

A Faith That Fails Not : Wordsworth's Republican Ideal in the 1790s

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“A Faith That Fails Not” : Wordsworth’s Republican Ideal in the 1790s

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to delineate William Wordsworth’s career as a radical political thinker throughout his formative years, the 1790s. Though often regarded as a typical defection from a radical revolutionary to resigned conservative, the course of Wordsworth’s political thought up until his settling in Grasmere Village in 1799 is found to be consistently republican when considered in the context of the contemporary radical politics and the philosophical thoughts behind that radicalism.

During his residence in France shortly after the outbreak of the 1789 Revolution, Wordsworth was in a position to be able to know of the Girondin version of French republicanism and other schools of radical thought shared by French pro-revolutionaries and British thinkers residing in France. These political and philosophical ideas included a particular school of radicalism which claimed its ideological roots in the republican tradition native to England that went back to the Puritan Revolution of the seventeenth century. Those French-derived ideas also espoused a pantheistic world view that every existing thing in the universe has life and sensation, thus collectively forming a sentient “world soul.” Wordsworth’s later allegiance to the pantheistic world view of “One Life,” then, cannot be defined simply as an escapist retreat to this nature mysticism but a re-enactment of his earlier radical position. Similarly, the poet’s apparent withdrawal to his homeland, the English Lake District, should be looked at as a strategic return to the ultimate roots of the French Revolution, the domestic soil of England.

When Wordsworth declared in *Home at Grasmere* that “blessedness” would spread “To all the Vales of earth and all mankind,” he was not expressing the empty vision of a lost idealist, but reasserting his consistent belief in a millenarian regeneration of the entire world briefly envisaged in the 1789 Revolution.

I

In the spring of 1805 Wordsworth completed the first full-length version of his autobiographical poem describing the earlier days of his poetic career. This poem, christened as *The Prelude* by his executors forty-five years later, concludes in a remarkably political vein:

...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,
Blessed with true happiness if we may be
United helpers forward of a day
Of firmer trust, joint-labourers in the work,
(Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe)
Of their redemption, surely yet to come.

(*Thirteen-Book Prelude* 13. 431-41)

Wordsworth in these lines expresses his conviction of a coming “redemption” of the whole of humanity along with his determination to work for that millenarian regeneration as an activist, or one of the “joint-labourers.” He is not merely referring to the abstract concept of a collective human salvation, nor is he sentimentally dreaming about becoming a heroic figure working for the human race. As abundantly obvious from this autobiographical poem, the poet in his young days deeply sympathized with the cause of the French Revolution and actively committed himself to the republican movements both in France and in his home country. Therefore, the above quotation from *The Prelude* should be read as a declaration of his political conviction backed by his actual experiences following the outbreak of that civil revolution.

It is not always easy, though, to bring Wordsworth’s political thought into a coherent perspective. Whereas it is documented that he was a revolutionary sympathizer in his early twenties, only a few years later he retired from

the British political scene when he was barely twenty-five years old. His subsequent residence in the Lake District, beginning in 1799, seems to corroborate his further withdrawal from political activities as well as from his ideal of a millenarian renovation of the world. On the surface, the allegiance to the revolutionary cause stated in the above-quoted passage would appear rather out of place for Wordsworth in 1805. Nevertheless, I would contend that it is still possible to trace a continuous line of thought in the first half of the poet's life. With regard to the decade of the 1790s in particular, when Wordsworth was in his twenties, we can find a consistent republican position inspired by the Revolution both in his writings and political activities. What I would like to attempt in this paper is to delineate this particular republican attitude of Wordsworth throughout these ten years. In the course of the following discussion, we shall see stages of progression in Wordsworth's thought during these eventful years: a radical activist committing himself to the cause of the French republican movement; a fledgling thinker who struggled to come to terms with the deteriorating political situations in France and Britain; and an egalitarian poet determined to speak for the public. Above all a portrait consistently figuring from these descriptions is that of a republican radical who never ceases to believe in the world's millenarian regeneration.

To recognize this aspect of Wordsworth will not only contribute to a better understanding of the poet's concern with contemporary society, but also lead to a more accurate definition of his literary achievement. We have already seen in the concluding part of *The Prelude* an instance of the literary and political closely bound together. In that autobiographical poem, in other words, a literary statement defining Wordsworth's poetic career is actually a statement of his political mission to help to lead the human race to an eventual redemption. Hence, only a broad perspective covering both the poet's literary and social concerns can do justice to the range of Wordsworth's thought. In the following discussion, I shall pay attention to five topics concerning Wordsworth's political and literary career in the 1790s. First, I make an attempt to define the radical republicanism he

came to subscribe to during his stay in France in 1791-92. Then I examine two philosophical positions shared by French revolutionaries in the late eighteenth century and their possible influence upon Wordsworth. After that, I look into Wordsworth's reaction to Godwin's philosophy in the middle of the 1790s referring both to his fascination with that philosophical system and to his subsequent disillusionment. Next to this Godwinian phase, I discuss the philosophy of "One Life" Wordsworth came to share with his friend Coleridge around 1797-98. In addition to explicating its religious-metaphysical aspects, I set my special focus on the political implications of this philosophy. The last part of this paper explores a new direction of thought Wordsworth took at the end of the 1790s after the strong influence of Coleridge waned. In the course of this discussion, I shall conclude my paper by pointing out Wordsworth's republican allegiance which persisted through the different political and philosophical views he took in turn during the last decade of the eighteenth century. The trajectory of Wordsworth's thought in the 1790s, thus sketched out, will lead to a more convincing portrayal of the poet, who, though assuming the character of a recluse in the latter part of his life, was still able to make constructive use of his earlier revolutionary experiences in creative literature.

II

In March 1804, Wordsworth decided to expand *The Prelude* into a thirteen-book version, abandoning his previous plan to write a five-book poem. Of the additions he made to this poetic autobiography, a great part was devoted to descriptions of his Continental tour in 1790, of his residence in revolutionary France in 1791-92, and of several years of intellectual struggle after returning to Britain. Obviously, the Revolution and the newly-born Republic occupied a prominent position in his mind; and as a part of his autobiographical writing they were of great personal, as well as of socio-historical importance. The Revolution and Wordsworth's concern with this great political event are detailed in Books 6, 9, and 10 of *The Prelude* in a roughly chronological order. Since

those *Prelude* books are subjective descriptions written long after the actual experiences, their status as documentary evidence might be somewhat disputable. But their importance is very high nonetheless. Not many contemporary private documents remain about this stage of Wordsworth's life; still less public records. Both in quality and quantity *The Prelude* is the most substantial documents on Wordsworth's early political attitude. Hence, though written ten to fifteen years later than the actual events, Books 6, 9 and 10 are still the best gateway to approach the young Wordsworth of the early 1790s. Here in the current section I shall sketch out a rough portrait of Wordsworth in this period drawing upon these mature descriptions of his earlier self, and after that I shall substantiate this portrait with some of the remaining documents written by Wordsworth in the early 1790s.

More than half of Book 6 of *The Prelude* is devoted to detailed descriptions of Wordsworth's Continental tour in 1790. Arriving in France "on the very Eve / Of that great federal Day" (6. 356-57) exactly a year after the liberation of the Bastille, Wordsworth in Book 6 is strongly attracted by the French Revolution progressing still peacefully. From the vantage point of 1805, *The Prelude* characterises the event in terms of the arrival of a new era and a regeneration of human nature: "'twas a time when Europe was rejoiced, / France standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again" (6. 352-54). This millenarian air, found also in the concluding part of the poem, seems to pervade every part of France both in the form of God-given blessedness and the human moral quality of benevolence: "we . . . found benevolence and blessedness / Spread like a fragrance everywhere, like Spring / That leaves no corner of the Land untouch'd" (6. 367-70). In this optimistic mood, people in France are described as sharing a strong sense of solidarity: for them "joy of one / Is joy of tens of millions" (6. 359-60). Some fifty lines later, the general atmosphere at this time is symbolically summarized in a dancing scene where the sense of unity is dominant: "We . . . form'd a ring, / And, hand in hand, danced round and round the Board: / All hearts were open, every tongue was loud / With amity and glee" (6. 406-9).

