evocation of the profaned spot, in which the “*severi religio loci*” was, dialectically or paradoxically, both negated and enhanced by destruction (“*Deepening* her echoing torrents’ awful *peal* / [...] / *Vallombre*, mid her falling fanes, deplores, / *Forever broke*, the *sabbath* of her bowers”; 76-79, emphasis added). I wonder whether, in those early lines, Wordsworth could be anticipating the complexity of his response to the French Revolution – simultaneously deploring its destructive, silencing impact, and celebrating the fact that it paved the way for a later, unimaginable utterance, “something evermore about to be” (VI, 542).

Response: Christy Edwall (Oxford)

At the risk of traversing well-trodden ground, I too would like to return to Marc’s salutation of the “magic of French Revolutionary Romance” in his opening gambit and the “bookishly romantic” France which Laurent has unpacked. I’m struck particularly by the moment when, along the Loire in Book IX, Wordsworth is supposed to be in “earnest dialogues” with Beaupuy but confesses that he “slipped in thought / And let remembrance steal to other times” (IX, 446-47), to the romantic cloud of hermits, travellers, maidens on palfreys, jousting knights, merry-makers, and glade-haunting satyrs. The passage is fluid, slippery, dreamlike, and – it seems to me – bizarre. In the context of the looming “civil slaughter,” the soon-to-be “unhappy Loire,” and Beaupuy’s “deluded” countrymen, Wordsworth’s retreat to the *locus amoenus* of old forms and past genres seems itself irresponsibly deluded. Or rather, implying a second childhood, recalling Book V and the “romances, legends penned / For solace by the light of monkish lamps; / [...] spun / By the dismantled warrior in old age / Out of the bowels of those very thoughts / In which his youth did first extravagate” (V, 521-27). Who else writes the 1805 *Prelude* but that dismantled warrior, that one-time member of the Grasmere militia?

Elsewhere in Book IX Wordsworth fails to feel what he ought; he does not succeed in matching internal and external event. Famously, sitting in the “open sun” where the Bastille stood, he “from the rubbish gathered up a stone / And pocketed the relick in the guise / Of an enthusiast” (IX, 65-67). Wordsworth, the poet of the ruined cottage, fails to make much of a ruined prison. A little further on, Wordsworth acknowledges “I looked for something which I could not find, / Affecting more emotion than I felt.” (IX, 70-71) (And what tourist has not felt a similar shock at the narrow, low-ceilinged darkness of Dove Cottage, a shock only repaired by a glance at Wordsworth’s homely ice-skate?) Even in his “more permanent residence” at Loire, Wordsworth admits he “scarcely felt / The shock

of these concussions," as "careless as a flower/ Glassed in a greenhouse" (IX, 86-89): the young poet artificially maintained, preciously preserved from the vagaries of the seasons. This "indifference" (IX, 91) he lays at the door of insufficient "needful knowledge" (IX, 93), even though, as David has mentioned, there were many chronicles that could patch this up. This disjunction between external and internal circumstances is matched by the incoherence of the times which, without the "form and body" put on by reportage, seemed to Wordsworth "[I]oose and disjointed" (IX, 106-107).

And so Wordsworth's slippage at the banks of the Loire into chivalric fantasy is the result of faulty information. Or maybe it's an indication of his literary consumption: he has read the wrong books. Or, perhaps, as Laurent suggested, Wordsworth has failed to cross the "isthmus" from adolescence to adulthood, "When cravings for the marvellous relent, / And we begin to love what we have seen" (V, 564-65). The romantic interlude is a fantasy of idealised social harmony: an unchanging, a-revolutionary greenhouse world of ever-present summer, perpetual quests, perpetual homecoming, and the intoxication of inherited language. Just as, in the middle of writing the new, elastic poetic form that is *The Prelude*, medieval and Italian romance blossomed into a tempting look backward to a world of received literary forms. In travelling to the country he left in 1790, Wordsworth has not become present to his past memories: travelling has dislodged his sensibilities, he has become even more errant, slipping back into an imagined past, in the company of a royalist friend who "wandered" through "the events of that great change [...] / As through a book, an old romance, or tale / Of Fairy" (IX, 305-8). In order to accompany his friend through bookish pastures, Wordsworth shuts his ears to his friend's "earnest dialogues."

If Wordsworth fails to feel as he should with a relic of the Bastille in his hand, he is more than moved by Charles Le Brun's *The Repentant Magdalene* which he "hunted out" in Paris. When confronted with the image of Le Brun's painting, Wordsworth's description – "A beauty exquisitely wrought – fair face / And rueful, with its ever-flowing tears" (IX, 79-80) – is markedly *off*, as Alan Liu has pointed out.¹¹ Words like *exquisite* and *rueful* suggest delicacy, control, feeling rising through the constraint of form. Yet Le Brun's Magdalene is Junoesque, fleshy, contorted, swathed in folds, poised as though waiting for the storm to strike. She's less repentant than a woman caught *in flagrante*. (The 1850 *Prelude* is somewhat nearer to Le Brun's hand-wringing mannerism: "A beauty exquisitely wrought, with hair / Dishevelled, gleaming eyes, and rueful cheek / Pale and bedropped with everflowing tears" IX, 78-80). Similarly, Wordsworth's reverie

¹¹ Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989) 36.

along the Loire is broken up by the picturesque attractions of “a roofless pile” of “a convent in a meadow green” (IX, 470, 469), “Romarentin” [*sic*], “Chambord” (IX, 483, 493) and some nameless rural castles, which together perform a “mitigat[ion]” of his “civic prejudice” (IX, 500). In these cases, and in Wordsworth’s feudal fantasy, aestheticism brings feeling and external objects into alignment. Is the fellowship of imaginative time-travel a balm in eliding the difficulties of friends with (hotly) contesting political convictions? Wordsworth’s “chivalrous delight,” he is quick to say, does not override “[h]atred of absolute rule” (IX, 503, 504) but this persuades me that old (poetic) forms can through sheer seductiveness – through the pleasure of inward incitation by what is seen – lead the poet into dangerous sympathy with the nostalgic beauties of the past. This “chivalrous delight” – his senselessness to the Bastille while capable of imagining with relish the satyrs’ joy over their female “unhappy thrall” (IX, 464) – may, as Marc suggests, bode badly for Wordsworth’s construction of the events to follow.

Response: Martin Procházka (Prague)

In his initial statement Marc proposes “[t]hat language, and words, should feature as the moot question of the French Books of *The Prelude*.” I agree with him but in a different sense than that implied in Jean-Claude Milner’s thesis of “survival of the speaking bodies” Marc has quoted. To me, Milner seems to voice common illusions of all radicals¹² that revolutions are tests of the survival of ideologies in the name of which they were begun, and that the authority of these ideologies in most cases proceeds from the “speaking bodies” of ideologues. Unlike Milner, I think revolutions are moments of transformation, when, as observed already by Kierkegaard, “speaking bodies” are swallowed by “the crowd.”¹³ This can be rephrased in a Foucauldian way that “speaking bodies”

¹² I oppose Milner’s equivocation that “radicalness is lethal or is not.” In political terms it is always lethal, because it inaugurates a repressive system which later liquidates it (see, e.g., Václav Havel’s absurd drama *The Garden Party*, 1963).

