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Sex and History in *The Prelude* (1805): Books Nine to Thirteen

Whatever the "truth" of Wordsworth's long life (1770-1850), Books Nine through Thirteen of the 1805 version of his autobiographical poem *The Prelude* present the French Revolution as the major crisis of the poet's poetic formation. As one critic has put it, "his allegiance to revolutionary enthusiasm was so strong that, when, as he saw it, the revolutionary government resorted to nationalistic war (and after he had set up residence with his sister, as they had so long desired), Wordsworth was thrown into a catastrophic depression that has led many modern critics to treat the Revolution (or having a child by and 'deserting' Annette Vallon, one is never quite sure) as the trauma of his life."[1] As this analysis reminds us, the "revolution" in Wordsworth's life also involved two women. As in the critic's sentence, so also in *The Prelude*, the story of Annette is in parenthesis, the desertion in quotation marks. "His sister"—and indeed Wordsworth does not name her—is also in parenthesis.

The consecutive parts of *The Prelude* were not consecutively composed. The account in the text is not chronological. I have taken the textual or narrative consecutivity imposed by an authorial decision as given. Such a decision is, after all, itself part of the effort to cope with crisis.

As I read these books of *The Prelude*, I submit the following theses:

1. Wordsworth not only needed to exorcise his illegitimate paternity but also to reestablish himself sexually in order to declare his imagination restored.
2. He coped with the experience of the French Revolution by transforming it into an iconic text that he could write and read.
3. He suggested that poetry was a better cure for the oppression of

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mankind than political economy or revolution and that his own life had the preordained purpose of teaching mankind this lesson.

My critique calls for a much more thorough reading of the history and politics of the French Revolution and the English reaction than I am able to provide here.

I sometimes use the Derridian words "trace" and "trace-structure" in the following way. In our effort to define things, we look for origins. Every origin that we seem to locate refers us back to something anterior and contains the possibility of something posterior. There is, in other words, a trace of something else in seemingly self-contained origins. This, for the purposes of my argument, "is" the trace-structure.

The trace, since it breaks up every first cause or origin, cannot be a transcendental principle. It would thus be difficult to distinguish clearly between the trace as a principle and cases of the trace, such as writing or a stream. The trace-structure does not simply undermine origins; it also disrupts the unified and self-contained description of things. By isolating three theses in Wordsworth's work, I am inconsistent with the notion of the trace-structure. No discourse is possible, however, without the unity of *something* being taken for granted. It is not possible to attend to the trace *fully*. One's own self-contained critical position as attendant of the trace also refers back and forward. It is possible to read such references as one's "history" and "politics." Since the trace cannot be fully attended to, one possible alternative is to pay attention to the texts of history and politics as the trace-structuring of positions, knowing that those two texts are themselves interminable.

Wordsworth's Exorcism of Illegitimate Paternity; Sexual Self-Establishment to Restore Imagination

It is commonly acknowledged that the story of Vaudracour and Julia, as told in Book Nine of *The Prelude* (1805), is a disguised version of the affair between Wordsworth and Annette Vallon. The real story is much more banal: Annette did not have a chance to begin with. She was romantic and undemanding. Plans for marriage were tacitly dropped over the years. No money was forthcoming even after Wordsworth received his modest legacy. Annette got deeply involved in the Royalist resistance and died poor at seventy-five. The story is told in detail in Emile Legouis's *William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon.*[2] "It is only fair to add that Wordsworth made some provision for his daughter from the time of her marriage in February, 1816. This took the form of an annuity for £30, which continued until 1835 when the annuity was commuted for a final settlement of £400."[3] In "Vaudracour and Julia" the woman is in a convent, the child dead in infancy, and the man insane.

It is not my concern in this section to decide whether Wordsworth can be excused or if Annette was worth his attentions. It is rather to remark that, in these books of *The Prelude*, one may find textual signs of a rejection of paternity, of a reinstatement of the subject as son (rather than father) within Oedipal law, and then, through the imagination, a claim to androgyny.

The acknowledgment of paternity is a patriarchal social acknowledgment of the trace, of membership in what Yeats has called "those dying generations." Through this acknowledgment, the man admits that his end is not in himself. This very man has earlier accepted sonship and admitted that his *origin* is not in himself either. This makes it possible for the man to declare a history. Wordsworth the autobiographer seems more interested at this point in transcending or coping with rather than declaring history —in producing a poem rather than a child. He deconstructs the opposition and cooperation between fathers and sons. The possibility of his being a father is handled in the Vaudracour and Julia episode. The rememoration—the symbolic reworking of the structures —of his being a son is constructed in the famous "spots of time" passages. Then, since mothers are not carriers of names, by means of Nature as mother, Wordsworth projects the possibility of being son *and* lover, father *and* mother of poems, male *and* female at once.

I will try to show this projection through the reading of a few passages. But first I should insist that I am not interested in a personal psychoanalysis of William Wordsworth, even if I were capable of undertaking such a task. The thematics of psychoanalysis as a regional science should be considered as part of the ideology of male universalism, and my point here would be that Wordsworth is working with and out of that very ideology. If indeed one wished to make a rigorous structural psychoanalytic study, one would have to take into account "the death of Wordsworth's mother when Wordsworth was eight." One would have to plot not only "the repressions, fixations, denials, and distortions that attend such traumatic events in a child's life and the hysteria and unconscious obsessions that affect the life of the grown man, and more than likely his poetic practice"[4] but also the search for "the lost object" and the recourse to fetishism in the text as signature of the subject.

The story of Vaudracour and Julia begins as a moment of dissonance in the story of the French Revolution, marking a deliberate postponement or substitution:

> *I shall not, as my purpose was, take note*
> Of other matters which detain'd 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* or *Report* which day by day
> Swept over us; but I will here *instead*
> Draw from obscurity a tragic Tale
> *Not in its spirit singular indeed*
> But haply worth memorial . . .
> (IX, 541-50; italics mine)

Not only does the story not have its proper place or singularity, but its narrative beginning is given as two random and not sufficiently differentiated choices out of plural possibilities: "Oh / Happy time of youthful Lovers! thus / My story may begin, Oh! balmy time . . ." (IX, 554-55). In the final version of *The Prelude* (1850), its revisions dating probably from 1828, the beginning is even less emphatic: "(thus / The story might begin)" is said in parenthesis, and the story itself is suppressed and relegated to the status of nothing but a trace of a record that exists elsewhere: "So might—and with that prelude did begin / The record" (IX, 557-58 [1850]). If in the serious public business of *The Prelude* such a nonserious theme as love and desertion were to be introduced, the 1850 text asks, "Fellow voyager! / Woulds't thou not chide?" (IX, 563-64).

The end of Book Nine in both versions gives us an unredeemed Vaudracour, who, situated in an indefinite temporality, remains active as an unchanging pre-text at the same time as the prospective and retrospective temporality of Books Ten to Thirteen puts together a story with an end. The mad Vaudracour is "always there":

> Thus liv'd the Youth
> Cut off from all intelligence with Man,
> And shunning even the light of common day;
> Nor could the voice of Freedom, which through France
> Soon afterwards resounded, public hope,
> Or personal memory of his own deep wrongs,

> Rouse him: but in those solitary shades
> His days he wasted, an imbecile mind.
>
> (IX, 926-33)

In this autobiography of origins and ends, Vaudracour simply lives on, wasting his days; the open-ended temporality does not bring his life to a close. In this story of the judgment of France, he remains unmoved by the voice of Freedom. In this account of the growth of a poet's mind, his mind remains imbecile. This is the counterplot of the origin of the prelude, the author's alias. The author stands in contrast to, yet in complicity with, the testamentary figures of the endings of the later books, who are in fact sublated versions of Vaudracour.