Books 9 and 10 present Wordsworth's year-long stay in France from 1791 to 1792 and his life in Britain during the following few years. In these books we see a series of events occurring in a crucial period of the Revolution: surrounding nations attacking the new-born Republic, power struggle inside the Revolutionary Government, the ascendancy of the Jacobins, and Robespierre's Reign of Terror. In sum, the historical course of action outlined in these two books is the French Revolution losing sight of its initial idealism and degenerating into collective violence. The real focus, though, is the fluctuating mind of the poet experiencing those historical events right at the moment they were occurring.

Apparently recording a relatively calm period in Wordsworth's French residence, Book 9 contains a pivotal moment in his political thinking. After setting his "more permanent" residence in Blois, the poet at first associated with royalist soldiers. Then, not impressed by those defenders of the Crown, he soon turned away and made a close friendship with Michel Beaupuy, a soldier of a republican mould. Beaupuy was not merely a French companion with whom to discuss contemporary matters; obviously he also was the young poet's mentor giving him much-needed lessons in philosophy, republican politics, and humanitarian concerns. Given the close association with this "patriot," or one committed to the Revolution, it is not surprising that Wordsworth himself turns into a revolutionary:

. . . and I gradually withdrew
 Into a noisier world; and thus did soon
 Become a Patriot, and my heart was all
 Given to the People, and my love was theirs.
(9. 122-25)

Discoursing with Beaupuy, Wordsworth came to believe that they would see "All institutes for ever blotted out / That legalized exclusion, empty pomp / Abolish'd" (9. 527-29). The height of their expectation at this stage almost reaches that of millenarianism; Beaupuy and Wordsworth think that they will "see the People having a strong hand / In making their own Laws, whence better days / To all mankind" (9. 532-34).

This portrayal of himself being drawn to republicanism is not an idealized characterization from Wordsworth's mature viewpoint. The same political attitude is clearly pronounced in Wordsworth's contemporary writings. *Descriptive Sketches*, written in the summer of 1792 in France, covers the Alpine part of the same Continental tour as narrated in Book 6 of *The Prelude*. Like that autobiographical poem, *Descriptive Sketches* too, among descriptions of the Alpine scenery, includes references to the Revolution then under way. The personified figure of Liberty in the last part of this poem, in particular, shows Wordsworth's pro-revolutionary position as well as the general atmosphere of Blois where he wrote these lines:

... Liberty shall soon, indignant, raise
 Red on his hills his beacon's comet blaze;
 Bid from on high his lonely cannon sound,
 And on ten thousand hearths his shout rebound,
 His larum-bell from village-tow'r to tow'r
 Swing on th'astounded ear it's dull undying roar.
 (774-79)

We have seen that in *The Prelude* Wordsworth believed in a millenarian expansion of that civil revolution through the whole world. We find from those *Descriptive Sketches* lines that this idea was not only in the mind of the mature autobiographical poet of 1805 and ascribed to his past self retrospectively, but was already present in the youthful poet writing in 1792. Wordsworth in that earlier poem goes on to assert that a total renovation of the whole world has already begun:

Lo! from th'innocuous flames, a lovely birth!
 With it's own Virtues springs another earth:
 Nature, as in her prime, her virgin reign
 Begins, and Love and Truth compose her train.
 (782-85)

Another, subtler way of expressing the poet's republican stance is found in the middle of *Descriptive Sketches*. Wordsworth here presents the figure of the "primaeval Man" (529) living in a natural, unrestrained state, and then that of the Swiss shepherd, a modern-day counterpart of that primordial human form. Here the Swiss

shepherd does not merely represent a pure state of humanity; in his egalitarian militant character, he symbolizes the republican notions of independence and equality:

The slave of none, of beasts alone the lord,
 He marches with his flute, his book, and sword,
 Well taught by that to feel his rights, prepar'd
 With this "the blessings he enjoys to guard."
 (532-35)

Wordsworth then refers to the battles in the fourteenth century through which the Swiss defended their independence from the invading forces of the house of Austria. It is therefore beyond doubt that the above quotation carried a strong political significance at the time of its composition when the republican momentum of the French Revolution was in full force. Furthermore, Switzerland has established a system of direct democracy in its independent Cantons longer than any other country in Europe. Wordsworth no doubt sees in the republican regime of Switzerland an image of the new-born French Republic.

Wordsworth's political outlook expressed in *Descriptive Sketches* is given a further elaboration in *A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* written presumably in February 1793 shortly after his return from France. Richard Watson, the then Bishop of Llandaff, was widely known as a liberal thinker and in fact had written in favour of the French Revolution. Shocked by the news of the execution of Louis XVI, however, he wrote an indignant protest against the Revolutionary Government, effectively recanting his former pro-republican position. *A Letter* is Wordsworth's defence of republicanism written against what he thought of as Watson's reactionary defection. Wordsworth had originally intended to publish this long epistle as an open letter to the Bishop, but it did not ultimately get to the press probably because the poet or the publisher was afraid of the British Government's hard-line reaction. Already in 1792, pro-French liberalism in Britain was under threat by the Government's repressive measures. A Proclamation against Seditious Writings was made in May 1792, and Thomas Paine was sentenced guilty of sedition for having written *The Rights of Man*,

Part Second (Owen and Smyser 24). The emancipation of the Bastille was welcomed enthusiastically in Britain at first. But once the initial favourable reaction was over, the attitude of the British political authorities quickly tended towards anti-liberal thought control. Richard Watson's turn of sympathies exactly reflected this general trend in contemporary politics.

In *A Letter* Wordsworth contradicts the Bishop's accusation against the Revolutionary Government by emphasising the inevitability of executing Louis XVI. In the fourth paragraph the poet justifies the execution by showing sympathy with the French public's vengeful feeling against the King: "there was not a citizen . . . 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" (32). Wordsworth then claims that "a time of revolution is not the season of true Liberty" (33), but a kind of transition period in which abuse of power cannot but prevail of necessity: "the obstinacy and perversion of men is such that she [Liberty] 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" (33). He implies in effect that the repressive regime of the Louis dynasty itself had invited the King's death. Later in the same document he makes a similar assertion:

I must add also that coercive power is of necessity so strong in all the old governments that a people could not but at first make an abuse of that liberty which a legitimate republic supposes. (38)

As late as in 1805 he still sticks by this position: "throwing off oppression must be work / As well of license as of liberty" (*Thirteen-Book Prelude* 10. 746-47). Successfully or not, he thus advocates an emerging violent turn in the French Revolution by calling it a temporary aberration on the way to true freedom. In this vindication of the French it is likely that *A Letter* is not only directed to Richard Watson's recantation of his former beliefs. Wordsworth's refutation against the Bishop is at the same time an attempt to give British republican followers, including Wordsworth himself, a sense of relief

from a darkening prospect for the future of their own political activity.

In its argument in favour of the current political condition in France, *A Letter* reveals its fundamental character, a thoroughgoing republicanism. In an early part of this document Wordsworth strongly claims along this purist line that "the system of universal representation" (37) and "the suffrage of every individual" (37) should be introduced in the existing nations. In a later discussion he again strictly insists upon universal suffrage:

If there is a single man in Great Britain, who has no suffrage in the election of a representative, the will of the society of which he is a member is not generally expressed; he is a helot in that society. (46)

Behind these assertions is Wordsworth's egalitarian ideal inspired by the Revolution. Elsewhere in *A Letter* Wordsworth directs an attack on class discrimination. Here again he presents the figure of the Swiss shepherd "with the staff in one hand and the book in the other" (39), this time to symbolize the wise in the lower class. His denunciation of class distinction then culminates in the portrayal of the wise French peasant Michel Gérard:

In the constituent assembly of France was found a peasant whose sagacity was as distinguished as his integrity, whose blunt honesty overawed and baffled the refinements of hypocritical patriots. (39)

In a preceding paragraph Wordsworth proposed a principle of election solely based on an individual's merits. Denying the idea that material wealth is a criterion of a person's integrity, Wordsworth argues that possession of fixed property should not be a requirement for legislators. A representative must be elected entirely on the grounds of his "virtues, talents, and acquirements" (38). The figures of the French peasant and the Swiss shepherd certainly give Wordsworth a foothold for putting forward this election system. Marilyn Butler comments that the explicit class animosity found in *A Letter* seems more representative of France in 1792 than of English radicalism (Butler, *Burke*,

Paine, Godwin 224). This radically republican position, together with the echo of *Descriptive Sketches* passages, testifies to the direct lineage of this prose document from Wordsworth's first-hand experience of Revolutionary France. Although not published by its author's hands, *A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* explicitly voices Wordsworth's commitment to French republicanism in the early 1790s.