¹³ “The eminent personage dared to consider everything permissible, the individuals in the crowd nothing at all. [...] No particular individual [...] will be able to halt the abstraction of levelling for it is a negatively superior force, and the age of heroes is past. [...] The abstraction of levelling, this spontaneous combustion of human race produced by the friction that occurs when the separateness of individual inwardness in religious life is omitted, will stay with us, as a tradewind that consumes everything.” Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: A Literary Review, The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) 259. The

finally become "discursive objects" produced by impersonal discourses of a system. Although this development may not always eliminate radicals, it often eliminates their individual rights. Their speeches are soon supplanted by repetitive phrases, slogans and their ritual manifestations, such as the show trials. As Kierkegaard wrote: "When the mouth blathers pure drivel, it is futile to try to deliver a coherent discourse; it is better to consider each word by itself – and so it is with the situation of individuals."¹⁴

Wordsworth might have been sensitive to this transformation even when he ceased to be a French-speaking "body" as Marc has pointed out. Wordsworth's letter to his friend James Losh of 4 December 1821 indicates: "*you* have been deluded by *places* and *persons*, while I have stuck to *principles*. I abandoned France and its rulers when *they* abandoned the struggle for liberty, gave themselves up to tyranny, and endeavoured to enslave the world."¹⁵ Yet the fact is that this statement only leads to a similar incoherence as that described by Kierkegaard. A few lines below Wordsworth subverts his "principles," writing, on the one hand, that "a free discussion of public measures through the press" is "the *only* safeguard of liberty," but simultaneously maintaining that the press has become the vehicle of those who "reject all remedies from the quarter that has caused or aggravated the malady" (96). Does he mean the radicals? As a result, the press, extolled as the only safeguard of freedom, must, according to Wordsworth, be submitted to "vigorous restrictions" (96). Instead of the press, the actual safeguards of liberty are private property and "the Church Establishment" (97). What is here at stake is not only the logical coherence of the argument, but the integrity of Wordsworth as a "speaking body" shattered by his attempt to preserve his radical countenance and simultaneously demonstrate his allegiance to conservative politics and values.

May I suggest that we should read the French books of *The Prelude* as a vain attempt to defend and preserve not only the speaker's radicalism but his very integrity? How can we interpret the often quoted passage about "an hour / Of universal ferment," when "mildest men / Were agitated" and "the soil of common life" was "too hot to tread upon" (IX, 164-65, 169-70)? Perhaps not in that indeterminate fusion of past, present and future, which blurs the meaning of the following lines and levels it down to the biblical *vanitas vanitatum*: "Oft said I

omission of "the separateness of individual inwardness in religious life" here seems to constitute "speaking bodies" and also (paradoxically) assimilate them to "the crowd."

¹⁴ Kierkegaard 267.

¹⁵ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* 96. Subsequent following page references are in parentheses.

then, / And not then only, 'What a mockery this / Of history, the past and that to come! / Now do I feel how I have been deceived, / Reading of nations and their works in faith – / Faith given to vanity and emptiness – / Oh, laughter for the page that would reflect / To future times the face of what now is!' (IX, 170-77, emphasis added).

Response: Marc Porée

Much as I fancy the *Unterhaltung* dimension of this “Entretien” which I would certainly want to last forever, I will be pursuing an autistic vein in this second, complementary statement, at least initially. Granted, and Christoph is damn right about this (as always!), I vastly overrated the transitivity of the discourse (not) spoken by William Wordsworth. The latter’s command of the French language was probably limited, which must have hampered, if not his understanding of the issues being discussed, at least his ability to fully and transparently converse with other French “speaking bodies” (Milner). Likewise, I may have over-exaggerated the relevance of Milner’s overall “problématique” – which only works, sadly enough, within the ambit of French (arrogant) pretensions to universality, with the French language serving as the ultimate *lingua franca*. Regarding my allusion to a Pentecostal speaking/blessing in tongues, it had better be left out of the picture. Atheistic Milner and religiously-minded Wordsworth do not go together very well, I realise this, and the intrusion or interpolation of a foreign subject (made to speak a foreign language) was bound to be awkward; having said that, of course, the introduction of an external factor within Milner’s Franco-French equation is precisely what is at stake in the French Books of *The Prelude*: one of the reasons why I identify so strongly with the poet has to do with the difficulties one experiences, structurally, as a non-native speaker *cum* outsider, away from home, at pains to identify with a ‘*récit national*’ that is being recited, and processed, in your presence, and to which you cannot relate otherwise than superficially. This partly accounts for the sense of estrangement conveyed by the French Books, *d’ailleurs*. What is at stake, too, is the possibility, and plausibility, for the “Déclaration des droits de l’homme” to be really, and not just theoretically, universal. At stake, *tout court*, is the sustainability of the idiom of politics – by which I probably mean Girondin politics – within the historical framework of the Revolution as it took place. In that respect, the death of Robespierre failed to spell out the death of Jacobinism, sadly enough again. On the contrary, Jacobinism flourished in the wake of the disappearance of the lawyer of Arras with a heart of stone (one who gave so much to hope for but disappointed so bitterly: *Robe s pierre/espère*). It has thrived ever since, all the way down, or up, to

the present of 2017 (in which centralized and non-elected bureaucracy continues to rule the day): *Robespierre pas mort!* In retrospect, it is only fair to argue that the Girondins (a.k.a. Brissotins, Rolandins) in particular, self-defined as the political enemies of the Montagnards (and hated as such by Robespierre), and Girondinism in general, represented an avenue of meaning, a '*horizon d'attente*' for the *Révolution*, an alternative option, all of which were, alas, never explored; they were ruthlessly nipped in the bud, much to the dismay of Wordsworth, in view of the horizontal, 'bottom-up,' potentialities which would have stood France in (very) good stead, had this decentralized, federalist, devolutional (?) mode of government of the provinces by the provinces (Blois, of all places...) been implemented.

Now, over-exploiting Milner led me to under-exploit the potential of my own statement, which I should like to return to, if I may. Let me begin at the end. What is striking about the episode taking place on Leven Sands is its linguistic, vocal and interlocutory dimension. The piece of news concerning the death of Robespierre, Wordsworth could have read of or about in the press. This is what he probably did, incidentally. But for the illocutory/perlocutionary scheme to work, he had to learn of it *by word of mouth*. Only a human voice, or throat, could have delivered the news. The person in question – not all that dissimilar to the unnamed shepherd in Switzerland who tells Wordsworth that he had unwittingly "crossed the Alps" (IX, 594) – is of course not the man in the street, but the person from Furness who happened to be crossing the Leven Sands. Providential indeed, but a common man, too, if only because he is a man "speaking to men," using "a language really spoken by men."¹⁶ A speaking body, in other words, although merely acting as a messenger – not one to be whipped, though, in view of the nature of the message –, and with no presence (let alone *real presence*) other than purely instrumental or discursive. The trick, for it is a device, consists in a blend of reported speech and interior monologue, which allows/enables William Wordsworth's persona to carry on with the protracted dialogue between William and Wordsworth, without truly being interrupted. A dialogue initiated during the sojourns in France, but one, we realise, which was never discontinued; it had simply gone under, like a river, the river "Alph," possibly, or the river Loire – only the better to resurface, showing the internal dialogue, the "Entretien," to be "infini," in the words of Maurice

¹⁶ William Wordsworth, "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads, The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane W. Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) 1: 138, 137.

Blanchot,¹⁷ but then Blanchot was only paraphrasing the German Romantics and their own spirited conversation (thank you so much, David, for restoring that great tradition!). To follow-up on Laurent Folliot's precious lead, it is to be assumed therefore that, on his death-bed, Wordsworth was still babbling of the green fields of France...