At the end of Book Ten an acceptable alter ego is found. He is quite unlike the Vaudracour who marks the story of guilt. This is of course Coleridge, the Friend to whom *The Prelude* is addressed. Rather than remain suspended in an indefinite temporality, this sublated alter ego looks toward a future shaped by the author:

> Thou wilt stand
> Not as an Exile but a Visitant
> On Etna's top. (X, 1032-34)

Unlike the fictive Vaudracour in his uncomfortable suspension, Coleridge, now in degraded Sicily, *is* the parallel of Wordsworth, then in unruly France. Wordsworth had not been able to find a clue to the text of the September Massacres in Paris:

> upon these
> And other sights looking as doth a man
> Upon a volume whose contents he knows
> Are memorable, but from him lock'd up,
> Being written in a tongue he cannot read,
> So that he questions the mute leaves with pain
> And half upbraids their silence.
>
> (X, 48-54)

That failure seems recuperated in all the textual examples—Empedocles, Archimedes, Theocritus, Comates—brought to bear upon contemporary Sicily, precisely to transform it to a pleasant sojourn for Coleridge. Imagination, a faculty of course denied to Vaudracour's imbecile mind, is even further empowered:

> by pastoral Arethuse

> Or, if that fountain be in truth no more,
> Then near some other Spring, *which by the name*
> *Thou gratulatest, willingly deceived*,
> Shalt linger as a gladsome Votary,
> And not a Captive.
> (X, 1034–38; italics mine)

As I will show later, the end of Book Eleven welcomes Coleridge as a companion in an Oedipal scene, and the end of Book Twelve cites Coleridge as guarantor that in Wordsworth's early poetry glimpses of a future world superior to the revolutionary alternative are to be found.

The end of Book Thirteen, the end of *The Prelude* as a whole, is a fully negating sublation of Vaudracour. If *his* life was a waste of days, by trick of grammar indefinitely prolonged, the poet's double is here assured

> yet a few short years of useful life,
> And all will be complete, thy race be run,
> Thy monument of glory will be raised.
> (XIII, 428–30)

If Vaudracour had remained unchanged by revolution as an imbecilic mind, here the poet expresses a hope, for himself and his friend, that they may

> Instruct . . . how the mind of man becomes
> A thousand times more beautiful than
> . . . this Frame of things
> (Which, 'mid all the revolution in the hopes
> And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
> (XIII, 446–50)

Julia is obliterated rather quickly from the story. By recounting these successive testamentary endings and comparing them to Vaudracour's fate, which ends Book Nine, I have tried to suggest that Vaudracour, the unacknowledged self as father, helps, through his disavowal and sublation, to secure the record of the progress and growth of the poet's mind. Let us now consider Wordsworth's use of Oedipal signals.

There is something like the use of a father figure by a son—as contrasted to acknowledging oneself as father—early in the next book (X, 467–515). Wordsworth recounts that he had felt great joy at the news of Robespierre's death. Is there a sense of guilt associated with ecstatic joy at *anyone's* death? We are free to imagine so, for, after recounting this excess of joy, Wordsworth suddenly recalls the faith in his own professional future felt by a father figure, his old teacher at Hawkshead. (As is often the case in *The Prelude*, there is no causal connection between the two episodes; however, a relationship is strongly suggested.) The memory had come to him by way of a thought of the teacher's epitaph, dealing with judgments on Merits and Frailties, written by Thomas Gray, a senior and meritorious member of the profession of poetry. This invocation of the tablets of the law of the Fathers finds a much fuller expression in later passages.

In a passage toward the beginning of Book Eleven, there is once again a scene of disciplinary judgment. Of the trivium of Poetry, History, Logic, the last has, at this point in Wordsworth's life, seemingly got the upper hand. As for the other two—"their sentence was, I thought, pronounc'd" (XI, 94). The realization of this inauspicious triumph of logic over poetry is given in a latent image of self-division and castration:

> Thus strangely did I war against myself
> . . . Did like a Monk who hath forsworn the world
> Zealously labour to cut off my heart
> From all the sources of her former strength.
> (XI, 74, 76-77)

Memories of the "spots of time" bring enablement out of this predicament. The details are explicit and iconic.[5] The poet has not yet reached man's estate: "When scarcely (I was then not six years old) / My hand could hold a bridle" (XI, 280-81). As he stumbles lost and alone, he accidentally discovers the anonymous *natural* inscription, *socially* preserved, of an undisclosed proper name, which is all that remains of the phallic instrument of the law:

> The Gibbet-mast was moulder'd down, the bones
> And iron case were gone; but on the turf,
> Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought
> Some unknown hand had carved the Murderer's name.
> The monumental writing was engraven
> In times long past, and still, from year to year,
> By superstition of the neighbourhood
> The grass is clear'd away; *and to this hour*
> The letters are all fresh and visible.
> (XI, 291-99; italics mine)

At the time he left the spot forthwith. Now the memory of the lugubrious discovery of the monument of the law provides

> A virtue by which pleasure is enhanced
> That penetrates, enables us to mount
> When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
> (XI, 266-68)

Many passages in these later books bring the French Revolution under control by declaring it to be a *felix culpa*, a necessary means toward Wordsworth's growth as a poet: this is such a suggestion. Nothing but the chain of events set off by the Revolution could have caused acts of rememoration that would abreactively fulfill memories of Oedipal events that childhood could not grasp.

As in the case of the memory of the teacher's grave, a metonymic though not logical or metaphoric connection between the second spot of time and the actual father is suggested through contiguity. Here Wordsworth and his brothers perch on a parting of the ways that reminds us of the setting of Oedipus' crime: "One of two roads from Delphi, / another comes from Daulia."[6] Ten days after they arrive at their father's house, the latter dies. There is no logical connection between the two events, and yet the spiritual gift of this spot of time is, precisely, that "the event / With all the sorrow which it brought appear'd / A chastisement" (XI, 368-70).

One might produce a textual chain here: joy at Robespierre's *judgment* (averted by a father figure); the self-castrating despair at Poetry's *judgment* at the hand of Logic (averted by a historical reminder of the *judgment* of the Law); final acceptance of one's own gratuitous, metonymic (simply by virtue of temporal proximity) guilt. Now, according to the canonical Oedipal explanation, "Wordsworth" is a man as son. And just as the murderer's name cut in the grass can be seen *to this day*, so also this rememorated accession to manhood retains a continuous power: "in this later time . . . unknown to me" (XI, 386, 388). It is not to be forgotten that the false father Vaudracour, not established within the Oedipal law of legitimate fathers, also inhabits this temporality by fiat of grammar.

Near the end of Book Eleven, Coleridge, the benign alter ego—akin to the brothers at the recalled "original" event—is once again called forth as witness to the Oedipal accession. Earlier, Wordsworth had written:

> . . . I shook the habit off

Entirely and for ever, and again
In Nature's presence stood, *as I stand now*,
A sensitive, and a creative soul.
(XI, 254-57; italics mine)

Although the "habit" has a complicated conceptual antecedent dispersed in the argument of the thirty-odd previous lines, the force of the metaphor strongly suggests a sexual confrontation, a physical nakedness. One hundred fifty lines later, Wordsworth welcomes Coleridge into the brotherhood in language that, purging the image of all sexuality, still reminds us of the earlier passage:

Behold me then
Once more in Nature's presence, thus restored
Or otherwise, and strengthened once again
(*With memory left of what had been escaped*)
To habits of devoutest sympathy.
(XI, 393-97; italics mine)

History and paternity are here fully disclosed as mere traces, a left-over memory in parenthesis (l. 396), or one among alternate methods of restoration (ll. 394-95). All that is certain is that a man, stripped and newly clothed, stands in front of Nature.

It is interesting to note that Wordsworth's sister provides a passage into the rememoration of these Oedipal events, and finally into the accession to androgyny. Unlike the male mediators who punish, or demonstrate and justify the law—the teacher, the murderer, the father, Coleridge—Dorothy Wordsworth restores her brother's imagination as a living agent. And, indeed, William, interlarding his compliments with the patronage typical of his time, and perhaps of ours, does call her "wholly free" (XI, 203).[7] It is curious, then, that the predication of *her* relationship with Nature, strongly reminiscent of "Tintern Abbey," should be entirely in the conditional:

Her the birds
And every flower she met with, could they but
Have known her, would have lov'd. Methought such charm
Of sweetness did her presence breathe around
That all the trees, and all the silent hills
And every thing she look'd on, should have had
An intimation how she bore herself
Towards them and to all creatures.
(XI, 214-21)

The only indicative description in this passage is introduced by a controlling "methought."