III

At the time of writing the rebuttal letter to the Bishop, Wordsworth did not seem to subscribe to any systematic philosophy, nor did he think of constructing one himself. Even though as a republican he certainly believed in the future of the Revolution and its millenarian expansion, at this stage this belief did not yet add up to a comprehensive system of thought. It would take a couple of more years for the poet to show interest in a full-scale philosophical system that could give him a definite world picture. However, spending a large part of his formative years in a revolutionary environment, the young poet was surely exposed to influences from various schools of contemporary thought in support of the cause of the Revolution. Although ultimately not demonstrable, it can be assumed that these possible influences might have been instrumental in the formation of the poet's thought in the latter half of the 1790s. Instead of trying to piece together fragments of the poet's thought in the early 1790s, then, we should shift our focus onto Wordsworth's philosophical environment during his 1791-92 stay in France. I would like to pick up two particular schools of thought which were in the air in late eighteenth-century France and might have been especially influential upon the mind of a young university graduate.

One of these two schools was the quasi-pantheist thought popular among French republican thinkers in the eighteenth century. As Margaret C. Jacob explains, pantheism is particularly congruous with republicanism, because the egalitarian ideal accompanying this type of political thought is compatible with a pantheistic world order where a spiritual presence pervades the entire universe, things and people all, rather than

with the traditional Christian order which presupposes a rigid hierarchy imposed by a supernatural force separate from the realm of human concerns (80). In other words, a pantheistic world is structured with horizontal relations, where the concept of qualitative superiority and inferiority on a hierarchical scale is essentially irrelevant. Indeed, as Jacob claims, by the early eighteenth century pantheism had become central to many thinkers operating in a republican tradition (80).

Wordsworth's associates in France included adherents to pantheism. According to H. W. Piper, Wordsworth came across at least three groups of pantheists during his second visit to France: British Unitarians, the Scottish thinker John Stewart and his friends, and French Girondins (69-70). Wordsworth's acquaintance with Unitarians has been documented to some extent. Before crossing the Channel to France he had visited Charlotte Smith in London and received letters of introduction to the French National Assembly and some British residing in Paris at that time. Smith was a Unitarian poet, and her introductory letters include one directed to another Unitarian poet, Helen Maria Williams, then living in Paris (Piper 65). Although Wordsworth failed to meet Williams in France, with Smith's letters in hand his connection with other Unitarians would no doubt have been established. Later in his life Wordsworth told J. P. Muirhead that in Paris he found James Watt, a British political activist and Unitarian, attending the 1792 Assembly in Paris (Roe 44-45). Unitarianism's pantheistic tendency is attributable to its central doctrine, the denial of the Trinity. Since Jesus Christ's divinity is negated by this doctrine, Unitarianism has an inherent task to prove God's historical presence in this world. The pantheist doctrine of God pervading everywhere in the universe can be a solution to this possible difficulty. Whether Wordsworth learned pantheist thought from British Unitarians in France remains a conjecture, but the physical proximity of the poet and this sect of Christianity is indisputable. Another group of British pantheists acquainted with Wordsworth was John "Walking" Stewart and the circle of his friends. Stewart, a Scottish eccentric famous for his long walking tours of

Asia, Europe and America, propounded a “religion of Nature,” a pantheistic creed involving the concept of a living, active universe (Piper 68). Whether there were important intellectual exchanges between Wordsworth and Stewart is not known; still, the poet’s own words that he met Stewart in Paris and was impressed by his conversation are recorded by De Quincey (Roe 44).

The Girondins, a moderate sect among French revolutionaries, might have been a French route through which Wordsworth possibly learned about a pantheistic world view. The quasi-pantheist idea that all matter was living, organic and animated was diffused widely through pre-Revolutionary France (Piper 25). This school of thought is represented by Diderot in his *De l’Interprétation de la Nature* of 1754:

... the world, like a huge animal, has a soul; and that, as the world may be infinite, this soul of the world, I do not say is, but may be an infinite system of perceptions, and the world may be God....

(Piper 20)

This theory indicates that the “soul of the world” is a total system of individual perceptions belonging to matter. Hence, as Piper rightly points out, this universal system of nature has two aspects: it makes the universe altogether material, the soul of the universe being a total accumulation of individual living material; and at the same time this position makes the universe wholly spiritual inasmuch as matter has the quality of spirit (21). In this framework, in short, there is no significant difference between materialism and pantheism. Accordingly, even the most “materialistic” thinker of this era, Baron d’Holbach, and his book of atheistic philosophy *Système de la Nature* (1770) can be categorized in this French tradition of quasi-pantheism.

Although Wordsworth’s direct debt to this French pantheism is not fully demonstrable from first-hand evidence, several conjectures can be made. Piper quotes Garat’s report on the philosophy of animated matter shared by a Girondin salon during the Revolution (22). The Girondins, in fact, were Wordsworth’s main French political associates in 1791-1792 (Moor-

man 172). He referred in *The Prelude* to the names of two celebrated Girondins, Carra and Gorsas (9. 179), and, later in Book 10 he shows his alliance with the Girondins in the statement that if he had stayed in France after 1792, he would have “made a common cause / With some [Girondins] who perished” (10. 194-95). In addition, he may have been closely associated with *Les Amis de la Constitution*, a progressive political group in Blois aligned with the Girondins (Roe 50). Through this revolutionary sect, therefore, Wordsworth might have had a connection with the theory of animated matter. Wordsworth could also have known about that theory from his reading. Joseph Warren Beach has found parallels with Wordsworth’s usages in d’Holbach’s *Système de la Nature* and Volney’s *Les Ruines des Empires* (118-20). Exactly when Wordsworth read those books is not known, but a copy of the former was found in Wordsworth’s library at his death, and the latter, a work also propounding a pantheistic doctrine, was at the height of its popularity during the poet’s year-long stay in France (Piper 69). In addition, Michel Beaupuy, the young poet’s closest friend and mentor, could have been a route for this religious doctrine. Descendants of Montaigne, the Beauveys were a family of considerable learning, whose house at Mussidan contained a huge library including almost every great author of the eighteenth century and the folios of *The Encyclopaedia* (Legouis 203). Given this family background, and his allegiance to republicanism, Michel Beaupuy can be counted among possible intellectual influences upon Wordsworth that brought him a quasi-pantheist theory of animated matter.

A hint of these influences is found in a passage added to *An Evening Walk* in 1794:

A heart that vibrates evermore, awake
To feeling for all forms that Life can take,
That wider still its sympathy extends,
And sees not any line where being ends;
Sees sense, through Nature’s rudest forms betrayed,
Tremble obscure in fountain, rock, and shade;
And while a secret power those forms endears
Their social accents never vainly hears.

(*An Evening Walk*, 1794 version 125-32)

Seeing "sense" act in fountains, rocks, and shades, Wordsworth here clearly shows his subscription to the quasi-pantheist theory of "animated matter." It is obvious that the way Wordsworth looks at nature in those lines is close to that of the French theory we have discussed. Like French thinkers, the poet here perceives that in nature everything possesses its life, and that the human heart can hear these living forms by attuning its sympathy with the language, or the "social accents," those forms utter. He further suggests that there is a spiritual force in the form of "a secret power" in the natural world, and presumably this power is the central animating principle of the whole universe. The pantheistic theory set forth in these lines is not merely an accidental formation in the mind of a whimsical youth. An echo of this quasi-pantheist passage is heard in two experimental verse fragments written four years later in 1798. One of these two fragments, "There is an active principle," postulates the presence of "an active principle" (1) in all things and assumes that this principle, as "the soul of all the worlds" (11), unites every thing in the universe. The other, "Not useless do I deem," refers to quiet sympathies of the human heart that attend to the "inarticulate language" (3) coming from things in nature. By the time Wordsworth wrote these fragments, he had subscribed to "One Life," a fully pantheist theory on which the poet collaborated with his friend Coleridge in 1797-98. The obvious parallelisms with these later verse experiments evince a significant status for the 1794 revision of *An Evening Walk* in Wordsworth's thought. That added passage was surely a seed of the poet's later philosophical development.

It will be misleading, however, to attach too much importance to the above-quoted 1794 passage. Although Wordsworth here comes close to an animated-matter theory, there is no further supporting evidence to show that Wordsworth around this time had formed a fully developed theory of pantheism. As Jonathan Wordsworth categorically asserts, there is nothing in the poet's writings at this time to suggest that he consistently thought of nature in terms of pantheism, or even of animated matter (*Music of Humanity* 188). The added lines to *An Evening*

Walk remain an isolated instance and they should be viewed as a tentative formulation of thought which is mainly significant when looked at from a retrospective point of view of 1797-98.