To continue in a Milnerian vein, *quand même*, the Robespierre episode proves the author of *Relire la Revolution* right. Right about the radicality of Robespierrean politics that prefers killing to talking or speaking. Right about Wordsworth being himself caught up in an intoxicating frenzy of lethal radicality, which infects and taints his own over-excited response to the slaying of the Monster/Dragon/Hydra. Intoxicated by sacrificial violence *à la* René Girard, Wordsworth gloats patriotically over the image of Robespierre's severed head – it must be granted that guillotines excel at chopping off the windpipe, thereby all very conveniently, and tidily, turning talking heads into mute heads! The gleeful celebration on the part of Wordsworth is homicidal and murderous in spirit; it is ugly to witness, displaying as it does a dark, cruel streak in the poet's psyche – adding immensely to his complexity. Finally, there is a geographic, topographic dimension to the episode which deserves to be unraveled. Leven Sands in Weymouth Bay makes for perilous and treacherous crossings indeed. Serving as a natural boundary, this Lancastrian strait of sorts (am I correct in calling it an isthmus?) works in a powerfully symbolic manner, and probably serves as a topical reminder of England's own revolutionary, blood-tainted past (inclusive of the War of the Roses and of the Civil Wars). Last but not least, it is the locus or site where a major speech-act is enacted, at home, in true performative fashion. Doing things with words, so to speak, helped topple the Robespierrean mountain and precipitate the foreign tyrant from the heights of despotism, and all this was effected on the premises of a quintessentially English coastal formation, no higher than the level of the sea (!). Robespierre sat on a wall... Robespierre had a great fall... It takes no more than the polarities of home versus abroad to be revenged on revolutionary France... As far as Wordsworth's private guilt is concerned, though, I should hasten to add that no amount whatsoever of performativity will put paid to those inner wranglings and gnawings of his. They were indeed to last for ever.

I will conclude by pointing in the direction of a joint piece of work, edited by Frédéric Regard, entitled *Mapping the Self: Space Identity, Discourse in British*

¹⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *L'entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969); Eng. *The Infinite Conversation*, trans Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

Auto/Biography (2003).¹⁸ (Regard contends that the discursive positioning of the self, in the British Isles, goes hand in hand with a spatial positioning – an idiosyncratic *rapport* to space and place, in short. Picking up an insight which was Michel Foucault's in the first place (on the subject of *heterotopia*), he contends, rather convincingly, that English biographies – *The Prelude* is England's greatest autobiography in verse, is it not? – tend to come into being as "maps of the self," inseparable from a strong sense of place (a locale, a *genus loci*) – irrespective of whether rootedness or uprootedness is at stake. And the frequency of such a motif tends to be much higher than is the case in other European countries. I'll leave you on that curious peculiarity... which you might want to query.

Response: Christoph Bode

If we want to read *The Prelude* biographically (we don't have to, but we can, because that is, after all, the genre as which it is advertised; but it follows that then we prize the what more highly than the how), we do not have to go very far when we look for reasons for Wordsworth's lack of surprise, lack of 'adequate' feelings in revolutionary France. For him, the revolution is "nothing out of nature's certain course" (IX, 253), because everything in his life so far has made him an egalitarian, a republican:

For, born in a poor district, and which yet
Retaineth more of an ancient homeliness,
Manners erect, and frank simplicity,
Than any other nook of English land,
It was my fortune scarcely to have seen
Through the whole tenor of my schoolday time
The face of one, who, whether boy o man,
Was vested with attention or respect
Through claims of wealth or blood.

(IX, 218-26)

This, he claims, was continued in Cambridge (one may well doubt that representation, but that is beside the point), to which he owed "something [...] holden up to view / Of a republic, where all stood far / Upon equal ground, that

¹⁸ Frédéric Regard (ed.), *Mapping the Self: Space Identity, Discourse in British Auto/Biography* (St-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de St-Étienne, 2003).

they were brothers all / In honour, as of one community" (IX, 229-32). So that, with necessity,

It could not be
But that one tutored thus, who had been formed
To thought and moral feeling in the way
This story hath described, should look with awe
Upon the faculties of man, receive
Gladly the highest promises, and hail
As the best the government of equal right
And individual worth.

(IX, 242-49)

Maybe he had read the wrong books. I do not know. What I do know, however, is that he presents the story of his revolutionary enthusiasm as one of continuity. It is the continuity that explains the relative lack of enthusiasm: "If [...] I rejoiced / *Less* than might befit my youth, the cause / In part lay here" (IX, 250-52, emphasis added). That was my point. From which it follows that the France Books of *The Prelude* have such a hard time to serve their assigned function, viz. to show a crisis, a shock, an impairment. They don't. And that is a problem because, as David has reminded us, Wordsworth needed such a pivotal, critical period of his life for the telling of his story of the growth of his own mind. He fashions the France Books in such a way, he positions them there – but the story he tells in these books simply will not tell what he wants it to tell.

Which brings me to another point, evoked by David: spots of time (generally) and narrative sequence. They fall into two classes: moments whose meaning was realised then and there, and moments whose meaning was realised only later. (Check Boat Stealing, Blind Beggar, Simplon Pass – whatever you will: it's the one or the other and seldom undecidable.) When did he know what? No mistake: narrators may shuffle the episodes of their tales regardless of their 'correct' chronological sequence. After all, that is one major difference between discourse and story. But if the insight of an earlier episode is presented as the solution to a problem that was only to occur far later, then we have a problem on the story level. And that is exactly what happens at the end of *The Prelude*: as we all know, the revelatory ascent of Mount Snowdon took place in the summer of 1791, after Wordsworth's first tour through France in 1790, but before his 1792 sojourn. And it is marked unequivocally as a moment of then-and-there revelation: "A meditation rose in me that night" (XIII, 66): the solution to all his problems – and therefore rightfully placed at the end of *The Prelude* – is the

apotheosis of the human mind as it invests the world around it with meaning exactly like the moon bathes the sea of clouds with the 'islands' of other mountain tops and transforms this sight into something different, turning it into "The perfect image of a mighty mind" (XIII, 69; cf. 1850: "the type / Of a majestic intellect"). He knew it then. Already. He had the solution before he had any problem. You always knew. Did you not? A botched tale.

Which brings me to Wordsworth's characteristic 'reading' of landscapes, of topography 'as' something. (For reasons of space I refrain from discussing Wittgenstein's deliberations on 'seeing as' as an essential human capacity. But they are interesting.) I had meant to raise the issue of the symbolic dimension of Morecambe Bay/Leven Sands – but then Marc did it in his response! Could there be any better proof of congeniality? Morecambe Bay is not only the largest expanse of tidal sands (German: *Watt*) in the UK. It is also extremely dangerous because of its fast tides and quicksands. It is an amphibious landscape. To cross over safely, you have to be able to read the tides. Wikipedia adds:

There have been royally appointed local guides (holding the post of Queen's Guide to the Sands) for crossing the bay for centuries. This difficulty of crossing the bay added to the isolation of the land to its north which, due to the presence of the mountains of the Lake District, could only be reached by crossing these sands or by ferry, until the Furness Railway was built in 1857. [...] The bay is notorious for its quicksand and fast moving tides (it is said that the tide can come in "as fast as a horse can run"). On the night of 5 February 2004, at least 21 Chinese immigrant cockle pickers drowned after being cut off by the tides.¹⁹

Wordsworth crossed over safely. Ponder that. Just in time. Twice. "There is a tide in the affairs of men."²⁰ The news of Robespierre's death confirmed: That is over now! Hence: a day that deserves "[a] separate chronicle" (= extreme slowing down of narrative speed; IX, 471). The locus conforms to Wordsworth's trajectory: crossed over. Safe now.