Although Wordsworth's delight in his sister makes him more like God than like her—"God delights / In such a being" (XI, 221-22)—she provides a possibility of transference for him. The next verse paragraph begins—"Even like this Maid" (XI, 224). Julia as object of desire had disappeared into a convent, leaving the child in Vaudracour's hands. Vaudracour as the substitute of the poet as father can only perform his service for the text as an awkward image caught in an indefinitely prolonged imbecility. Dorothy as sister is arranged as a figure that would allow the poet the possibility of a replaying of the Oedipal scene, the scene of sonship after the rejection of premature fatherhood. If the historical, though not transcendental, authority of the Oedipal explanation, especially for male protagonists, is given credence, then, by invoking a time when he was like her, William is invoking the pre-Oedipal stage when girl and boy are alike, leading to the passage through Oedipalization itself, when the object of the son's desire is legally, though paradoxically, defined as his mother.[8] Nature sustains this paradox: for Nature is that which is not Culture, a place or stage where kinships are not yet articulated. "One cannot confound incest as it would be in this intensive nonpersonal régime that would institute it, with incest as represented in extension in the state that prohibits it, and that defines it as a transgression against persons. . . . Incest as it is prohibited (the form of discernible persons) is employed to repress incest as it is desired (the substance of the intense earth)."[9]

Wordsworth would here clear a space beyond prohibitions for himself. Dorothy carries the kinship inscription "sister" and provides the passage to Nature as object choice; Wordsworth, not acknowledging paternity, has not granted Annette access to a kinship inscription (she was either Madame or the Widow Williams). The text of Book Eleven proceeds to inscribe Nature as mother and lover. The predicament out of which, in the narrative, Dorothy rescues him, can also be read as a transgression against both such inscriptions of Nature:

> I push'd without remorse
> My speculations forward; yes, set foot
> On Nature's holiest places. (X, 877-79)

The last link in this chain is the poet's accession to an androgynous self-inscription which would include mother and lover. Through the supplementary presence of Nature, such an inscription seems to embrace places historically "outside" and existentially "inside" the poet. We locate a passage between the account of the discovery of the name of the murderer and the account of the death of the father:

> Oh! mystery of Man, *from what a depth*
> *Proceed* thy honours! I am lost, but see
> In simple childhood something of the base
> On which thy greatness stands, but this I feel,
> That from thyself it is that thou must give,
> Else never canst receive. The days gone by
> Come back upon me from the dawn almost
> Of life: *the hiding-places of my power*
> *Seem open; I approach*, and *then they close*;
> I see by glimpses now; when age comes on,
> May scarcely see at all, and I would give,
> While yet we may, as far as words can give,
> A substance and a life to what I feel:
> I would enshrine the spirit of the past
> For future restoration.
> (XI, 329–43; italics mine)

We notice here the indeterminacy of inside and outside: "from thyself" probably means "from myself," but if addressed to "mystery of man," that meaning is, strictly speaking, rendered problematic; there are the "I feel"s that are both subjective and the subject matter of poetry; and, of course, the pervasive uncertainty as to whether memory is ever inside or outside. We also notice the double inscription: womb or depths that produce the subject and vagina where the subject's power finds a hiding place. Consummation is as yet impossible. The hiding places of power seem open but, upon approach, close. It is a situation of seduction, not without promise. It is a palimpsest of sex, biographic memorialization, and psychohistoriography.

Dorothy is in fact invoked as chaperon when Nature is his handmaiden (XIII, 236–46). And when, in the same penultimate passage of the entire *Prelude*, she is apostrophized, William claims for the full-grown poet an androgynous plenitude which would include within the self an indeterminate role of mother as well as lover:

> 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
> (XIII, 204-10)

This intimation of androgynous plenitude finds its narrative opening in the last book of *The Prelude* through the thematics of self-separation and autoeroticism, harbingers of the trace. The theme is set up as at least twofold, and grammatically plural. One item is Imagination, itself "another name" for three other qualities of mind, and the other is "that intellectual love" (XIII, 186), with no grammatical fulfillment of the "that" other than another double construction, twenty lines above, where indeed Imagination is declared to be *another* name for something else. Of Imagination and intellectual love it is said that "they are each in each, and cannot stand / Dividually" (XIII, 187-88). It is a picture of indeterminate coexistence with a strong aura of identity ("each in each," not "each in the other"; "dividually," not "individually"). In this declaration of theme, as he sees the progress of the representative poet's life in his own, Wordsworth seems curiously self-separated. "This faculty," he writes, and we have already seen how pluralized it is, "hath been the moving soul / Of our long labour." Yet so intrinsic a cause as a moving soul is also described as an extrinsic object of pursuit, the trace as stream:

> We have traced the stream
> From darkness, and the very place of birth
> In its blind cavern, whence is faintly heard
> The sound of waters. (XIII, 172-75)

The place of birth, or womb, carries a trace of sound, testifying to some previous origin. The explicit description of the origin as place of birth clarifies the autoerotic masculinity of "then given it greeting, as it rose once more / With strength" (XIII, 179-80). For a time the poet had "lost sight of it bewilder'd and engulph'd" (XIII, 178). The openness of the two adjective/adverbs keeps the distinction between the poet as subject (inside) and Imagination as object (outside) indeterminate. The autoerotic image of the subject greeting the strongly erect phallus that is his moving soul slides quickly into a logical contradiction. No *rising* stream can "reflect anything in its "solemn breast," let alone "the works of man and face of human life" (XIII, 180-81). It is after this pluralized and autoerotic story of Imagination as trace that Wordsworth assures "Man" that this "prime and vital principal is thine / In the recesses of thy nature" and follows through to the openly androgynous claims of lines 204-10, cited above.

The itinerary of Wordsworth's securing of the Imagination is worth recapitulating. Suppression of Julia, unemphatic retention of Vaudracour as sustained and negative condition of possibility of disavowal, his sublation into Coleridge, rememorating through the mediation of the figure of Dorothy his own Oedipal accession to the Law, Imagination as the androgyny of Nature and Man—Woman shut out. I cannot but see in it the sexual-political program of the Great Tradition. If, in disclosing such a programmatic itinerary, I have left aside the irreducible heterogeneity of Wordsworth's text, it is also in the interest of a certain politics. It is in the interest of suggesting that, when a man (here Wordsworth) addresses another man (Coleridge) in a sustained conversation on a seemingly universal topic, we must *learn* to read the microstructural burden of the woman's part.

Transforming Revolution into Iconic Text

To help introduce this section, let us reconsider those lines from Book Ten:

> upon these
> And other sights looking as doth a man
> Upon a volume whose contents he knows
> Are memorable, but from him lock'd up,
> Being written in a tongue he cannot read,
> So that he questions the mute leaves with pain
> And half upbraids their silence. (X, 48-54)

The contents of the book of revolution must be transformed into a personal memory. The autobiographer assures us that, at twenty-two, he knew them to be "memorable." He uses strong language to describe the task of learning to read them. It would be to transgress an interdiction, for the book is "lock'd up" from him.

In Book Nine help in reading the text of the landscape and, then, of the landscape of revolution, comes from Tasso, Spenser, and the Milton of *Paradise Lost*. As his despair thickens, Wordsworth begins to *identify* with Milton's personal position, as described, say, in *Samson Agonistes*. The sleepless city articulates its guilt through Macbeth. His own guilt by transference (including perhaps the unacknowledged guilt of paternity) makes him echo

Macbeth's nightmares. He admires and sympathizes with the Girondists because they identified with the ancient Greeks and Romans.

A little over halfway through Book Ten, Wordsworth does a double take which seems to purge the experience of the revolution of most of what one would commonly call its substance. In line 658, he "reverts from describing the conduct of the English government in 1793-4, to recount his own relation to public events from the time of his arrival in France (Nov. 1791) till his return to England. He is therefore traversing again the ground covered by Books IX and X, 1-227 (de Selincourt, p. 583).

This gesture of distancing seems to mark an important advance in the chain I am now describing. Instead of leaning on the great masters of art and poetry for *models* by means of which to organize the discontinuous and alien landscape and events, in the latter half of Book Ten Wordsworth begins to compose *icons* out of English and natural material. The vision of the sacrifice on Sarum Plain can be seen as the last link in this chain. (The great icon of the ascent of Mount Snowdon in Book Thirteen triumphantly takes us back to a time *before* Wordsworth's experience in France.) Since we have looked at the occluded chain of the thematics of paternity, sonship, and androgyny, this overt and indeed often ostensive effort should not occupy us long. This section will involve little more than fleshing out, through a reading of a few passages, of what I have summarized in the last two paragraphs. It remains merely to add that this is of course rather different from a consideration of Wordsworth's own declared political allegiance at the time of the composition of these Books.[10]

The sensible or visible is not simply the given of immediate experience. It carries the trace of history. One must learn to read it. Wordsworth records this impulse in a reasonable way when he judges his initial response to French events as follows:

> I was unprepared
> With needful knowledge, had abruptly pass'd
> Into a theatre, of which the stage
> Was busy with an action far advanced.
> Like others I had read, and eagerly
> Sometimes, the master Pamphlets of the day;
> Nor wanted such half-insight as grew wild
> Upon that meagre soil, help'd out by talk
> And public News; but having never chanced
> To see a regular Chronicle which might shew,