Besides this quasi-pantheist theory, there is another major philosophical influence to which Wordsworth was possibly exposed in France. This concerns the nature of the British Constitution in the history of republican movements. The British monarchical regime may usually be thought of as antithetical to republicanism; indeed England once repressed its domestic republican movement, the English Civil War. There is, however, a position in political thought to regard the British monarchical system as compatible with the republicanism of the Puritan Revolution. According to Z. S. Fink it was possible for the French in the eighteenth century to admire the British Constitution and the English republicans of the seventeenth century at the same time because of the notion that England had realized many of the principles of the republicans through the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (117). Despite its monarchical regime, for those who assumed this position, Britain was in effect a republic.

Admiration for the native English republicanism was shared by French republicans at the time of the Revolution. During this period, in fact, there was an upsurge of interest in English republican thinkers especially among the Girondins, and the political significance of English history was explored (Fink 107-8). Not only French intellectuals, but also English thinkers subscribed to this republican interpretation of the English monarchy. On 4 November 1789 the London Revolution Society, meeting principally to commemorate the Glorious Revolution, decided to send an address to the newly formed French National Assembly to congratulate it on the successful start of the Revolution (Roe 15). This episode indicates that the members of the Society shared a common understanding that the French Revolution was not an isolated incident in history but a natural continuation of English liberalism, a view close to that French interpretation of the English Constitution. Further, that the British public felt the historical undercurrent of English republicanism is indicated by the generally favourable reaction to

the Revolution until the Republic's policies turned to repressive violence. Whether Wordsworth directly inherited this political view from the Girondins or his compatriots is hypothetical, yet it is at least true that both in France and Britain the poet was in a political environment which was permeated by that republican view of the British Constitution. Indeed, Wordsworth's stay in Paris in 1792 coincided exactly with the period at which the influence of English republicanism on the Girondins was at its height (Fink 110).

Later in this paper we shall look at a possible role this republican advocacy of the British Constitution might have played in the formation of Wordsworth's thought in his later career following *Lyrical Ballads*. It can be claimed of the Wordsworth of the early 1790s that, in his own way, he believed in the native English republicanism, a position close to that of French republican thinkers. From what source he acquired this view is debatable, but if we believe the poet of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth felt that the origin of his republican spirit was in his earlier-day experiences in the Lake District and at Cambridge. In Book 9 Wordsworth refers to his personal background as a chief reason for his intuitive sympathy with the republican cause of the Revolution. First, he claims that he was brought up in an egalitarian community at Hawkshead where there was not unreasonable discrimination based on possessions and pedigree:

It was my fortune scarcely to have seen
Through the whole tenor of my schoolday time
The face of one, who, whether boy or man,
Was vested with attention or respect
Through claims of wealth or blood. (9. 222-26)

Wordsworth goes on to state that he saw in the academic life of Cambridge a meritocratic community where every member shared equal opportunities for distinction. This time he specifically calls this academic society a "republic":

... something there was holden up to view
Of a republic, where all stood thus far
Upon equal ground ...
... where, furthermore,

Distinction lay open to all that came,
And wealth and titles were in less esteem
Than talents and successful industry. (9. 229-36)

The poet rounds off his argument by mentioning three other influences that disposed him to welcome the Revolution: "subservience . . . To God and Nature" (9. 237-38); "fellowship with venerable books" (9. 240); and "mountain liberty" (9. 242), or the freedom of spirit associated with mountains. The last item particularly points to the bond of the English soil with republicanism. Backed by his long familiarity with the republican cause shown in these instances, Wordsworth professes that the outbreak of the French Revolution appeared to him "nothing out of nature's certain course—/ A gift that rather was come late than soon" (9. 253-54). For the poet the course of events in France must have looked remarkably compatible with the political attitude native to the English communities he had associated with.

It must have been beyond doubt for one with this conviction that Britain should sympathize with French republicanism and aid the further progression of the Revolution. It is because of this expectation that Wordsworth was deeply shocked when the British Government, having been hostile towards France for some time, finally went to war in 1793. Until this time his British nationality coexisted in his mind with his being a follower of Republican France without conflict. The 1793 war made these two aspects of his personality suddenly incompatible; it is not surprising that he felt a serious crisis of identity, which, ironically enough, he terms "revolution":

And now the strength of Britain was put forth
In league with the confederate host;
Not in my single self alone I found,
But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,
Change and subversion from this hour. 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.

(*Thirteen-Book Prelude* 10. 229-37)

It was around this time that the Revolutionary

regime of France itself took an explicit turn away from its initial idealism. Robespierre came to power in July 1793 marking the beginning of the Reign of Terror. Except for the liberation of the Bastille and other isolated instances of violence, for the first few years the Revolution as a whole progressed peacefully. Through the September Massacres of 1792, the execution of Louis XVI and other incidents, however, the Revolutionary Government had already assumed a violent tendency and with the ascendancy of Robespierre it took a decisive turn towards terrorism. Although Robespierre himself was executed in July 1794, violence was not swept away at once. Moreover, the Republican Army, supposed to be fighting defensive battles against the monarchies hostile to the Republic, had begun invading neighbouring countries in May 1794, even though Republican France had renounced conquest of foreign territories in the French Constitution of 1790. With these foreign invasions the French themselves threw away their own pledge of their own accord. It appeared to Wordsworth, too, that the French, completely losing sight of the honourable goal they had been struggling for, had discarded their ideal of liberty: "mounted up, / Openly in the view of earth and heaven, / The Scale of Liberty" (10. 794-96). Yet, despite all this degeneration on the part of the French, Wordsworth confesses that he "stuck / More firmly to old tenets" (10. 799-800), that is, he stubbornly adhered to his belief in the Revolution and the Republican regime. In this predicament described in *The Prelude*, he obviously needed a system of philosophy that could give him firm principles of thought and conduct. The philosophical system he came to subscribe to in this mental crisis was William Godwin's theory of political justice.

IV

Published in February 1793, immediately following the execution of Louis XVI and the outbreak of war between France and Britain, Godwin's *Political Justice* offered British republican activists a basis for optimism at a time when the political situation was deteriorating. In this book of political philosophy Godwin puts for-

ward an optimistic progressivism concerning the future of the human race. At the heart of this positive view is the notion of human perfectibility, as Godwin asserts at the opening of *Political Justice*: ". . . perfectibility is one of the most unequivocal characteristics of the human species, so that the political, as well as the intellectual state of man, may be presumed to be in a course of progressive improvement" (1. 11). According to this scheme, whatever the current condition of society may be, there should always be a hope for amelioration, since "no mind can be so far alienated from truth, as not in the midst of its degeneracy to have incessant returns of a better principle" (*Political Justice* 1. 29). With its confidence in the brighter side of human nature prevailing over "degeneracy," Godwin's proposition should have been particularly relevant to the ominous political mood of early 1793. Following the notion of human perfectibility, Godwin goes on as far as to prophesy a universal expansion of the French Revolution:

. . . only six years elapsed between the completion of American liberty and the commencement of the French revolution. Will a term longer than this be necessary, before France, the most refined and considerable nation in the world, will lead other nations to imitate and improve upon her plan?

(*Political Justice* 1. 224-25)

Here Godwin's notion of human perfectibility is explicitly linked to the possibility of its ultimate development, a millenarian regeneration of the whole world.

Another prominent feature of Godwin's book is its rationalism. From the point of view of 1804, Wordsworth rather sarcastically defines the Godwinian theory as turning away from the realm of feelings to that of a "purer element," or reason: "the Philosophy / That promised to abstract the hopes of man / Out of his feelings, to be fix'd thenceforth / For ever in a purer element" (*Thirteen-Book Prelude* 10. 806-9). Exactly as here summarized by Wordsworth, Godwin offered a rationalist philosophy placing its particular emphasis on the rational judgment of each individual. In *Political Justice* he states that if one learns the logical connection of events, he can not only overcome "the tumult of

passion" (1. 316) but also deal with "the moral concerns of mankind with the same clearness of perception, the same unalterable firmness of judgment, and the same tranquillity" (1. 316-17) as in the case of geometrical propositions. The pure rationality of the human mind described here is what Godwin thinks is requisite for absolute happiness in the future.