Else: No word on Martin's contribution. Total unison. Maybe only this: an integrity which is always less threatened from without than from within. Therefore: "my theme has been / What passed within me. Not of outward things /

¹⁹ "Morecambe Bay," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morecambe_Bay, accessed 20 December 2017.

²⁰ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (4.2.270). *The Norton Shakespeare*, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 1997) 1578.

Done visibly for other minds – words, signs, / Symbols or actions – but of my own heart / Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind” (III, 173-77).

Finally: on account of revolutionary universalism/universality and ‘nature’ (which, as we know, always comes cooked or grilled). I wanted to consult the fabulous *Histoire mondiale de la France*, compiled under the auspices of Patrick Boucheron, about 1792, Wordsworth’s year in France. It has no entry. It is a gap year (sorry about that), a lacuna wedged between 1791 and 1793. But for 1791, this tome has this to say in the headnote: “Plantations en révolutions. Dans la nuit du 22 au 23 août 1791, une révolte d’esclaves sans précédent embrase la colonie française de Sainte-Domingue. Les droits de l’homme et du citoyen ne peuvent rester le privilège des colons blancs. De ce soulèvement naissent la première abolition de l’esclavage et l’indépendance d’Haïti.”²¹ And for 1793: “Paris, capitale du monde naturel. Le 10 juin 1793, la fondation du Muséum d’histoire naturelle à Paris, héritier du Jardin royal des plantes, s’inscrit dans le projet d’éducation morale et politique des Jacobins. Il assure le rayonnement de la France dans le champ des savoirs naturalistes pendant plusieurs décennies.”²² Lodged between revolutionary universalism and the new Natural History Museum: could there possibly be a more congenial (non-)dwelling place for Wordsworth?

For 1792, we have the French Books of Wordsworth’s *Prelude*. He presents ‘France’ as a crisis overcome. Only that, as the story shows, it wasn’t a crisis, really. And, what is more, he had the means to overcome it all along, viz. the capability to see things ‘as,’ to transform them into something meaningful. But to communicate that, you need a language. A common language that would, at the same time, be original. *The Prelude* is the necessarily inconclusive attempt to prove to himself that he could do it. The French Books, in all their inconclusiveness and contradictoriness, are emblematic of the overall *Prelude* project. An attempt at coming to terms with your own life. How could that enterprise ever be anything else but inconclusive?

Response: David Duff

Our collective emphasis on language is surely right. That Wordsworth’s Revolutionary experience was lived in French but written about in English; that his command of French was limited; that this prevented him from the active participation for which he yearned; that he indulged in compensatory linguistic fantasies, apostolic and journalistic; these are overwhelming facts, and previous

²¹ Patrick Boucheron (ed.), *Histoire mondiale de la France* (Paris: Seuil, 2017) 404.

²² Boucheron 409.

scholars have not properly attended to them. The standard 'internalisation' argument (Abrams's "apocalypse by imagination"²³) could be reframed: Wordsworth's failure to achieve public speech in Revolutionary France – to speak the language of the Revolution in its full sublimity and ferocity – led instead to the privatised, pacified language of his poetry, back in England. Yes, as a poet he was (in his own eyes) a "man speaking to men,"²⁴ but it's not quite like addressing the National Convention or issuing a call to action in *L'Ami du peuple*. Or not like making an epochal pronouncement such as Madame Roland's "Liberté, que de crimes on commet en ton nom" (but you have to be guillotined to get that soundbite opportunity). At some level, Wordsworth's discourse of the sublime is born of a nostalgia for this type of absolute speech act – the grandiloquence of life's great occasions, as Barthes put it.²⁵ Only occasionally does the latent ferocity in this lingering linguistic fantasy show through: in the "Carnage is thy daughter" of the "Thanksgiving Ode"; or in the homicidal glee Marc speaks of in the Robespierre episode – a glimpse, as Marc rightly says, into "a dark, cruel streak in the poet's psyche," all the more shocking because Wordsworth seems unaware of it.

For all the talk of language in *The Prelude*, and for all the retrospective analysis of his "youthful errors," at no point does Wordsworth's address the problem of revolutionary language raised by Coleridge in his Apologetic Preface to *Fire, Famine and Slaughter*: its intoxicating, incantatory, self-generating, delusive quality ("bubbles, flashes and electrical apparitions, from the magic cauldron of a fervid and ebullient fancy, constantly fuelled by an unexampled opulence of language,"²⁶ to use his very mixed metaphor). This was Coleridge's rationalisation in 1817 of his "violent words"²⁷ of 1797, and most readers are not much convinced by it. But he was echoing a point already made by other analysts of revolutionary fanaticism, notably the French playwright and rhetorician Jean-Francois de La Harpe, who argued in 1797 that the key to the Revolution's aberrations was its language.²⁸ By contrast, another overwhelming

²³ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973) 335-47.

²⁴ Wordsworth, "Preface" 138.

²⁵ Quoting Baudelaire in Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (Le Degré zéro de l'écriture, 1953), trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 21.

²⁶ *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16: Poetical Works*, ed. J.C.C. Mays (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) 1.i: 433.

²⁷ Coleridge 1.i: 433.

²⁸ Jean-François de La Harpe, *Du Fanatisme dans la langue révolutionnaire* (1797), quoted by Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1984) 19.

fact about *The Prelude* is the distance Wordsworth keeps from Revolutionary language. There are references to the “clamorous halls” of the National Synod and the Jacobin Club (IX, 46-47), the “hubbub wild” of the Parisian streets (IX, 56), the “heart-bracing colloquies” with Michel Beaupuy (IX, 473), and many other scenes of political listening or speaking. But we are never taken anywhere near the texture of French revolutionary discourse, spoken or written. With one or two obvious exceptions, the watchwords of the Revolution and the distinctive features of Revolutionary political rhetoric (“the impassioned and highly figurative language of the French Orators,”²⁹ captured by Coleridge and Southey in *The Fall of Robespierre*, working purely from English newspaper accounts) are nowhere mentioned. Two omissions in particular stand out: the first is where Wordsworth, again talking of his time with Beaupuy, acknowledges that “I shall not, as my purpose was, take note / Of other matters which detained us oft / In thought or conversation – public acts, / And public persons, and the emotions wrought / Within our minds by the ever-varying wind / Of record and report” (IX, 544-50). Such a ‘taking note’ would of necessity have involved the particulars of Revolutionary language and political news – but he declines to provide it (and in the 1850 version he removes the phrase “as my purpose was,” the suggestion that he ever intended such a thing). The other omission is in the passage about the royalist officers with whom he consorted on his first arrival in Blois. It is here that he admits that his French was “half-learned” (IX, 194), granting him a certain indulgence from his interlocutors, yet he ends by claiming that it was his opposition to their views that awakened his Revolutionary zeal “which yet / Had slumbered [...]. Every word / They uttered was a dart by counter-winds / Blown back upon themselves [...] their discourse / Maimed, spiritless – and in their weakness strong / I triumphed” (IX, 259-67). What Wordsworth omits to mention here that this ‘triumph’ was essentially in his own head; with his faltering French (soon after his arrival in France), there can be little repartee, and he can have won no arguments. If by some means he did, he does not tell us how, because in *The Prelude* the language of Revolution never leaves his lips.