> (If any such indeed existed then)
> Whence the main Organs of the public Power
> Had sprung, their transmigrations when and how
> Accomplish'd, giving thus unto events
> A form and body . . .   (IX, 91-106)

As far as the record in *The Prelude* is concerned, Wordsworth never did go in search of an originary, formalizing as well as substantializing chronicle of the power structure of the French Revolution. Instead he sought alternate literary-historical cases within which he could insert the historical and geographical landscape. If I quote Marx in his middle twenties here, it is only because we should then witness two textualist solutions to similar problems, going in opposed directions. Ludwig Feuerbach also seems not to know how to read a social text, and Marx proposes the following:

> the sensuous world around [us] is not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and, indeed, in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, and modifying its social system according to the changed needs. Even the objects of the simplest "sensuous certainty" are only given [us] through social development, industry and commercial intercourse. [Because he lacks this approach] Feuerbach sees [in Manchester] only factories and machines, where a hundred years ago only spinning-wheels and weaving-looms were to be seen, or in the Campagna of Rome he finds only pasture lands and swamps, where in the time of Augustus he would have found nothing but the vineyards and villas of Roman capitalists.[11]

Confronted with a little-known historical text, Wordsworth's solution is to disavow historical or genealogical production and attempt to gain control through a private allusive positing of resemblance for which he himself remains the authority and source; at least so he writes almost a decade later. Most of these "resemblances," being fully implicit, are accessible, of course, only to a reader who is sufficiently versed in English literary culture. For example, Wordsworth makes his task of describing the French experience "resemble" the opening of *Paradise Lost*, Book IX, where Milton turns from the delineation of sinless Paradise to describe

> foul distrust, and breach
> Disloyal on the part of Man, revolt,
> And disobedience; on the part of Heav'n
> Now alienated, distance and distaste,
> Anger and just rebuke, and judgment giv'n.
> (de Selincourt, p. 566)

It must be pointed out that the "sin" is not just France's against Paradise, which Wordsworth will judge. It could more "literally" be Wordsworth's own carnal knowledge, which this text must subliminally obliterate.

Michel Beaupuy makes an attempt to fill Wordsworth in on the sources of the present trouble, and on the hope for the future. As Wordsworth commemorates these conversations, which for him came closest to a "regular Chronicle" of the times, he gives them apologetic sanction, for Coleridge's benefit, in the name of Dion, Plato, Eudemus, and Timonides, who waged a "philosophic war / Led by philosophers" (ll. 421-22). Indeed, Wordsworth's sympathies were with the Girondists because they "were idealists whose speeches were full of references to ancient Greece and Rome" (de Selincourt, p. 576). Here too it is interesting to compare notes with Marx:

> Luther put on the mask of the apostle Paul; the Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman republic and the Roman empire; and the revolution of 1848 knew no better than to parody at some points 1789 and at others the revolutionary traditions of 1793-5. In the same way, the beginner who has learned a new language always retranslates it into his mother tongue: he can only be said to have appropriated the spirit of the new language and so be able to express himself in it freely when he can manipulate it without reference to the old, and when he forgets his original language while using the new one.[12]

A new and unknown language has been thrust upon William Wordsworth. Even as its elements are being explained to him, he engages in a bizarre "retranslation" into the old. What he describes much more carefully than the substance of the conversation is when "from earnest dialogues I slipp'd in thought / And let remembrance steal to other times" (IX, 444-45). In these interstitial moments, the proferred chronicle is sidestepped through the invocation of "straying" hermit and "devious" travelers (IX, 446, 448). Next the poet reports covering over the then present discourse with remembered stories of fugitive maidens or of "Satyrs . . . / Rejoicing o'er a Female" (IX, 460-61). Geography, instead of being textualized as "the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one," is "retranslated" into great literary accounts of the violation or flight of women. The sight of a convent "not by reverential touch of time / Dismantled, but by violence abrupt" (IX, 469-70) takes its place upon this list and prepares us for Julia's tale. The verse paragraph that intervenes between the two does give us something like an insight into Beaupuy's discourse. Let us consider the strategy of that paragraph briefly.

First, an invocation of an unrememorated castle (third on the list after Romorentin and Blois)—"name now slipp'd / From my remembrance" (IX, 483-84)—inhabited by a nameless mistress of Francis I. This visual object, as Wordsworth remembers, gives Imagination occasion to enflame two kinds of emotions: one was, of course, "virtuous wrath and noble scorn" though less so than in the case of "the peaceful House / Religious" (IX, 496, 492-93); the other was a

> mitigat[ion of] the force
> Of civic prejudice, the bigotry,
> So call it, of a youthful Patriot's mind

and, Wordsworth goes on, "on these spots with many gleams I look'd / Of chivalrous delight!" (IX, 500-01). Beaupuy in the written text is able to produce a summary of his argument only by metaphorizing the object of the French Revolution as "a hunger-bitten Girl" . . . "'Tis against *that* / Which we are fighting'" (IX, 510, 517-18). Here is the summary:

> All institutes for ever blotted out
> That legalised exclusion, empty pomp
> Abolish'd, sensual state and cruel power
> Whether by the edict of the one or few,
> And finally, as sum and crown of all,
> Should see the people having a strong hand
> In making their own Laws, whence better days
> To all mankind. (IX, 525-32)

This admirable summary is followed by a proleptic rhetorical question that reminds us that due process was suspended under the Reign of Terror. As a deviation from this theme, the story of

Vaudracour and Julia is broached. One is reminded that Beaupuy, the only good angel on the Revolutionary side, is himself a deviation, "of other mold," and that his own retranslation of the events into art and sexual courtesy (in an unwitting display of class and sex prejudice) serves, as it were, to excuse his Revolutionary sentiments:

> He thro' the events
> Of that great change wander'd in perfect faith,
> As through a Book, an old Romance or Tale
> Of Fairy, or some dream of actions . . .
> . . . Man he lov'd
> As Man; and to the mean and the obscure . . .
> Transferr'd a courtesy which had no air
> Of condescension, but did rather seem
> A passion and a gallantry, like that
> Which he, a Soldier, *in his idler day*
> Had pay'd to Woman [!]
> (IX, 303-06, 311-12, 313-18; italics mine)

It is the passage through the long Book Ten that allows the poet of *The Prelude* to represent himself as generative subject. The literary-historical allusions and retranslations of Book Nine change to icons of the poet's own making. In an intermediate move, Wordsworth tells the tale of lost control by *interiorizing* literary analogues. We have seen how, in the final passages about the androgynous Imagination, the distinction between inside and outside is allowed to waver. As Wordsworth tries to transform revolution into iconic text, again the binary opposition between the inside of literary memory and the outside of the external scene is no longer sufficient. The distinction begins to waver in a use of Shakespeare that has puzzled many readers.

Book Ten, lines 70-77, is worth considering in all its versions.

> "The horse is taught his manage, and the wind
> Of heaven wheels round and treads in his own steps,
> Year follows year, the tide returns again,
> Day follows day, all things have second birth;
> The earthquake is not satisfied at once."
> And in such a way I wrought upon myself,
> Until I seem'd to hear a voice that cried,
> To the whole City, "Sleep no more."

Most of it is within quotation marks, the poet "wrighting" upon himself. About two years after the completion of the 1805 *Prelude*, the quotation marks were lifted, and thus the sense of a unique sleepless night was removed. As the passage stands in 1805, the exigency seems to be more to invoke Shakespeare than to achieve coherence. The lines begin with a peculiarly inapt quotation from the lighthearted opening of *As You Like It*, where Orlando complains that his brother's horses are treated better than he. Wordsworth wrests the line from its context and fits it into a number of sentences, all either quotations or self-quotations (thus confounding the inside of the self with the outside), which seem to echo two different kinds of sentiments: that wild things are tamed and that things repeat themselves. The sentences do not seem to provide much solace against the massacres, guaranteeing at once their taming and their return, though perhaps the idea of a wild thing obeying the law of its own return is itself a sort of taming.