Some of the characteristic claims of Godwin's philosophy derive from this rationalist position. First, Godwin's idea of social amelioration depends for its realization not on enforcement, but on rational infusion of the right opinions. Discussing the improvement of society, he makes the empiricist argument about human morality that "the moral characters of men are the result of their perceptions" (*Political Justice* 1. 11). Then in a later chapter he names three means for improving the morality of mankind: "literature, or diffusion of knowledge through the medium of discussion . . . education, or a scheme for the early impression of right principles upon the hitherto unprejudiced mind; and political justice, or the adoption of any principle of morality and truth into the practice of a community" (1, 19). A position stemming from this view is a political quietism: social reformation should not be achieved by political activities to stir up people's emotions, but exclusively by people's gradual enlightenment: "The complete reformation that is wanted, is not instant but future reformation. . . . It consists in an universal illumination. . . . When the true crisis shall come, not a sword will need to be drawn, not a finger to be lifted up" (*Political Justice* 1. 222-23). Hence, a political rally in an ordinary sense is quite outside of Godwin's scheme; if a political gathering is organized, it should not provoke the public into a collective action but should be in such a form as to promote "the uncontrolled exercise of private judgment" (1. 158). Godwin's stance is clear: "Human beings should meet together, not to enforce, but to enquire. Truth disclaims the alliance of marshalled numbers" (1. 216). Another characteristic claim in *Political Justice* coming out of Godwin's rationalism is the social origin of criminal behaviour. While the human being is enlightened by being instilled with the right opinions, the opposite is also true. The necessitarian argument of God-

win's theory has it that criminal conduct is the product of the wrong circumstances and that punishment is consequently not a means of justice but a violation of it (Roe 132). Godwin succinctly sums up this thesis in his chapter on crime and punishment: "The assassin cannot help the murder he commits any more than the dagger" (*Political Justice* 2. 690).

Wordsworth's allegiance to Godwinian philosophy is discernible both in his writings and political activities during 1794-95. Among the documents of this period the first possible borrowing from Godwin is found in *A Night on Salisbury Plain*, a Spenserian narrative poem completed in the spring of 1794. The framework of this poem's action is based on his walking trip on Salisbury Plain in the summer of 1793. As shown in Book 10 of *The Prelude*, 1793 was a time when Wordsworth was suffering an identity crisis brought about by the deteriorating development of the French Revolution and, in particular, the war between France and Britain. *A Night on Salisbury Plain*, therefore, can be regarded both as a representation of the poet's own psychological crisis in 1793 and as his endeavour to come to terms with this predicament from the 1794 viewpoint. In the concluding part of this poem, Wordsworth accuses the contemporary repressivist politics, denouncing those cruel politicians who do not hesitate to use their coercive power to the degree of terrorism:

Insensate they who think, at Wisdom's porch,
That Exile, Terror, Bonds, and Force may stand:
That Truth with human blood can feed her torch,
And Justice balance with her gory hand
Scales whose dire weights of human heads demand
A Nero's arm. (514-19)

Then the poet in this plight solemnly prophesies that reason will after all prevail on earth:

Heroes of truth pursue your march, uptear
Th'Oppressor's dungeon from its deepest base;
High o'er the towers of Pride undaunted rear
Resistless in your might the herculean mace
Of Reason. . . . (541-45)

The "Heroes of truth" are then ordered to drag "foul Error's monstrous race" (545) from their

lair and to wipe out "Superstition's reign" (548) from the earth. Couched in the terms of battle between personified figures, the tone of this passage is that of radical protest, but the means of protest is to free mankind from their superstitious frame of mind, a Godwinian path of peaceful enlightenment.

Another sign of *Political Justice* appears in the poet's attempt to revise *A Night on Salisbury Plain*, completed in the autumn of 1795 in the form of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. While the action of the former poem is largely devoted to the tragic story of a female vagrant, the focus of the new version is shifted to the story of the other main character, a sailor on the run after committing a murder. Having been driven to crime by circumstances, at the end of the poem he is caught and hanged by the hand of justice. It is evident that Wordsworth, subscribing to Godwin's view that criminal behaviour is socially induced, is criticising the legal system of punishment in this revised version. In fact, in a letter of the same period the poet comments on the revised poem to this effect: "Its object is partly to expose the vices of the penal law and the calamities of war as they affect individuals" (*Letters* 159).

Indications of Godwin's influence on Wordsworth are not limited to literature; elements of that philosophy were strongly echoed in Wordsworth's political activities in 1794. Around this period, Wordsworth was projecting a political journal to be titled *The Philanthropist, or a monthly Miscellany* with his friend William Matthews. For some reason this project was abandoned by late 1794, yet the Godwinian concept of rational reformation is visible here and there in the correspondences with Matthews about their plan of publication. In a letter of 23 May 1794, Wordsworth expresses his decision to be fully engaged in Matthews' plan to publish a political monthly (*Letters* 118). Again in a letter to Matthews dated 8 June of the same year Wordsworth refers to that topic and this time proposes some specific details about the title, purposes, and contents of the projected publication. An important comment occurs in this letter, where Wordsworth explicitly states his stance of favouring gradual reformation over sudden, revolutionary change:

. . . they [the public] can only be preserved from a convulsion by oeconomy in the administration of the public purse and a gradual and constant reform of those abuses which, if left to themselves, may grow to such a height as to render, even a revolution desirable. (*Letters* 124)

Only a few years before, Wordsworth certainly subscribed to a large-scale revolutionary change of society, hoping that "Liberty shall soon, indignant, raise / Red on his hills his beacon's comet blaze" (*Descriptive Sketches* 774-75). The political activist of *The Philanthropist*, on the other hand, is a supporter of a peaceful, gradual reform policy. More clearly than in the first *Salisbury Plain* poem, Wordsworth here suggests his newly-assumed Godwinian allegiance to rational amelioration as well as his explicit turn away from his earlier position of a revolutionary radical. In the same letter the poet goes so far as to express an explicit aversion to revolution: "I recoil from the bare idea of a revolution" (*Letters* 124). The means of political reform for the Wordsworth of 1794 is first and foremost the Godwinian concept of rational enquiry: "Freedom of inquiry is all that I wish for . . . let the field be open and unencumbered, and truth must be victorious" (*Letters* 125).

Nevertheless, this shift of his political stance does not mean that Wordsworth has abandoned the ideal of the universal regeneration inspired by the 1789 Revolution. As we have seen above, Godwin himself had predicted a universal expansion of the American and French Revolutions. Therefore, Wordsworth in 1794-95, in compliance with Godwin, should have maintained his original position of supporting the contemporary civil-revolution movements. His millenarian aspiration is still intact; it has only undergone a Godwinian revision through his intellectual endeavour to come to terms with the deteriorating political situations: the Terrorism of the French Republic, the Britain-France war, and the increasingly repressive policy of the British Government. With its philosophy systematically based on human perfectibility and rationalism, Godwin's *Political Justice* should have given Wordsworth a renewed confidence in the cause of the republican movements.

The mid 1790s, when Godwin's fame was at

its height, was a period in which both the intellectual climate and political condition were rapidly changing. Wordsworth himself, in his twenties then, was growing fast as a thinker, poet, and political activist. His living environment had a major change, too; he quit the half-vagrant life style he had adopted since his Cambridge graduation and settled at Racedown, a country estate in Dorsetshire. Given these vicissitudes both in society and in his life, it is not surprising that his intellectual allegiance should shift rather drastically around this period. Wordsworth's enthusiasm for Political Justice began to cool in the summer of 1795 (Roe 194-95) and before long he walked out of the shadow of its influential author. There is not enough contemporary evidence to pinpoint exactly when Wordsworth pulled away from Godwinism, nor is it easy to document the reasons for this intellectual withdrawal. Yet, among the small number of documentary records, Book 10 of *The Prelude* exhibits Wordsworth's mental struggle around this time, which finally led to an utter confusion of the mind. As shown by this document it is at least certain that the Godwinian philosophy after all failed to remain a meaningful support for Wordsworth's mind:

Thus I fared,

Dragging all passions, notions, shapes of faith,
Like culprits to the bar, suspiciously
Calling the mind to establish in plain day
Her titles and her honours, now believing,
Now disbelieving, endlessly perplex'd
With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
Of moral obligation, what the rule
And what the sanction, till, demanding proof
And seeking it in every thing, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine
Sick, wearied out with contrarities,
Yielded up moral questions in despair.