These thoughts are prompted by Martin’s caveat about being drawn by Jean-Claude Milner into some sort of defence of Wordsworth’s Revolutionary radicalism, a defence that Wordsworth himself (unlike Coleridge) fails to provide. Perhaps I have misunderstood that caveat – and correct me if I have – but the distance Wordsworth keeps from the language of Revolution, while narrating his experience in France, precludes the kind of attention Kierkegaard

²⁹ Coleridge 3.i: 12.

urges, the consideration of "each word by itself." Was Wordsworth "swallowed by the crowd" in 1792? Christoph's point that Wordsworth tries to narrate his French experience as a crisis overcome, but "it wasn't a crisis," is very much to the point here. There is no analysis by Wordsworth of the French Revolution as linguistic event, the "Fall of language" that Steven Blakemore writes about in his book on Burke.³⁰ The crisis Wordsworth does manage to pinpoint is the philosophical one he describes in Book XI, after his return to England – his disastrous Godwinian phase. About his French experience itself, he remains curiously non-committal, even as tries to separate out the different phases of it: his trajectory from 'indifference' to 'zeal' to messianic fantasy. I have highlighted the lacunae, as we all have, but there is a kind of honesty here. Despite what Chandler and others propose,³¹ Wordsworth is no Burkean in 1805. His relation to the Revolution is complex and contradictory, but it is more a suspension of disbelief than a Coleridgean renunciation. He never became the "speaking body" he aspired to be in France, but equally he never quite left it behind. It was only Annette – and his unborn daughter – he left behind (yes, I have to mention it again, it's the elephant that is always in the room).

Laurent's statement and Christy's open up other valuable perspectives. That Wordsworth was, to begin with, a Sentimental Traveller in France seems eminently plausible: he didn't ham it up as much as Sterne, and *The Prelude* is not funny, but Wordsworth certainly was a specialist of emotion, and his classification of how different temperaments were affected by the Revolution (this is a recurrent, almost obsessive theme of the French Books) is very reminiscent of Sterne's classification of the different kinds of traveller (we should add – a good Revolutionary word – 'fellow traveller'). That he was also attracted to the sexual possibilities of this modish literary perception of France seems equally likely, especially in light of what happened (albeit not with a *fille de chambre*). The link between Gray's *Elegy* – the germ of so much of Wordsworth's poetry – and the theme of unfulfilled potential or failed utterance in the Revolution books is a brilliant insight. As for Ariosto and Tasso, invoked so prominently in the Beaupuy section and elsewhere, Wu's *Wordsworth's Reading* confirms that Wordsworth had a pocket copy of *Orlando Furioso* on which he wrote "I carried this Book with me in my pedestrian Tour in the Alps with Jones. W. Wordsworth" – and that he left a copy (presumably brought back from France) at his brother

³⁰ Steven Blakemore, *Burke and the Fall of Language: The French Revolution as Linguistic Event* (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1988)

³¹ James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Richard's in Staple Inn in 1793.³² So France and Ariosto were inseparably connected for Wordsworth. Yet I share Christy's sense that the romance passages are bizarre. They serve to introduce the dialectic between enchantment and disenchantment that is a central organising metaphor of the Revolution books (the 'blissful dawn' that was in reality a Bower of Bliss, a false paradise wrought under the spell of an enchanter) but they also contribute to the linguistic distancing I spoke of earlier. Instead of French *actualités*, the "record and report" of what was actually going on, we get Italian Renaissance poetry. The bromance between Beaupuy and Wordsworth is certainly "heart-bracing" (IX, 473) but it feels like a displacement. Of Annette obviously, but also of something more. Why does Wordsworth emphasise Beaupuy's meekness so much (the word is used three times)? "Meek, though enthusiastic to the height / Of highest expectation" (IX, 300-301). That's very high indeed. Is it because, by contrast, Wordsworth's own enthusiasm was tinged with ferocity? "Lofty" is one antonym to "meek", and that's the adjective Wordsworth aspired to for himself. But lurking in *The Prelude*, as Marc has intimated, is another, more dangerous Wordsworth, not lofty but proud, self-absorbed, violent (in imagination at least), a Wordsworth which the narrative never quite admits to yet never fully conceals. The fascination with different temperaments, and how they responded to the "over-pressure of the times" (XI, 47), was part of his attempt to discover his own, but the discovery is never conclusively reached, which, as Christoph implies, is not entirely a surprise.

Part 3

Martin Procházka

I agree, Christoph, with your remark about the integrity: my point, however, deriving from Kierkegaard, is concerned with a specific kind of integrity based on what Kierkegaard calls "the separateness of individual inwardness in religious life" (Kierkegaard's "religious life" may be narrowly understood as practising a specific religion as well as most widely as any relationship to the other). Here, the crucial moment may be Wordsworth's preference for Le Brun's *Sainte Madeleine repentante* which, rather than mere "dangerous sympathy with nostalgic beauties of the past" pointed out by Christy, indicates the loss of the speaker's "individual inwardness." In other words, Kierkegaard's "abstraction of levelling" is hard to imagine as a mere outcome of 'outer' forces.

³² Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 7.

Likewise, it is a product of the 'inner' changes similar to some of those implied in the French Books of *The Prelude*.

Christoph Bode

Thank you so much for that elucidation!

Laurent Folliot

Thanks to Christy for pointing out the odd way in which the *Madeleine* of Le Brun seems to stand out at the opening of the French Books – such a bizarre, alternate version of the *genius loci*, as it were. Is that a way of confessing (or pretending?) that nothing of what follows is truly central to Wordsworth's endeavour in *The Prelude*?

To come back to Jean-Claude Milner and the vexed question of Wordsworth's radicality, I'd like to thank Marc once again for offering such an area for discussion in the first place, as well as Martin for his pungent intervention. I'm not sure, in fact, that both positions are quite incompatible. To begin with, I believe we should never lose sight of the tremendous dissociation that took place between his humanitarian theory and Jacobin practice. This means, bearing in mind what Martin has said about revolutions, that the right of radicals to speak out also includes their right to speak, sometimes very vocally indeed, in order to silence their adversaries, which is also one salient reason why those who have lived by the (s)word have also often perished by it. The kind of topical publication whose relevance to Wordsworth's own position David emphasised also includes a kind of lethal journalism/oratory. Wordsworth's ambivalent fascination with the deathlike power of language (which Greg Dart has analysed in his book)³³ might go some way towards explaining his comparative elusiveness for much of the French books in *The Prelude*, the supplementary gloating over Robespierre's death which Marc has pinpointed, and even his blatant contradictions in the 1821 letter to Losh that Martin has reminded us of.

It might be added that Wordsworth's defence of man in his later poetry often is a defence of *silent* man, with the old Cumberland beggar being an extreme case in point. In fact, the beggar exemplifies the bedrock dignity of man, to the extent that he is not fully a citizen in, say, the French Republican sense of the word – and to the extent that he no longer speaks. I don't have the time or the ability to launch into an Agambenian reading of Wordsworth here, but perhaps we could say, in exaggerated fashion, that his subjects tend to have (silently expressive)

³³ Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

bodies rather than a political right to speak (the kind of right Wordsworth himself would later enjoy in an English, conservative-Whiggish way!).