In the allusion to *Macbeth* that follows, however, the result of becoming so agitated seems to be an acknowledgment of the guilt of the murder of a father/king. The voice in Shakespeare had seemingly cried, "Sleep no more!" to all the house because Macbeth had murdered Duncan. Although in Wordsworth's eyes it is Paris who is guilty of killing the king, the Shakespearean reference where the guilty Macbeth is himself the speaker implicates Wordsworth in the killing of his own paternity through the rejection of his firstborn. A peculiar line in the collection of sayings stands out: "All things have second birth." When in an extension of the *Macbeth* passage nearly two hundred lines later, he confides to Coleridge that although the infant republic was doing well, all the injustices involved in its inception gave him sleepless nights, an overprotesting parenthesis stands out in the same unsettling way:

> Most melancholy at that time, O Friend!
> Were my day-thoughts, my dreams were miserable;
> Through months, through years, long after the last beat
> Of these atrocities (*I speak bare truth,*
> *As if to thee alone in private talk*)
> I scarcely had one night of quiet sleep
> Such ghastly visions had I of despair
> And tyranny, and implements of death,
> And long orations which in dreams I pleaded
> Before unjust Tribunals, with a voice
> Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense,
> of *treachery and desertion* in the place

> The holiest that I knew of, my own soul.
> (X, 369-81; italics mine)

The image of the victorious republic is that of a Herculean female infant (Annette bore a daughter, Caroline) who had throttled the snakes about her cradle. I am suggesting, of course, that even as Wordsworth seeks to control the heterogeneity of the revolution through literary-historical and then iconic textuality, the occlusion of the personal guilt of the unacknowledged paternity is still at work.

Shakespearean echoes are scattered through the pages of *The Prelude.* Most of the time, however, Milton helps Wordsworth get a grip on the Revolution. I have already mentioned that Book Nine opens with a Miltonic echo. Wordsworth describes the beginning of the Reign of Terror in words recalling the Miltonic lines, "So spake the Fiend, and with necessitie, / The Tyrant's plea, excus'd his devilish deeds" (*Paradise Lost*, IV, 394-95; de Selincourt, p. 579).

Lines 117-202 of Book Ten are limpid in their conscious sanctity. These are the lines that end in recounting that Wordsworth left France merely because he was short of funds and that this was by far the best thing that could have happened because this way his future contributions as a poet were spared. Here Wordsworth speaks of himself as comparable to an angel and of his courageous hopes for France, not in the voice of Shakespeare's guilty Macbeth, but as Milton's saintly Samson, undone by a woman:

> But patience is more oft the exercise
> Of saints, the trial of their fortitude,
> Making them each his own Deliverer
> And Victor over all
> That tyrannie or fortune can inflict.
> (*Samson Agonistes*, 1287-91; de Selincourt, p. 577)

Indeed, it is the language of *Paradise Lost* helps give that joy at Robespierre's death the authority of just condemnation: "That this foul Tribe of Moloch was o'erthrown, / And their chief Regent levell'd with the dust" (X, 469-70).

We have so far considered some examples of allusive textualization and also of the interiorization of literary allusion. Let us now turn to the composition of icons.

The point is often made that it was not so much the experience

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of the French Revolution, but the fact of England's warring with France, that finally brought Wordsworth to despair. Wordsworth's initial reaction to the Revolution matched a good English model: "There was a general disposition among the middle and upper classes to welcome the first events of the Revolution—even traditionalists argued that France was coming belatedly into line with British notions of the 'mixed constitution.'"[13] In addition, Wordsworth claims three personal reasons for sympathy: "born in a poor district," he had never, in his childhood, seen

> The face of one, who, whether Boy or Man,
> Was vested with attention or respect
> Through claims of wealth or blood
> (IX, 223-25)

At Cambridge he had seen that "wealth and titles were in less esteem / Than talents and successful industry" (IX, 234-35). (A superficial but understandable analysis.) And all along, "fellowship with venerable books . . . and mountain liberty" prepared him to

> hail
> As best the government of equal rights
> And individual worth. (IX, 246-48)

Support for idealistic revolutionary principles based on such intuitive-patriotic grounds would be ill prepared for England's French policy. Fortunately for Wordsworth's long-term sanity, the martial conduct of the French, the "radicalization of The Revolution," and the fear of French invasion provided him with a reason to withdraw into the ideology-reproductive "passive" politics that is apolitical and individualistic, as it allowed Pitt to become "the diplomatic architect of European counter-revolution."[14] If the reverence due to a poet is laid aside for a moment and Wordsworth is seen as a human being with a superb poetical gift as defined by a certain tradition, then his ideological victimization can be appreciated:

> The invasion scare resulted in a torrent of broadsheets and ballads . . . which form a fitting background for Wordsworth's smug and sonorous patriotic sonnets:
>
> It is not to be thought of that the Flood
> Of British freedom, which, to the open sea
> Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity
> Hath flowed, "with pomp of waters, unwithstood," . . .

> "Not to be thought of"; and yet, at this very time, freedom of the press, of public meeting, of trade union organisation, of political organisation and of election, were either severely limited or in abeyance. What, then, did the common Englishman's "birth-right" consist in? "Security of property!" answered Mary Wollstonecraft: "Behold . . . the definition of English liberty."[15]

It might be remembered that the elation of first composition at the inception of *The Prelude* is not unmixed with the security of a legacy and a place of one's own.

This "revolutionary" nationalism articulates itself in one of the first full-fledged icons that will situate politics and history for Wordsworth, his select readership, and students of the Romantic period. The components of the icon are scattered through lines 254 to 290 of Book Ten: a tree, a steeple, a congregation, plucked flowers. The overt argument begins by setting up a strong binary opposition of nature and antinature. Wordsworth uses the honorable but confused appellation of patriotism as a "natural" sentiment, based on the assumption of a "natural" tie between man and the soil (as if indeed he were a tree), rather than an "ideological" connection needed to support a political and economic conjuncture bearing its own history.[16] Thus the initial feeling against England's French policy is already dubbed "unnatural strife / In my own heart" as the icon is set up. And since the so-called conceptual justification for the icon is based on what may as well be called the "metaphoric" axiomatics of a man as a tree, or an organism "literally" rooted in the soil, the metaphor which is the first component of the icon has more than a sanction by analogy:

> I, who with the breeze
> Had play'd, a green leaf on the blessed tree
> Of my beloved country; nor had wish'd
> For happier fortune than to wither there,
> Now from my pleasant station was cut off,
> And toss'd about in whirlwinds.

A limited and controlling play is changed by the war into an untimely death which, in an induced motion, imitates life. Just as the subjectivistic element of the anti-Vietnam War movement was not for communist principles but a cleaner America, so also Wordsworth's icon casts a vote here not for revolutionary principles but an England worthy of her name.

The tree is a natural image. The next bit of the icon secures the social and legal dimension. Although the situation is a church, the iconic elements are steeple, congregation, Father worship. Wordsworth's practice is different when he wants to invoke transcendental principles. Here the preparation slides us into a situation where Wordsworth feels alienated because, unlike the "simple worshippers" (sharing in "mountain liberty") who gave him his taste for revolution, he cannot say, "God for my country, right or wrong." The power of the icon, with the status of conceptual-literal-metaphoric lines made indeterminate, wrests our support for Wordsworth's predicament without questioning its strategic structure; indeed indeterminacy is part of both the rhetorical and the thematic burden of the passage, as the opening lines show:

> It was a grief,
> *Grief call it not*, *'twas anything but that*,
> *A conflict of sensations without name*,
> Of which he only who may love the sight
> Of a Village Steeple as I do can judge
> When in the Congregation, bending all
> To their great Father, prayers were offer'd up,
> Or praises for our Country's Victories,
> And 'mid the simple worshippers, perchance,
> I only, like an uninvited Guest
> Whom no one own'd sate silent, shall I add,
> Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come?
> (X, 264-75; italics mine)

It is not by chance that the responsibility for such a mishap is thrown on an unspecified "they":

> Oh much have they to account for, who could tear
> By violence at one decisive rent
> From the best Youth in England, their dear pride,
> Their joy, in England. (X, 276-79)

We are no longer sure whether the warmongers of England or revolution itself is to blame. The condemned gesture is still the act of cutting or rending. But the icon ends with an ambiguous image. At first it is alleged that, at the time, the French Revolution was considered a higher advent than nationalism—just as Christ was greater than John the Baptist. Then this very thought is "judged" in the following lines:

> A time in which Experience would have pluck'd

> Flowers out of any hedge to make thereof
> A Chaplet, in contempt of his grey locks.
> (X, 289-90)

This is indeed a contemptuous picture of a revolution that goes against any established institution. The image of age pretending to youthful self-adornment is unmistakable in tone. The force of the whirlwind has been reduced to weaving a chaplet, cutting off a leaf to plucking flowers. The coherence of a historical or revolutionary argument is on its way to being successfully rejected as mere folly.

I now turn to what in my reading is the place where the chain stops and the mind triumphs over the French Revolution: Book Twelve, lines 298-353, the reverie on Sarum Plain.