(*Thirteen-Book Prelude* 10. 888-900)

Turning our attention to fictional literature, we find that Wordsworth's wilful severance from Godwin is most clearly indicated in *The Borderers*, a tragedy written at Racedown in late 1796 to early 1797. Centring on the character of Rivers, the Godwinian villain, this play as a whole forms an explicit criticism of Godwinian

thought. A self-acknowledged rationalist, Rivers attempts to allure the other protagonist of the play, Mortimer, to what he believes is rational conduct, i.e., murdering elderly Herbert. After Mortimer has fatally deserted Herbert on the heath exactly following Rivers' scheme, this rationalist villain manifests his principle of conduct in his congratulating words to Mortimer:

You have obeyed the only law that wisdom
Can ever recognize: the immediate law
Flashed from the light of circumstances
Upon an independent intellect.

(*Borderers* 3. 5. 30-33)

The Godwinian lineage of these lines is evident in that they form a loose reference to Godwin's conception of the healthy state of the mind: "The genuine and wholesome state of mind is . . . to expand every fibre of its frame according to the independent and individual impressions of truth upon that mind" (*Political Justice* 2. 569). Furthermore, when Wordsworth recollects the intellectual itinerary of his young days in the 1805 *Prelude*, those same lines from *The Borderers* are quoted to expound the Godwinian rational mind. In short, by presenting Mortimer's misguided murder of innocent Herbert, this tragedy enacts "the dangerous use which may be made of reason" ("Preface to *The Borderers*" 79) disclosing a crucial defect of Godwin's rationalist thinking. Thus the poet can be thought to have come to a totally negative attitude towards Godwin by late 1796, quite opposite to the view he held only a year or two before in the *Salisbury Plain* poems and the epistolary remarks on *The Philanthropist*.

Along with this direct accusation made explicitly in the narrative, in *The Borderers* there is also a subtler criticism against Godwinism. Although a self-confessed rationalist villain, Rivers' character is not consistently rational but displays a contradiction in a crucial area of his behaviour. He does not necessarily act like a man who, as Godwin puts it, "regards all things past, present and to come as links of an indissoluble chain" (*Political Justice* 1. 316). Rather on the contrary, he seems to be compulsively driven to repeat, or to make Mortimer vicariously repeat, his past error so as to relieve the guilt

that threatens to destroy his barely-kept mental stability. Implied in this psychology of the villain is not that he recognizes the logical and temporal connection of events, rather that he is driven by a compulsion, a form of unconscious passion, which should have been discarded by pure rationalism. Rivers himself inadvertently reveals the real motive behind his cruel conduct: "I had within me / A salient spring of energy, a fire / Of inextinguishable thought—I mounted / From action up to action with a mind / That never rested. . ." (4. 2. 118-22). On the surface level, he believes that he is in control of his behaviour and takes action of his own accord, but it is in fact subliminal emotional urges that move this villain into further felonies. This is also what Wordsworth wants to point out about Godwinian thought nine years later in *The Prelude*. Godwinism is supposed to be a rational philosophy; but its real essence paradoxically consists in the emotional: "Tempting region that / For Zeal to enter and refresh herself, / Where passions had the privilege to work, / And never hear the sound of their own names" (*Thirteen-Book Prelude* 10, 810-13).

The attacks on Godwin discussed so far are a conspicuous element in *The Borderers*. A looser, less well-defined form of disapproval is levelled in this tragedy towards a different object, the violent course of the French Revolution. The fundamental action of this play is that the protagonist Mortimer is led into the murder of elderly Herbert by a trick of the villain Rivers. As Marilyn Butler rightly claims, the structure of the action can be regarded as a stylized account of the French Revolution (Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* 64). Since Herbert is a patriarchal figure representing the *Ancien Regime*, it is even possible to compare the eventual death of this old aristocrat to the destiny of Louis XVI. This tragedy therefore can be read as a literary exploration of the criminal actions committed by the Revolutionary leaders of France (Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* 65).

Considering Wordsworth's disapproval of the violent crimes of the Revolution, together with his denial of his former Godwinian position, it is conjectured that the poet was trapped in a dilemma when writing *The Borderers* in late 1796.

He has openly disavowed his allegiance to Godwin, and at the same time in that play's action he has inscribed criticism against the revolutionary crimes committed in France. As we have argued in the discussion on *The Philanthropist*, Wordsworth acquired this pacifist attitude presumably from Godwin's gradual, peaceful reformism. As he has openly repudiated the overall Godwinian system, however, he would concurrently have lost the theoretical grounds to support that pacifism by which he still stands firmly. Here we find a philosophical lacuna in the poet's mind. By 1796 Wordsworth has settled in the countryside; presumably he was out of touch with the main political scene in London. As evident from his tragic drama of 1796, inside him he was nonetheless strongly conscious of contemporary politics and political thoughts. What was lacking for him was a philosophical principle that could sustain his unchanged concerns with contemporary society in the new environment of the country estate of Racedown. Although ultimately not demonstrable, it is very likely that there should have been a demand on Wordsworth's part for a new systematic doctrine which could replace his former reliance on Godwin's *Political Justice*. The philosophical mentor who came to supply this demand was S. T. Coleridge, and the system of thought that gave Wordsworth a new conviction both in politics and in poetry was the elaborated system of pantheism, which they called "One Life."

V

Wordsworth's intimate friendship with Coleridge began in June 1797 at their Dorsetshire residences, Racedown and Nether Stowey. "One Life" was brought to Wordsworth by Coleridge in their exchanges of friendship; then this philosophy was elaborated into a comprehensive system of thought by both poets during the year-long period of their close relationship. Its inception being in the religious thought of Coleridge, the significance of this philosophy was not limited to its influence on Wordsworth's literary production from the late 1790s onwards; the political aspect of "One Life" gave the poet a new conceptual support for his republican con-

cerns.

“One Life,” a school of nature mysticism, assumes the pervasive presence of a pantheist life-force in the whole universe. The direct lineage of this thought can be traced to the doctrine of Unitarianism to which Coleridge was fully committed in the late 1790s. As I have discussed in the third part of this paper, pantheism is an inevitable aspect of this religious doctrine that denies the orthodox idea of the Trinity, and consequently the divinity of Jesus Christ. Coleridge in particular was fascinated by the formulation of the Unitarian priest Joseph Priestley that God is present throughout the world by extending his energy, or life-force, to every existing thing: “the Divine Being, and his energy, are absolutely necessary to that of every other being. His power is the very life and soul of every thing that exists . . .” (*Disquisitions* 2nd ed. 42). Quoting H. W. Piper we have established that in a pantheist world view the distinction between matter and spirit is ultimately untenable (Piper 21). Priestley admits to this aspect of pantheism in his doctrine: “If they say that, on my hypothesis, there is no such thing as matter, and that every thing is spirit, I have no objection . . .” (*Disquisitions* 353). Once a self-acknowledged “Josephidite” (Ernest Hartley Coleridge 147), Coleridge followed Priestley’s theory to the extent that in 1796 he, too, came to speculate on the pervasive presence of God:

Glory to Thee, Father of Earth and Heaven!
All-conscious Presence of the Universe!
Nature’s vast ever-acting Energy!
(*Destiny of Nations* 459-61)

For the Coleridge of 1796-97, God is a pantheist presence that is “Diffused through all” (*Religious Musings* 140) in the material guise of physical energy. In the system of “One Life,” this all-pervading presence is recognized through natural scenery; i.e., nature is the divine language in which God’s presence is constantly revealed to humanity. The 1798 version of “Frost at Midnight” gives us a fine expression of this language of nature merged with a pantheist concept of God: “The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language, which thy God / Utters who from eternity doth teach /

Himself in all, and all things in himself” (59-62).