I'm really fascinated by what Marc and Christoph have had to tease out of Leven Sands. A great level space on which one (not just any one, though, the poet) barely escapes that great leveller Death, or the great deathly Levelling, riding its tidal horse (we in French have similar sayings about the sea near Mont Saint-Michel in Normandy, by the way). Nice ambiguities here, especially in view of Marc's point about Wordsworth's need for an anonymous speaker voicing the real language of men at such a juncture (everyman/no man, the poet's alter ego and opposite?). The tidal wave is also, interestingly, reminiscent of the Arab/Quixote dream in Book V.

Lastly, I fully concur with Marc over the placedness of English discourse. But I feel this might make for another, fully extended conversation.

David Duff

I am pleased, Laurent, that we are thinking along parallel lines about the elusiveness (and allusiveness) of the French Books and the importance of "lethal journalism/oratory." The copy that survives of Marat's *Ami du peuple* stained with his own blood is a graphic reminder of that: a lethal dart thrown back upon himself, not by counter-winds but by the counter-revolutionary from Caen. Your point about silence is very suggestive – that recurring theme in his poetry takes on startling new significance in light of your analysis.

The French republican conception of a citizen as a speaking subject is, I take it, inherited from the ancient Greeks. The idea of public speech that underpins the Greek polis – and its notion of citizenship – is the ultimate standard against which French revolutionary democracy can be measured. It's not explicitly invoked by Wordsworth, but his yearning for full public utterance – not just the "earnest dialogues" (IX, 446) with Beaupuy, which are mere *têtes-à-têtes* – is presumably an indication of that. Better a *tête-à-tête*, though, than a conversation with a headless corpse, if that was the price of public speech in France. This seems to be the calculation Wordsworth makes as he considers what might have been had he lived out his messianic fantasy.

Martin Procházka

I do not think, David, that we can ask whether Wordsworth was "swallowed by the crowd." Although *The Prelude* is an autobiographical poem, its speaker cannot be generally identified with the historical person of William Wordsworth. This is especially true about the affair with Annette, which indeed is, as you have written, "an elephant that is always in the room." Moreover, I have not applied

Kierkegaard's observation directly to Wordsworth's situation in France. I only quoted from Kierkegaard's general account of the revolutionary time and its aftermath in *Two Ages*, according to which the modern "crowd" as "a collectivity in which there are no authentic individuals" is closely related to the "public" which is an anonymous and abstract notion created by "the press."³⁴ Kierkegaard then compares the public speaking "in antiquity," when the speakers "were able to oppose" the crowd assembled in the square, and continues: "With the press's public the situation is quite different. [...] journalistic anonymity and the ghostliness of the public is conducive to concealment and concealment conducive to brutishness."³⁵ The most frightening aspect of this situation is the fact that "the crowd" and "the public" are indivisible and "the public is a sheer abstraction."³⁶ "Blatant contradictions" (to use Laurent's words) in Wordsworth's letter to Losh (who, by the way, also visited France in 1792), as well as the desperately ironic passage from Book IX quoted in my previous response ("Faith given to vanity and emptiness – / Oh, laughter for the page that would reflect / To future times the face of what now is!"; IX, 175-77), may perhaps be explained as expressions of the fear of the ungraspable origin of revolutionary violence and its post-revolutionary impact. Therefore I agree with Laurent's point about the "defence of a silent man" in Wordsworth's later poetry.

Christoph Bode

It strikes me that Wordsworth, in fantasizing about interventionist public discourse, totally neglects, and thereby rejects, a native British tradition of public discourse, viz. that established in the London coffee-houses circa 1700 (about which Jürgen Habermas wrote so illuminatingly in his *Habilitationsschrift*, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1962). There is a kind of public discourse that does not include the possibility of asking for the head of your opponent. It is in this spirit that Immanuel Kant defined Enlightenment as "the public use of [...] reason."³⁷ The closest anyone in Britain in the 1790s came to *this* kind of non-revolutionary, but evolutionary, gradualist exchange and negotiation was William Godwin. As I suggested in 1977,³⁸ Wordsworth's "Godwinian phase"

³⁴ Kierkegaard 170.

³⁵ Kierkegaard 138-39.

³⁶ Kierkegaard 139.

³⁷ Immanuel Kant, "An answer to the question 'What is enlightenment?'" (1784), *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 19.

³⁸ Christoph Bode, *William Wordsworth und die Französische Revolution* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1977).

should be re-examined and re-evaluated. It was never the height of his revolutionary fervour. It was the logical outcome of the non-interventionism that had already characterised his year in France. Again: more continuity than discontinuity. Godwinianism allowed him to cross over for good before the tide came in.

Marc Porée

A minor point, more of a pretext, really. Among the many points David touches upon, so synthetically, in his response statement is the comparison between Wordsworth and Coleridge. It is not terribly flattering to the author of *The Prelude*. The silences of Wordsworth, his omissions, become all the more palpable, contrastively. The same could be said with reference to their respective responses to the fact of being in a foreign country and of leading the life of a writer abroad. Following upon their departure for Germany, in 1798, Coleridge returned to England long after Wordsworth. While the latter is all too anxious to leave, the former prolongs his 'Residence in Germany' beyond what was reasonable: his reluctance to comply with the urgent appeals of his wife is well-known, and so is his familiarity with the Harz and its *unheimliches* Brocken Spectre. In similar fashion, Coleridge finally returned with quite a few things German in his luggage, figuratively speaking. He developed a life-long interest in acting as an *Übersetzer*, a Translator *extraordinaire* (Schiller, and quite certainly Goethe's *Faust*). Now, as many critics have noted, Wordsworth does not seem to have been much taken by French literature during and after his stay. In view of all this, it could very well be that the key moment in the French Books is when they begin to enact and implement the homing instinct (*nostos*). The "voyage au pays du peuple," as Jacques Rancière sees it, was worthwhile, provided it was "court," short. The French Books, but this feels like bringing coals to Newcastle, read best when (re)read back to front, i.e., as from the time when they become fully English again.

David Duff

Thank you, Marc, for raising this new question. Where do you think that pivotal moment is? Can you pinpoint for us where in the French Books Wordsworth's homing instinct is first displayed? As for the order of reading, I note that when Wordsworth re-narrated his French experience in *The Excursion* (not autobiographically, but drawing unmistakably on his own life), he did indeed write it in reverse, starting with "Home at Grasmere" (as distinct from "Residence in France").

Christoph Bode

Yes, when and where do his lines become “fully English again”? Even if we think we can identify that moment, would it not be a category mistake (this is not directed against you, Marc, but against positivistic readings) to deduce *anything* from this for the life of Wordsworth? After all, here is Wordsworth’s warning to Wordsworth: “Yet do not deem, my friend [...] that this was really so” (VIII, 472-75). Is the poet ever where he is? “[...] more than all, a strangeness in my mind, / A feeling that I was not for that hour, / Nor for that place.” (III, 79-81) This is said about his Cambridge years. In all first-person narrative, the narrator is in two places at the same time (in the case of *Tristram Shandy*, three places, at the Auxerre moment), but the narrator of *The Prelude* as *erlebendes Ich* (object of the discourse) is also never quite there, though – the narrator underscores this point – at first uncannily at home, not in Grasmere, but in France – though lacking a language, lacking articulation. It will save his neck (he muses). A blessing in disguise? Does the poet risk his head when he has found his language?