The lines are addressed to that certain Coleridge who, as "Friend," is witness, interlocutor, and alter ego of *The Prelude*. They are an apology for a hubristic professional concept of self: poets like prophets can see something unseen before. This is not a unique and self-generative gift, for poets are connected in "a mighty scheme of truth"—a "poetic history" that is presumably other and better than "history as such," which by implication here, and by demonstration elsewhere in *The Prelude*, has failed in the task of prediction and prophecy. The gift is also a "dower" from an undisclosed origin, but the Friend is encouraged to establish something like a relationship between that gift or "influx" and *a* work of Wordsworth's (not necessarily *The Prelude*?), whose origin is caught in a negative which necessarily carries the trace of that which it negates. The thing negated (logically "prior") would, in this case, seem paradoxically to imply a chronological posteriority: "the depth of untaught things." This vertiginous deployment of indeterminacy and traces culminates in the hope that this work will deconstruct the opposition between Nature and Art—"might become / A power like one of Nature's." Yet to be like *one* of Nature's powers, bringing in the entire part-whole/identity problem, makes even that possible deconstruction indeterminate. Such a collocation of indeterminacy, where nothing can be fixed, is the antecedent of the deceptively simple and unified word "mood" to which Wordsworth was "raised" and which is, presumably, both the origin and the subject matter of what I am calling an iconic recuperation of the events of 1791-93. (The date of the "actual" walk is July-August, 1793.)

It is by now no longer surprising that the immediate setting of the reverie is also marked by tracings and alternations. The ranging walks took place either *without* a track or *along* the dreary line of roads. The trace-structure here is not the obstreperous heterogeneous material or opening of political history; a vaster time scale seems to make the experience safe for poetry: "through those vestiges of ancient times I ranged." The disingenuous line "I had a reverie and saw the past" carries this overwhelming and conditioning frame.

In his vision of Sarum Plain, the poet sees multitudes *and* "a single Briton." This Briton is a *subject*-representative or alter ego of great subtlety. He is also the *object* of Wordsworth's attentive reverie. There is the same sort of self-deconstructive ego splitting as in the autoerotic passage on the Imagination as object of attention that I discussed earlier. He is not necessarily singular though "single," as the following words make clear: "Saw . . . here and there, / A single Briton. . . ." The relationship between him and the prophetic voice is one of metonymic contiguity, not of agency or production. The voice itself, though "of spears" and thus war making, is "heard" like that prophetic "voice of the turtle," announcing peace and safety from God's wrath: a revolution controlled and soothed into the proper stuff of poetry. The consciousness that produced the voice is itself undermined and dispersed into a compound image and common nouns that hold encrypted the proper name of the leader of Wordsworth's calling, Shakespeare:

> The voice of spears was heard, the rattling spear
> Shaken by arms of mighty bone, in strength
> Long moulder'd of barbaric majesty. (XII, 324-26)

I have already remarked upon Wordsworth's use of a metonymic or sequential, rather than a metaphoric or consequential, rhetoric. Here that habit seems specifically to blur the relationship between selves and voices. Imagination, or Poetry, is presented as an august trace, other and greater than what can be uttered by a mere individual. Since the poet carefully orchestrates this presentation, the intolerable trace-structure of history as catastrophe can now be tamed.

The relationship between Shakespeare's encrypted name and the poet's successful invocation of a darkness that took or seemed to take (the rhetoric of alternation yet again) all objects from his sight to produce a highly precarious "center" where the icon is finally visible is thus predictably metonymic: "It is the sacrificial Altar." At last the carnage of the French Revolution is reconstructed into a mere image of a generalized "history" on the occasion of a highly deconstructive and self-deconstructed Imagination. Wordsworth can now "read" the September Massacres:

> It is the sacrificial Altar, fed
> With living men, how deep the groans, the voice
> Of those in the gigantic wicker thrills
> Throughout the region far and near, pervades
> The monumental hillocks. (XII, 331–35)

"History" has at last come alive and animated the native landscape. And indeed the next few images are of a collective possibility of reading; no longer a reverie but actual geometric shapes which figure over a precultural soil—the very image of the originary institution of a trace, what Heidegger would call "the worlding of a world."[17] The precultural space of writing is as carefully placed within a *mise-en-abîme* as the origin of Wordsworth's unspecified work a few lines earlier: "untill'd ground" matching "untaught things." This particular inscription is not a reminder of Oedipal law but a charming and pleasant access to science. The principle of figuration is multiple: "imitative form," "covert expression," "imaging forth" of the constellations. This principle, the relationship between representation and represented, is finally itself figured forth as that connection among poets (the Druids and Wordsworth) with which the argument began:

> I saw the bearded Teachers, with white wands
> Uplifted, pointing to the starry sky
> Alternately, and Plain below. (XII, 349–51)

The icon is sealed at the beginning of the next verse paragraph: "This for the past" (XII, 356).

The intolerable trace-structure of history is thus brought under control by the authorial positing of the elaborate trace-structure of the Imagination and the brotherhood of poets. The control is emphasized all through the next verse paragraph, the closing lines of Book Twelve. Coleridge is called forth to testify that at this time Wordsworth began to produce good poetry. But even Coleridge is superseded, for "the mind is to herself / Witness and judge." Out of the self-evidence of such supreme self-possession, and by way of an elaborate iconic self-deconstruction, Wordsworth competes successfully with the revolution and records the articulation of a new world; the double privilege matches the accession to androgyny:

> I seem'd about this period to have sight
> Of a new world, a world, too, that was fit

> To be transmitted and made visible
> To other eyes, as having for its base
> That whence our dignity originates
>
> (XII, 370-74)

and so on. Reading Romantic poetry will bring about what the French Revolution could not accomplish. What we need to learn from is "'An unpublished Poem on the Growth and *Revolutions* of an Individual Mind,'" as Coleridge's description of *The Prelude* has it "as late as February 1804" (de Selincourt, p. xxvi; italics mine).

Yet a postscript must be added. These books of *The Prelude* have curious moments when what is suppressed projects into the scene. Vaudracour and the murderer's name operate unceasingly as textual time passes. And elsewhere the poet apologizes most unemphatically for having neglected details of time and place, and for not having given his sister her rightful place in his poem. If these two items are seen as hardly displaced representatives of the matter of France and the matter of woman, the poet is here excusing the very constitutive burden of these Books:

> Since I withdrew unwillingly from France,
> The Story hath demanded less regard
> To time and place; and where I lived, and how
> Hath been no longer scrupulously mark'd.
> Three years, until a permanent abode
> Receiv'd me with that Sister of my heart
> Who ought by rights the dearest to have been
> Conspicuous through this biographic Verse,
> Star seldom utterly conceal'd from view,
> I led an undomestic Wanderer's life
>
> (XIII, 334-43)

(The sister, incidentally, disappears completely from the 1850 version.) I comment on a comparable narrative intrusion at the end of this next section.

Poetry as Cure for Oppression: A Life Preordained to Teach This Lesson

Wordsworth offers his own poetry as a cure for human oppression and suffering because it teaches one where to look for human value.

In lines 69-158 of Book Twelve, the ostensible grounds for such a suggestion are researched and presented. The narrative has just passed through the Oedipal encounters. Now Wordsworth is ready to undertake his own critique of political economy. His conclusion is that the true wealth of nations is in

> The dignity of individual Man,
> Of Man, no composition of the thought,
> Abstraction, shadow, image, but the man
> Of whom we read [a curious distinction!], the man whom we behold
> With our own eyes. (XII, 84-87)

Man as a category is of course always an abstraction, whether we see him, read of him, or make him a part of "public welfare," which last, according to Wordsworth in this passage, is "plans without thought, or bottom'd on false thought / And false philosophy" (XII, 74-76). Without pursuing that point, however, let us insist that although, following his rhetorical bent, Wordsworth does not equate the true wealth of nations with individual male dignity, but leaves them suggestively contiguous on a list, there can be no doubt that he here recounts the history of someone who *seriously* and with experience, knowledge, and wisdom confronts the problems of social justice and political economy. He refers to "the Books / Of modern Statists" (XII, 77-78), most specifically, of course, to Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, first published in 1776.[18] (In the 1850 version of *The Prelude*, the phrase—"The Wealth of Nations"—is put within quotation marks, as the title of a book.)