Wordsworth’s faith in “One Life” appears in *The Pedlar*, written in early 1798 when Coleridge’s influence on him was at its height. In this poem Wordsworth shows his firm allegiance to this philosophy by depicting “one life,” or the pervasive divine presence, recognized through the natural scenery of Northern England:

. . . in all things
He [the Pedlar] saw one life, and felt that it was
joy.
One song they sang, and it was audible—
Most audible then when the fleshly ear,
O’ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
Forgot its functions, and slept undisturbed.
(217-22)

Coleridge’s shadow is obvious in this explicit reference to “one life.” Nature’s intermediary role in the recognition of this pantheist life-force can also be traced back to Coleridge. However, Wordsworth here quietly introduces elements characteristic of himself. In the form of “one song” in line 219, the “one life” of *The Pedlar* has the same transcendent character as Coleridge’s original beliefs, since this divine presence is described to be most audible for the implied spiritual ear. “One life,” or its derivation “one song,” is certainly something beyond the physical order of things. Yet at the same time the spiritual presence of *The Pedlar* is more firmly embedded in nature and is presented as more humanly approachable than in Coleridge. When perceived, “one life” is translated into the human emotion of “joy.” Although “one song” is spiritual in a strict sense, it is a more human form than the purely abstract concept of the Coleridgean “One Life.” In particular, the auditory image of “one song” is that of natural sounds made by birds, insects, streams and other organic and inorganic things in mountain places. While faithfully following his mentor friend’s religious concept, Wordsworth shows his own individuality in this subtle revision of Coleridge’s original “One Life.” Adopted concept as it may have been, in a more natural, humanized form, “One Life” has become Wordsworth’s own philosophy by early 1798.

Wordsworth's further exploration of "One Life" attains its consummate form in "Tintern Abbey" of mid 1798. In this meditative poem, he writes about the "serene and blessed mood" (42) in which the human mind transcends its physical limitation to become "a living soul" (47). In this state the object that the soul recognizes is not that fully metaphysical notion of "One Life" but its more naturalized, human variant, "the life of things" (50). Later in the same poem, the poet aims his attention at a similarly spiritual stage of recognition. This time he intuitively a more vague object which he can only call "A presence" (95). Two lines later, referring to this vague presence as "something," Wordsworth unfolds its liminal character partaking of nature, the spiritual order, and the realm of the human mind at the same time:

. . . something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

(97-100)

The Pedlar and "Tintern Abbey" show us that in early to mid 1798 Wordsworth most enthusiastically believed in "One Life." Yet, as already suggested, this does not mean that the poet has surrendered to Coleridge's superior intellect. His friend's pantheist philosophy, on the contrary, gave him a fertile ground to explore his own individual poetic voice. Given Wordsworth's constructive participation in the formulation of this pantheist thought, it can be surmised that "One Life" had a potentiality to fill the philosophical lacuna left in Wordsworth by his severance with Godwinian philosophy. Moreover, for Wordsworth "One Life" was not merely a theory taught to him by his mentor; it was a part of his life. He not only elaborated that theory but actually lived it. In this sense it is especially significant to recall that a part of *The Pedlar*, including the story of the Pedlar's growth and the final recognition of the pantheist life-force, was later changed into first-person narration and incorporated in *The Prelude* as an autobiographical record. For Wordsworth "One Life" was not a merely metaphysical concept in the realm of fiction; it was an essential element constituting his own existence.

In an earlier part of this paper, I discussed pantheism as being inherently congruous with republicanism and noted that this religious position was in fact shared by French republican thinkers of the eighteenth century. The same theoretical argument can be made for "One Life." In fact, both Coleridge and Wordsworth saw much political relevance in this pantheist principle. In *Religious Musings*, in which Coleridge defines the pantheist nature of "One Life," this philosophy is placed in the context of the imminent arrival of the millennium. This poem's apocalyptic character is clearly indicated in its "Argument" which includes "Millennium" and "Universal Redemption" among its themes. With the vision of "that blest future" (370) and of the coming of "the SAVIOUR" (372), Coleridge prophesies the advent of the millenarian "THOUSAND YEARS" (373). This earthly paradise, then, leads to a truly universal redemption: "And lo! the Throne of the redeeming God / Forth flashing unimaginable day / Wraps in one blaze earth, heaven, and deepest hell" (417-19). A further importance of *Religious Musings* is that this meditative poem sees a road to redemption in the recent political upheaval, the French Revolution. In the sections titled "The Present State of Society" and "French Revolution," the poem declares that "the day of Retribution [is] nigh: / The Lamb of God hath open'd the fifth seal" (316-17), and goes on to assert that "the Great, the Rich, the Mighty Men, / The Kings and the Chief Captains of the World . . . shall be cast to earth" (322-25). Coleridge further adds, "Ev'n now the storm begins" (328), emphasizing that political development towards the millennium has already begun in the Revolution. By placing "One Life" side by side with the contemporary radical politics, Coleridge in *Religious Musings* openly acknowledges the close kinship between that pantheist doctrine and the revolutionary cause of the French Republic.

For Wordsworth in 1797-98, too, "One Life" is thought to have an important political meaning. At this time living far from London's political scene, Wordsworth still maintained his social concerns. In March 1798, while working on the pantheist poem *The Pedlar*, Wordsworth announced his scheme for a new philosophical

poem *The Recluse*: “My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society. Indeed I know not any thing which will not come within the scope of my plan” (*Letters* 212). Implied in this statement is that his interest in political matters has not diminished, rather it is now lodged in a broader perspective laid out for that philosophical poem having a comprehensive range of subjects. Since Wordsworth made these epistolary remarks as the author of *The Pedlar*, and as a convert to the philosophical system of “One Life” (Jonathan Wordsworth, *Borders* 350-51), it can be claimed that, like for Coleridge, “One Life” has a definite political significance for Wordsworth, which was to be expressed in the form of creative literature rather than in activities or straightforward political utterances.

Along with its inherent compatibility with republicanism, in yet another aspect “One Life” has relevance to the lifestyle of Wordsworth around this period. Since the autumn of 1796 Wordsworth was leading a rather isolated life at the country estate of Racedown. This way of living apart from mankind might have appeared inconsistent with his activist days in the first half of the 1790s. Wordsworth must certainly have had his own rationale for this half-reclusive life, yet he might have needed a further theoretical support to help to justify his seemingly non-political country residence. The pantheist principle of “One Life” could have supplied a sanction to this purpose. In “Tintern Abbey” that universally pervasive life-force is depicted as a principle uniting human minds through its inspirational function: “A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things” (101-2). As John Beer suggests in his reading of *Lyrical Ballads*, this uniting force necessarily forms an ultimate link between all living beings, recognition of which would bring human beings together in a republican sense of their common nature (77). From this viewpoint it is presumable that, no matter where Wordsworth may have lived, he could always have been assured of a sense of participation in the common sphere of humanity. Moreover, in the framework of “One Life” Wordsworth could have found a more positive meaning in his country retirement. At Racedown and later at Alfoxden, he was in an ideal condition to commune with the pantheist presence

through the rich natural beauty of the countryside. Communion with that life-force naturally leads Wordsworth’s mind to a higher stage than ordinary people can achieve; this gives Wordsworth the special privilege of being an exemplary figure and a moral leader of people who can show them the right way to follow. Coleridge wrote in a 1795 letter that the sight of beautiful rural scenery improves human moral character: “The pleasures, which we receive from rural beauties, are of little Consequence compared with the Moral Effect of these pleasures—beholding constantly the Best possible we at last become ourselves the best possible” (Coleridge, *Letters* 154). Wordsworth is now in a condition in which he can be the best possible himself; and by being the best possible he can contribute to the moral amelioration of others, and ultimately he can help to bring about a regeneration of mankind. This transformation of the human mind would be nothing less than a revolution from within; and this is also what the French Revolution appeared for the idealistic mind of the young Wordsworth of 1790:

. . . ’twas a time when Europe was rejoiced,
France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again.

(*Thirteen-Book Prelude* 6. 352-54)

The pantheist principle of “One Life” is part of the poetics of *Lyrical Ballads* published in late 1798. Being aware of the life-force indiscriminately pervading all human beings, Wordsworth chose subject matters even from the life of the rural poor and wrote on them in the language of “the middle and lower classes of society” (“Advertisement” 116). Two years later, in the newly written “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” Wordsworth declared that people in the rural lower class “hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived” (124). If we read this passage with Coleridge’s 1795 letter quoted above, it will be apparent on what philosophical grounds Wordsworth bases this assertion. Behind Wordsworth’s belief in the excellency of the rural language is his conviction that, communing with natural scenery, rural residents also possess the best moral quality. The egalitarian

principle of *Lyrical Ballads* and its preface is not simply a literary strategy to pronounce a break with the Neo-Classical tradition, it is a declaration of literary republicanism which has its philosophical basis in Wordsworth's republican career and the pantheist principle of "One Life."