Marc Porée

Very shortly after his arrival in Blois and before his decisive encounter with Beaupuy, Wordsworth finds himself consorting with Royalists who go all out to persuade him to follow them as émigrés and exiles in their flight *nach* Germany. As if he were sitting in the dock, accused of a crime no one formally holds against him, except his own patriotic Super-Ego, Wordsworth’s persona pleads not guilty. With pride into the bargain, availing himself of a tradition of meritocratic republicanism (“the government of equal rights / And individual worth”; IX, 248-49) which, paradoxically in view of the weight and pomp of the “regal sceptre” (IX, 212) back home, is far less French than it is English. Ur-English, if you will, and proceeding from (in reverse order vis-à-vis the lines as they stand in Book IX, 218-49): “mountain liberty” (IX, 242) (of paramount importance), “fellowship with venerable books” (IX, 240), “[t]o God and Nature’s single sovereignty” (IX, 238) the stay at Cambridge and its “one community” (IX, 233) of “Scholars and gentlemen” (IX, 234) standing “[u]pon equal ground” (IX, 232) – an insight which, incidentally, adumbrates Derrida’s plea for *L’Université sans condition*³⁹ – and, first and foremost, the birth in “a poor district” (IX, 218), with its brand of “homeliness” (IX, 219) (irrespective of William’s premature orphanhood), which happens to be more republican than “any other nook of English land” (IX, 221) (topography, again). Owing to such circumstances, topical and structural, Wordsworth feels blessed to have developed

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, *L’Université sans condition* (Paris: Galilée, 2001).

the habit of bowing before no one, and of never yielding to “claims of wealth and blood” (IX, 226).

In other words, to answer David’s pointed question, no sooner have the French Books begun than a tropism takes over, gathering momentum as they proceed, and carrying the Resident in France all the way back to Britain. Woven into the texture of this “levelling” Muse⁴⁰ (nothing new, here, I’m afraid) is a habitus, a mode of behaviour or reaction that is never dazzled, never impressed by those presented as one’s betters. Consequently, Wordsworth can cry, weep, mourn, shed tears – *sunt lacrimae rerum* is a Wordsworthian tag as much as it is a Virgilian one (IX, 275) – but never will he go down on his knees. His not being affected, say, by that one small stone from the ruins of the Bastille which he pockets, is surely at one with Wordsworth’s northern phlegm, but further down, it ties in with the grassroots appeal of English democracy. The French talk a lot, declare a great deal, are easily exalted, it transpires, but when it comes to the nitty gritty of *Egalité*, the English have the edge. And the French Books make this pretty clear, it would seem.

David Duff

A great answer, Marc. So Wordsworth never gives up his magic carpet. And hey presto, he is back in London, playing cards again with his brother Richard (with some new French tricks up his sleeve no doubt, learnt at the “card-tables” of Blois [IX, 116]). Then there’s the declaration of war and he becomes not a patriot but a traitor. His “revolution.”

But, Christoph, you think there is a continuity even there, and that Godwinianism is a logical consequence of his French non-interventionism? We need a day-by-day record, which we don’t have, because before he got Godwinized, he wrote his *Llandaff* pamphlet, where he’s still an apologist for revolutionary violence and doing that most un-Godwinian thing, radical pamphleteering – the closest he comes, in fact, to that fantasy of public speech, albeit in England not in France, and in English not in French (or some sort of hybrid). Hardly, though, in the ‘safe’ tradition of the English coffee-shop “public sphere,” because after all he is defending king-killing and declaring himself a republican (ergo, another head might need to roll – George III, be warned). But I’ve already spoken about this in Paris.

⁴⁰ “His Muse [...] is a levelling one. It proceeds on a principle of equality and strives to reduce all things to the same standard.” William Hazlitt, “Mr. Wordsworth,” *The Spirit of the Age, or, Contemporary Portraits*, 4th edn., ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1886) 152.

And Martin, thank you for clarifying your point about crowds. Kierkegaard's distinction between the tangible crowd assembled in the square whom one can address in person (direct democracy, Greek-style), and the abstract, ghostly "crowd" addressed anonymously through print journalism, is extremely helpful here. But in revolutionary Paris, the "crowd" addressed by journals like *L'Ami du peuple* was all too real, and just around the corner. That must have been part of the attraction for Wordsworth of radical journalism – his fantasy vocation – but he must have realised the potential consequences of wielding such power. Or did that realisation only come later? Most of the journalists who were later killed – Marat, Brissot, Desmoulins, Gorsas, Carra – were still alive in 1792. Once thoughts of radical journalism were set aside, the only "public" Wordsworth sought (as explained in the "Essay Supplementary") was "the people, philosophically characterised" – a purified and pacified version of the revolutionary crowd. Was that another delayed reaction to his French experience?

Christoph Bode

What I meant is: Godwinianism is *verbal* radicalism. It does not ask for political action (by association, forming clubs etc.), in fact, warns of it. That is why it serves as the perfect link between his revolutionary enthusiasm and his later acquiescence in "things as they are." Like in a game of domino, the equal number of points on both sides of the divide (Wordsworth's political crossing over) spells non-interference, non-interventionism. That is what Wordsworth in France and Wordsworth in his "Godwinian phase" have in common. No political action, just debate. Words. Language. And, in France, not even that, to a sufficient degree.

Wordsworth does not advocate regicide, he explains it; just as he is not 'for' terror when he historically explains it. That is a huge difference. Godwin could explain revolutionary violence without, of course, condoning it. Is that apologetic? Even Gandhi could explain British colonial violence.

By the way: regicide is a British invention. The British horror at the beheading of Citizen Capet always went hand in hand with an astonishing historical denial and forgetfulness. Which, again, does not mean that Wordsworth would not have stood by, silently, if it had happened again. Emulating Milton.

Next: the dissemination of rational proposals for reform is not, basically, at odds with Godwin's political ideas. Godwin just could not explain how, if the present system was as repressive and irrational as he had presented it in *Political Justice*, it could ever be changed from within by simple rational debate – the system as depicted by Godwin would not allow it. Hence the gigantic hiatus, in his political philosophy, between 'things as they are' and 'things as they should be.' He had no *practical* political agenda. Neither had Wordsworth. I don't blame him.

Martin Procházka

I must apologise for resorting again to Kierkegaard's *Two Ages* when I respond to David's very pertinent observation that "the 'crowd' addressed by journals like *L'Ami du peuple* was all too real, and just round the corner." In my response to the initial statements I pointed out that "revolutions are moments of transformation." I should have added that this does not merely involve the "speaking bodies," but also the crowd. In *Two Ages* there is a passage about the changing relationship between individuals and the crowds which to me seems relevant not only for the interpretation of the French Books of *The Prelude*, but also for the development of the French Revolution up to the Reign of Terror:

A particular individual can take a lead in an insurrection, but no particular individual can take lead in levelling [...]. Particular individuals may contribute to levelling, [...] but levelling is an abstract power and is abstraction's victory over individuals. In modern times levelling is reflection's correlative to fate in antiquity. The dialectic of antiquity was oriented to the eminent (the great individual and then the crowd; one free man and then the slaves) [...]. The dialectic of the present age is oriented to equality, and its most logical implementation, albeit abortive, is levelling, the negative unity of negative mutual reciprocity of individuals.⁴¹

The desperate ironic passage from Book IX can be interpreted in this framework as the expression of the speaker's anxiety about the loss of meaning of history dominated by the process of levelling. To respond to Christoph's suggestion that the passage seems to anticipate Marx's dictum about the repetition of history as a farce: yes, possibly, but with an important difference – Marx never thought of levelling as "a negative unity of negative mutual reciprocity" as Kierkegaard did. For Marx, levelling was a necessary precondition of the global revolution and the victory of Communism.