Quite appropriately, though always by implication, Wordsworth finds the increasing of the *wealth* of nations, as understood by classical economists, to be a hollow goal. Adam Smith was a proponent of the labor-command theory of value: "The value of any commodity, therefore, to the person who possesses it, and who means not to use or consume it himself, but to exchange it for other commodities, is equal to the quantity of labour which it enables him to purchase or command. Labour, therefore, is the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities."[19] His method of increasing the wealth of a nation is therefore greater division of labor, greater specialization, deregulation of trade, economic interaction between town and country, the establishment of colonies—all based on a view of human nature reflected in the following famous passage:

> Man has almost constant occasion for the help of his breth-

> ren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. . . . It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.[20]

Wordsworth predictably does not concern himself with the practical possibilities of laissez-faire capitalism. He implicitly questions its presuppositions regarding human nature—which he considers an aberration. He does not, however, suggest that the production of commodities requires and produces this aberrant version of human nature. He posits, rather, a subjective theory of human value, where the work of salvation would consist of disclosing that man's essential wealth lay inside him.

He therefore asks: Why is the essential individual who is the standard of measurement of this subjective theory of value (yet, curiously enough, not an abstraction) so rarely to be found? Wordsworth poses a rhetorical question: "Our animal wants and the necessities / Which they impose, are these the obstacles?" (XII, 94-95). If this question were answered in the affirmative, then the entire occluded chain of the nonacknowledgment of paternity might, even in so seemingly self-assured a passage, be making itself felt; in other words, Wordsworth would then be in the most uncharacteristic position of "taking himself as an example," making of his animal nature the inevitable reason for the failure of perfectibility. If in the negative, then Wordsworth's case against political justice, against Godwin, Adam Smith, and the French Revolution is won. As in all rhetorical questions, the questioner obliquely declares for one alternative: "If not, then others vanish into thin air" (XII, 96). And the asymmetry of the rhetorical question constitutes *The Prelude*'s politics as well as the condition of its possibility.

The position, then, is that social relations of production cannot touch the inner resources of man. The corollary: Revolutionary politics, seeking to change those social relations, are therefore superfluous; poetry, disclosing man's inner resources, is the only way. Although Wordsworth cannot ask how there will come to pass a set of social relations in which everyone will have the opportunity and education to value poetry for its use, he does ask a preliminary question that seems appropriate if the poet is to disclose the wealth of man:

> how much of real worth
> And genuine knowledge, and true power of mind
> Did at this day exist in those who liv'd
> By *bodily labour*, *labour far exceeding*
> *Their due proportion*, under all the weight
> Of that injustice which upon ourselves
> *By composition of society*
> Ourselves entail
> (XII, 98–105; italics mine)

If this question is asked rigorously, we arrive at the problem of human alienation in the interest of the production of surplus-value:

> The fact that half a day's labour is necessary to keep the worker alive during twenty-four hours does not in any way prevent him from working a whole day. Therefore the value of labour-power and the value which that labour-power valorizes [*verwertet*] in the labour-process, are two entirely different magnitudes; and this difference was what the capitalist had in mind when he was purchasing the labour-power.[21]

Whether he has stumbled upon the crucial question of social injustice or not, Wordsworth's ideological preparation and predilection lead him to a less than useful answer. The ground rules of the academic subdivision of labor would make most of us at this point piously exclaim, "One does not judge poets in this way! This is only Wordsworth's personal story, and since this is poetry, it is not even that—the 'I' of *The Prelude* is to be designated 'the speaker,' not 'Wordsworth.'" Suffice it to say that I am deliberately calling Wordsworth's bluff, seeing if indeed poetry can get away with a narrative of political investigation when it never in fact "irreducibly intends" anything but its own "constitution."

Although

> an intermixture of distinct regards
> And truths of individual sympathy often might be glean'd
> From that great city, (XII, 119–20)

Wordsworth "to frame such estimate [of human worth],"

> . . . chiefly look'd (what need to look beyond?)
> Among the natural abodes of men,
> Fields with their rural works. (XII, 105-08)

"What need," indeed! Wordsworth is tracing out a recognizable ideological circuit here, deciding that the peculiarities of one's own locale give the *universal* norm. (In fact, even in terms of *rural* England, the situation in Cumberland and Westmorland was not representative.)[22] "Feuerbach's 'conception' of the sensuous world [in the *Principles of A Philosophy of the Future*] is confined on the one hand to mere contemplation of it, and on the other to mere feeling; he posits 'Man' instead of 'real historical man.' *'Man' is really 'the German.'*"[23]

There is something to admire in Wordsworth's impulse. Not only does he ask the question of disproportionate labor, he also emphasizes that the excluded margins of the human norm are where the norm can be properly encountered; his own thematics are of depth and surface:

> There [I] saw into the depth of human souls,
> Souls that appear to have no depth at all
> To vulgar eyes. (XII, 166-68)

This is all the more laudable because of the deplorable consequences of the vagrancy laws, some of them of Tudor origin, that began to be sharply felt as a result of the rise of industrial capitalism. It is noteworthy, however, that at the crucial moment of decision in *The Prelude* Wordsworth does not speak of the dispossessed "small proprietors" of the Lake Country, of whose plight he had considerable knowledge, nor of "an ancient rural society falling into decay."[24]

The ideologically benevolent perspective Wordsworth had on these vagrants would not allow him to argue here for a fairer distribution of labor or wealth, but would confine him to the declaration that virtue and intellectual strength are not necessarily the property of the so-called educated classes—and hedge even that declaration by an "if" and a personal preference:[25]

> If man's estate, by doom of Nature yoked
> With toil, is therefore yoked with ignorance,
> If virtue be indeed so hard to rear,
> And intellectual strength so rare a boon
> I prized such walks still more.
> (XII, 174-78)

It is of course worth noticing that the conditions for prizing the walk are askew. In terms of the overt argument of this part of *The Prelude*, we are not sure whether Wordsworth thinks the first "if" is correct; this uncertainty makes the "therefore" rhetorically undecidable, since the declared charge of the argument suggests that the last two "if's" are false suppositions. But I prefer to ask simpler questions: Why is the doom of Nature not equally exigent upon everyone, and why should a man who does not want to reduce Man (*sic*) to a homogenizing abstraction be unable to entertain the question of heterogeneity?

If, indeed, one continues the analogy, it looks like this: Wordsworth will work on the human wealth represented by the solitaries and produce poetry which will teach others to be as wealthy as the originals. It should be repeated that such an analogy ignores such questions as "Who reads poetry?" "Who makes laws?" "Who makes money?" as well as "What is the relationship between the interest on Wordsworth's capital and the production of this theory?" The greatness of Marx was to have realized that, within capitalism, that interest is part of a surplus the production of which is the sole prerogative of wage labor and that production is based on exploitation. "Productive labor" and "free labor" in this context are not positive concepts; they are the bitter names of human degradation and alienation: the "'productive' worker cares as much about the crappy shit he has to make as does the capitalist himself who employs him, and who also couldn't give a damn for the junk."[26] Within the historical situation of the late eighteenth century, to offer only poetry as the means of changing this definition of "productive" is class-bound and narrow. Since it denies the reality of exploitation, it need conceive of no struggle. An example of this attitude can still be found in the official philosophy of current Departments of English: "The goal of ethical criticism is transvaluation, the ability to look at contemporary social values with the detachment of one who is able to compare them in some degree with the infinite vision of possibilities presented by culture."[27]

Wordsworth's choice of the rural solitary as theme, then, is an ideologically symptomatic move in answer to a critical question about political economy. It is neither to lack sympathy for Wordsworth's predicament nor to underestimate "the verbal grandeur" of the poetry to be able to recognize this program.

We have so far considered Wordsworth's suggestion that poetry is a better cure for human oppression or suffering than revolution. His second suggestion is that his own life is preordained to teach this lesson. In making my previous arguments, I have amply presented the elements of this well-known suggestion. So much so, that I will not reformulate it here. Suffice it to mention that this particular chain of thought in *The Prelude* is rounded off most appropriately, in a verse paragraph of exquisite beauty, where Wordsworth expresses an unconvincing uncertainty about that very telos of his life; even as he finds, in the "private" memory of the "public" poetic records of his "private" exchange with Coleridge, a sufficient dialogic justification for *The Prelude*:

> To thee, in memory of that happiness
> It will be known, by thee at least, my Friend,
> Felt, that the history of a Poet's mind
> Is labour not unworthy of regard:
> To thee the work shall justify itself.
> (XIII, 406-10)

Yet, just as there is a moment when France and Dorothy jut into the text as apology when all seemed to have been appeased (p. 350), so also is there a moment when, in this final book, something apparently suppressed juts into the scene. Life is seen to have a telos or at least a place that is distinct from the poet's self. And such a life is seen as capable of launching an unanswerable or at least unanswered reproach. There is even a hint that *The Prelude* might be but an excuse. If the passage I quote above narrates a poetic career, this passage narrates the career of *The Prelude* not just as text but as discourse:

> O Friend! the termination of my course
> Is nearer now, much nearer; yet even then
> In that distraction and intense desire
> I said unto the life which I had lived,
> Where art thou? Hear I not a voice from thee
> Which 'tis reproach to hear? Anon I rose
> As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretch'd
> Vast prospect of the world which I had been
> And was; and hence this Song, which like a lark
> I have protracted . . . (XIII, 372-81)

No answer to Wordsworth's question of the first six lines is articulated in the next four; only a strategy is described. If one pulled at a passage like this, the text could be made to perform a self-deconstruction, the adequacy of *The Prelude* as autobiography called into question. But then the politics of the puller would insert itself into the proceeding. I have stopped short of the impossibly duped position that such a person with pull is politics free, oscillating freely in "the difficult double bind" of an aporia, like the Cumaean sybil in a perpetual motion machine.