Christoph Bode

With regard to your last paragraph, Martin: that is exactly what I meant – if farce *first time around*, what does that say about history?

Martin Procházka

Sorry, Christoph, for misunderstanding you. It implies that history is not a teleological process and its meaning cannot be articulated by means of available historical narratives.

⁴¹ Kierkegaard 84.

David Duff

I agree with everything Christoph says about Godwinianism as a perfect "transition" for Wordsworth, albeit one that he presents as leading him into spiritual crisis. And I agree that this phase needs re-examining. Clearly the crisis is structurally necessary in the narrative of *The Prelude* – it's his version of the Fall. But it's also a displacement, because there are plenty of other experiences – mentioned and unmentioned in *The Prelude* – that contributed to that crisis. It seems to have been Godwin's role to be blamed for everything, by radicals and conservatives alike, and Wordsworth (who was a bit of both) was no exception. At least you *don't* blame him, Christoph.

Martin, I welcome too your further quotation from Kierkegaard. It's not surprising that equality was the most problematic term in the French revolutionary triad. The spanner in the works of bourgeois revolution. And yes, I agree with Marc, that this was the term which meant most to Wordsworth, though he learnt it in England not in France. As for the lines about "laughter for the page that would reflect / To future times the face of what now is," if we can understand that "laughter," I think we will have finally cracked *The Prelude*. The laughter not of mere farce perhaps, but of a special kind of tragi-comic-romantic-ironic farce. A *Mischgedicht*, in short (we should expect no less from our Schlegelian investigation).

Laurent Folliot

I definitely agree that Godwinianism was, as David and Christoph suggest, an ideal, indeed a necessary-necessitarian transition phase for Wordsworth (which could only begin after he had written "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff"; the publication of *Political Justice* must have come rather shortly on the heels of that). Following the same line of argument, it's interesting that Godwin should indeed serve later as a scapegoat and bear the obloquy of the Terror in some ways, and yet we may surmise that such a re-interpretation emerged long before Wordsworth wrote *The Prelude*: in *The Borderers* he was already beginning to connect Godwin-style utilitarianism with, if not outright head-chopping, at least human sacrifice of some kind. And Rivers is indeed the only orator in the play, which would somehow confirm some of the hypotheses raised.

Christoph's salutary warning that *The Prelude* made Wordsworth and that the Wordsworth who wrote it wasn't the one who travelled to Blois and Paris leads me to think that, perhaps, the "laughter" he rather cryptically mentions might be understood as the gap that separates human life and events, including revolutions, such as historians and political commentators of all kinds may represent them – and that would include, for example, the hopeful editor of

The Philanthropist – and the same essential objects such as, ideally, the poet of *The Recluse*, always indispensable to underwrite beforehand the claims of *The Prelude*, would embody them or image them forth. In other words, history-writing of all stripes is laughable when compared with what philosophical poetry – now that the philosophical poet is firmly grounded in England and writing *The Prelude* – should ultimately achieve. The vanity and emptiness of history-writing is an eighteenth-century commonplace of sorts, which Wordsworth appropriates in his own peculiar way, i.e., with a dollop of the egotistical sublime!

Just a word of clarification regarding my perhaps hazardous reference to Sterne. True, *A Sentimental Journey* is about Yorick more than it is about France, but what of Wordsworth's own 'French' texts? What I meant was that in both cases, as Wordsworth was almost certainly aware, France is the ideal terrain for romancing the self (including by flirting with the enemy), and more precisely that some thematic motifs seem to recur from one text to the other. I still don't have Wu's book by me, unfortunately, but I'd be rather startled if Sterne weren't on the list. Anyway, my earlier point was about the erotic undercurrent to the journey motif (borne out, I think, by some unobtrusive hints in early texts like *Descriptive Sketches*, for instance). On the other hand, the romance aura of all those youthful roving makes it easier for Wordsworth, as Marc says, to hint that he's remained English all along (to put Spenser back into Ariosto, perhaps).

David Duff

Since I do have Wu's volumes by my side, and Wordsworth's letters too, I can confirm there is only one explicit mention of Sterne, in a letter to William Matthews on 3 August 1791. Asked by Matthews for his observations on "modern Literature," he replies: "You might as well have solicited me to send you an account of the tribes inhabiting the central regions of the African Continent. God knows my incursions into the fields of modern literature, excepting in our own language three volumes of *Tristram Shandy*, and two or three papers of *The Spectator*, half subdued – are absolutely nothing."⁴² A Shandyesque remark if ever there was one. And a Bloomian remark, too, with its pretence of blissful ignorance of the crowded literary terrain ("half subdued" is especially Bloomian – oh, that it were so, the competitors half-beaten even before you start). *Tristram Shandy* is definitely one source of the irony Christoph speaks of, if not of the eroticism Laurent describes. And one source for the narrative trickery of *The Prelude* (or, as it was called on an 1805 manuscript, "Poem. Title Not Yet Fixed Upon"): the deferrals and disruptions, turns and counter-turns, the missing chapters...

⁴² *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. 1, The Early Years 1787-1805*, 2nd edn., ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) 56; Wu 132.

Marc Porée

We have just a few minutes left, though it feels like a quite un-Wordsworthian thing, rushing to meet a deadline:

so have we long time
Made motions retrograde, in like pursuit
Detained. But now we start afresh: [...]

(IX, 7-9)

I certainly “start afresh” in my own rereading of the French Books, enriched by the contributions of the one and the many. To be recollected in tranquillity, no doubt, and repeated for sure...

Christoph Bode

After such consoling yet open-ended final words, what could one possibly add, of substance? Nothing. Except maybe the genre question: *The Prelude* itself is advertised as an epic; but, Wordsworth admits, unusual in so far as it is an epic told by a first-person narrator. That seems like a contradiction in terms, like “*Lyrical Ballads*.” It is not quite autobiography either, because it will relate of exterior events only insofar as they pertain to the growth of his mind; Wordsworth as character is the focalizer, long before the term existed, but ‘his’ is also the voice that narrates; or not quite: it is always the *later* Wordsworth who narrates what he thinks/remembers to have seen in the mirror of the consciousness of his former self. Hence the Blind Beggar as symbol of the whole enterprise: the subject as object of his own story (“[t]he story of the man and who he was”; VII, 615) is always blind and somebody else has to write it down for him. Romanticism (at least the German variety) is *the* period for genre-mixing and blending. But genre is also in the eye of the beholder. Farce or tragedy? Aldous Huxley once said, using a man who slips on a banana skin as an example, that comedy is the tragedy that happens to others. To see revolutionary activities (that once one had deep sympathies with) as potentially farcical bespeaks an ironic aptitude, a distancing not only from these events but also from one’s former self. History would then not teach anything; except that the French Revolution played a part in the making of Wordsworth.

The self-fabrication of Wordsworth in *The Prelude* was, logically, a never-ending project: as long as he moved on in time, he had to re-write his ‘take’ on the first twenty-eight, twenty-nine years of his life. Projects of this kind can only, like our conversation, end abruptly.

David Duff

Regrettably so, and since the clock has struck eleven in London, we must draw our discussion to a close. Thank you all for sharing your insights and rising so magnificently to the difficult challenge we set ourselves. This is my valedictory message but it is “a valediction forbidding mourning,” because we will return to the table one day and, yes, “start afresh.”

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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