In these pages I have read a poetic text attempting to cope with a revolution and paternity. I have not asked the critic to be hostile to poetry or to doubt the poet's good faith; although I have asked her to examine the unquestioning reverence or—on the part of the poets themselves—the credulous vanity that seems to be our disciplinary requirement. As a feminist reader of men on women, I thought it useful to point out that, in the texts of the Great Tradition, the most remotely occluded and transparently mediating figure is woman.

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Notes

1. Wallace W. Douglas, *Wordsworth: The Construction of a Personality* (Kent: Kent State Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 3-4.

2. Legouis's approach is so sexist and politically reactionary that the reader feels that it was Annette's good fortune to have been used by Wordsworth, Wordsworth's good sense to have treated her with exemplary pious indifference and no financial assistance, and his magnanimity to have given his daughter money in her adult life, to have allowed this daughter, by default, to use his name, and to have probably addressed her as "dear Girl" in "It is a beauteous evening," when, on the eve of his marriage to sweet Mary Hutchinson, Dorothy and William were walking with ten-year-old Caroline, *without* Annette, because the latter, "although inexhaustibly voluble when she pours out her heart, . . . seems to be devoid of intellectual curiosity" (Emile Legouis, *William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon* [London: J. M. Dent, 1922], pp. 68, 33). Critical consensus has taken Wordsworth's increasingly brutal evaluation of the Annette affair at face value: "In retrospect [his passion for Annette] seemed to him to have been transient rather than permanent in its effects upon him, and perhaps to have arrested rather than developed the natural growth of his poetic mind. . . . Consequently, however vital a part of his biography as a man, it seemed less vital in the history of his mind" (*The Prelude, or Growth of A Poet's Mind*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926], p. 573; this is the edition of *The Prelude* that I have used. References to book and line numbers in the 1805 version are included in my text.) Female critics have not necessarily questioned this evaluation: "What sort of girl was Annette Vallon that she could arouse such a storm of passion in William Wordsworth?" (Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957], p. 178.) More surprisingly, "it would not be possible to read *The Prelude* without wondering why on earth Vaudracour and Julia suddenly crop up in it, or why Wordsworth does not make any more direct mention of Annette Vallon. Nevertheless, although one cannot help wondering about these things, they are not really what the poem is about" (Margaret Drabble, *Wordsworth* [London: Evans Brothers, 1966],

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p. 79). Herbert Read did in fact put a great deal of emphasis on Annette's role in the production of Wordsworth's poetry (*Wordsworth*, The Clark Lectures, 1929-30 [London: Jonathan Cape, 1930]). His thoroughly sentimental view of the relationship between men and women—"the torn and anguished heart [Wordsworth] brought back to England at the end of this year 1792"—and his discounting of politics—"he was transferring to this symbol France the effects of his cooling affection for Annette"—make it difficult for me to endorse his reading entirely (p. 102, 134).

3. Read, pp. 205-06. "It is impossible to date *Vaudracour and Julia* accurately; we know of no earlier version than that in MS. 'A' of the *Prelude*, but it is possible that the episode was written some time before 1804" (F. M. Todd, "Wordsworth, Helen Maria Williams, and France," *Modern Language Review*, 43 [1948], 462).

4. Richard J. Onorato, *The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in* The Prelude (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 409.

5. I refer the reader to my essay, partially on a passage from *The Prelude*, "Allégorie et histoire de la poésie: hypothèse de travail" (*Poétique*, 8 [1971]), for a working definition of the "iconic" style. An "icon" is created in "passages where the [putative] imitation of real time is momentarily effaced for the sake of a descriptive atemporality [*achronie*]" (p. 430). Such passages in Romantic and post-Romantic allegory characteristically include moments of a "temporal menace . . . resulting in a final dislocation" (p. 434). This earlier essay does not relate Wordsworth's "iconic" practice to a political program. Geoffrey Hartman's definition of the concept of a "spot of time," also unrelated to a political argument, is provocative: "The concept is . . . very rich, fusing not only time and place but also stasis and continuity" (*Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964], p. 212).

6. *Sophocles I*, ed. David Grene (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 42.

7. For the sort of practical but unacknowledged use that Wordsworth made of Dorothy, see Drabble, pp. 111 and passim. The most profoundly sympathetic account of the relationship between William and Dorothy is to be found in F. W. Bateson, *Wordsworth: A Re-interpretation*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1954).

8. "Femininity," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), Vol. XXII.

9. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Mark Seem et al. (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 161.

10. A sense of the field may be gleaned from A. V. Dicey, *The Statesmanship of Wordsworth: An Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917); Crane Brinton, *The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1926); Kenneth MacLean, *Agrarian Age: A Background for Wordsworth* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1950); E. P. Thompson, "Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon," in *Power and Consciousness*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien and William Dean Vanech (London: Univ. of London Press, 1969); George Watson, "The Revolutionary Youth of Wordsworth and Coleridge," John Beer, "The 'Revolutionary Youth' of Wordsworth and Coleridge: Another View," David Ellis, "Wordsworth's Revolutionary Youth: How We Read *The Prelude*," in *Critical Quarterly*, 18, 19, Nos. 3, 2, 4 (1976, 1977; I am grateful to Sandra Shattuck for drawing my attention to this ex-

change); and Kurt Heinzelman, *The Economics of the Imagination* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

11. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Collected Works*, ed. Jack Cohen et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1976) V, 39-40. I do not say Marx and Engels here because the passage is from Part I of *The German Ideology*. "It gives every appearance of being the work for which the 'Theses on Feuerbach' served as an outline; hence we may infer that it was written by Marx" (*The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker [New York: Norton, 1972], p. 110).

12. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *Surveys from Exile*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 146-47.

13. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 105.

14. Ibid., p. 107.

15. Ibid., p. 79; only first ellipsis mine.

16. A contrast is to be encountered in Rousseau. "A man is not planted, in one place like a tree, to stay there the rest of his life" (*Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley [London: Modern Library, 1911], p. 20). Although Derrida (*Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976], pp. 222-23) shows us how even "this criticism of the empirical Europe" can be used in the service of ethnocentric anthropology, it is certainly a less insulated world view than Wordsworth's. It is in this spirit that, at the end of *Emile*, the hero is encouraged to travel in order to choose that system of government under which he would find greatest fulfillment. He does of course come back to woman and mother country.

17. See "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 44 ff.

18. "From the context, Wordsworth clearly means 'statist' not only in the sense of 'a politician, statesman' (*OED* 1, which cites as example a Wordsworthian usage from 1799) but also in the sense of a political economist (which might include *OED* 2, 'one who deals with statistics,' the earliest usage of which is given as 1803)" (Heinzelman, p. 305, n. 18).

19. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: Modern Library, 1937), p. 30.

20. Ibid., p. 14.

21. Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), I, 300.

22. "Wordsworth as a social poet would seem to have preferred to be faithful to the experience of his own northern counties rather than to the greater experience of England, which he certainly knew about" (MacLean, p. 95).

23. Marx, *German Ideology*, p. 39; italics mine.

24. MacLean, p. 89.

25. "Feeling as imagination he reserved for himself and the child, our 'best philosopher'; feeling as affection he conferred, with just a slight air of condescension and shame, upon the peasant world" (MacLean, p. 96). "He obviously no longer believed [in Michel Beaupuy's philosophy], and he perhaps had convinced himself that there was a difference between English and French beggary, but this does not justify him in rationalizing beggary, no matter how eloquently, as a fundamental good" (Edward E. Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron* [Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1963], p. 56).

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26. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 273.

27. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 348.