In the third section of this paper we have looked at the likely influence of French pantheistic thought on the young Wordsworth of 1791-92. The effect of this influence is visible in the revision Wordsworth made to *An Evening Walk* in 1794. We have also found a trace of this French-mediated theory of animated matter in the two fragments of 1798, "Not useless do I deem" and "There is an active principle." The relation between this earlier pantheistic theory and "One Life," though, remains a conjecture; except for the verbal echoes among these texts, positive evidence to demonstrate a causal link between those two pantheist positions is sparse. One thing that is certain is that in the late 1790s Wordsworth adopted a fully pantheist philosophy which closely resembled the animated-matter theory popular in late-eighteenth-century France. We cannot prove to what extent Wordsworth was conscious of that earlier pantheistic position when he learned about Coleridge's philosophical formulation. Wordsworth himself might have denied any significant link between the French theory and his newly adopted "One Life." After all, this possible causal relation is ultimately undemonstrable in biography. Rather, it counts as more significant in the broader sphere of intellectual history; in that context "One Life" can surely be accorded an important place in the history of political thought as well as in literature and philosophy.

VI

"One Life" was probably the most meaningful event in Wordsworth's intellectual life. This pantheist thought provided the conceptual grounds for his contemporary literary achievements such as *Lyrical Ballads* and the project of *The Recluse*; further, its influence reaches beyond *The Excursion* of 1815. Curiously enough, however, the period in which Wordsworth had a totally unreserved allegiance

to "One Life" was not much longer than a full year beginning in July 1797. After the removal from Alfoxden and departure to Germany in mid 1798, when Coleridge's company was no longer readily available, Wordsworth gradually withdrew from this philosophy. A faint sign of his uncertainty about "One Life" is shown as early as in "Tintern Abbey" of July 1798. Each one of this poem's two pantheist climaxes is followed by a statement showing the poet's slight misgiving about that pantheist presence: the lines "If this / Be but a vain belief . . ." (50-51) follow the first climax; "perchance / If I were not thus taught . . ." (112-13) the second. Then in the "Infant Babe" section of *The Two-Part Prelude* of the following year, this pantheist life-force is replaced by a more human principle of maternal love. In "Tintern Abbey," the life-force is clearly assigned the function of unifying the whole world as "A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought" (101-2). In the "Infant Babe" lines it is the love the babe receives from its mother that creates for it a unified, living universe: "In one beloved presence . . . there exists / A virtue which irradiates and exalts / All objects through all intercourse of sense" (*Prelude 1798-1799* 2. 285-90). As Jonathan Wordsworth argues, in both passages Wordsworth has a need to feel that he belongs to an integrated whole; in "Tintern Abbey" the need can be satisfied by pantheist affirmation, whereas in *The Two-Part Prelude* there is no compatible certainty ("The Two-Part Prelude of 1799" 583). This lack of certainty presumably induced Wordsworth to have recourse to mother love, or "the filial bond" (*Prelude 1798-1799* 2. 293), for a new unifying principle. Although *The Two-Part Prelude* adopts the pantheist lines of *The Pedlar*, the fact that the new human principle of love replaces "One Life" in "The Infant Babe" testifies to Wordsworth's increasing uncertainty about that Coleridge-derived pantheist philosophy. It is quite obvious that the importance of "One Life" cannot be overemphasized: it enabled Wordsworth to write important works including *Lyrical Ballads*, its "Preface," and many other poems of experimental nature. In addition, it presumably gave a conceptual framework to the philosophical poem that was to engage the poet

for the rest of his literary life. Nevertheless, it will be wrong to think about Wordsworth in 1799 and after only in terms of this pantheist philosophy. "One Life" is now less significant as an object of conscious belief; Wordsworth is about to take yet another, subtle turn in his philosophical doctrine.

Here great care should be taken in discussing Wordsworth's new direction. For, on the surface level, even after 1799 he appears to remain the same nature poet as that of *The Pedlar* and "Tintern Abbey." A sensitive reading is required to unravel the fine difference between the Wordsworth of "One Life" and the poet after 1799. First, we should look at a passage in *The Two-Part Prelude* that suggests the new direction he is taking. In this poem, immediately after the passage on "one life," originally written for *The Pedlar* and later incorporated in the present poem, there follow a couple of lines showing the poet's uncertainty about the pantheist presence: "If this be error, and another faith / Find easier access to the pious mind . . ." (2. 465-66). Then in the next passage newly written for *The Two Part Prelude*, Wordsworth reveals his new form of nature worship:

Yet were I grossly destitute of all
Those human sentiments which make this earth
So dear, if I should fail with grateful voice
To speak of you, ye mountains! and ye lakes
And sounding cataracts! ye mists and winds
That dwell among the hills where I was born.
(*Prelude 1798-1799* 2. 467-72)

Although somewhat indirectly expressed, the import of these lines is unmistakable. Wordsworth admonishes himself never to be ungrateful for the blessings that the natural surroundings of the Lake District have given him even if he should no longer be able so directly to feel "one life." The attitude revealed here is subtly, yet decidedly different from that in his former belief in that pantheist life-force. Wordsworth is shifting towards a position in which he appreciates individual things in nature as themselves, not as media through which he feels the presence of that pantheist principle. In other words, in this new form of perception, nature is felt significant without referring to the

metaphysical concept that formerly supplied the theoretical grounds underlying his nature worship. Wordsworth now does not worship *through* nature, but he appreciates nature itself as the direct and ultimate object of his faith. This was a new beginning for Wordsworth when in 1798-99 he began to withdraw from a total commitment to "One Life." Indeed, the first hint of this new attitude has already appeared in "Tintern Abbey" where he discloses his slightly uncertain feeling about pantheism. Though inconspicuously, in this earlier poem, too, the poet's object of worship shifts from that metaphysical presence to nature, or to the scenery of the River Wye impressed into his mind five years before:

If this
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,
.....
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee
O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee! (50-58)

In Grasmere in 1799-1800 Wordsworth composed the first version of *Home at Grasmere*, a poem intended for an important part of *The Recluse*. This blank verse poem, depicting his arrival in that Lake District village, is clearly an outcome of that new form of nature worship. Here there is no conspicuous indication of Coleridge's influence; no reference to "One Life" as its conceptual basis (Jonathan Wordsworth, *Borders* 356). Curiously, without that philosophical support, Wordsworth can still insist on the arrival of a regenerated earth:

Both in the sadness and the joy we found
A promise and an earnest that we twain,
A pair seceding from the common world,
Might in that hallowed spot to which our steps
Were tending, in that individual nook,
Might even thus early for ourselves secure,
And in the midst of these unhappy times,
A portion of the blessedness which love
And knowledge will, we trust, hereafter give
To all the Vales of earth and all mankind.

(*Home at Grasmere*, MS. B 247-56)

His conviction of the coming of a millenarian

salvation of the world here seems to be based on his belief that Grasmere is a "hallowed spot" and that together with his sister he can secure "blessedness" in this privileged place. Lacking the metaphysical grounds of "One Life," however, this belief, along with the belief in "love and knowledge," can have little meaning outside the personal context of the poet's love for his sister Dorothy (Jonathan Wordsworth, *Borders* 359). The poet's confidence in a collective blessing of mankind sounds nonetheless genuine and strong. We should then make a deeper exploration of that confidence to find a further principle working behind the poet's positive attitude in this poem.

As we have discussed earlier, in Book 6 of *The Prelude* of 1805 Wordsworth refers to the republicanism native to his home soil, the Lake District. It is conjectured then that he sees in his homeland an inherent potential to be the centre of a universal republican movement. And this recognition of the republican aspect of the Lake District, it might be argued, is echoed in the above-quoted lines of *Home at Grasmere*. In addition to that explicit statement on the republican nature of his home neighbourhood, in Book 8 of *The Prelude* the Grasmere community in their annual fair is presented as an embodiment of a communal spirit. That village community, depicted as a "little family" (8. 7), is on one hand explicitly contrasted to the portrayal of the alienated anonymous crowd of London in the preceding book, and on the other imagined as a visionary republic which is subjected to no patriarchal power other than that of the commanding mountain of that area, Helvellyn (Bate 21). In the later *Guide to the Lakes* of 1835 the same Grasmere community is called a "commonwealth": ". . . a pure Commonwealth; the members of which existed in the midst of a powerful empire, like an ideal society or an organized community, whose constitution had been imposed and regulated by the mountains which protected it" (206). Jonathan Bate argues that the language used in this passage, especially such terms as "Commonwealth, ideal society, and organized community," is from the tradition of radical republicanism that goes back to the English Civil War (21). Bate goes on to claim that to summon up English republicanism is to

declare allegiance to the French Revolution, and that, therefore, by associating Grasmere Vale with republicanism, Wordsworth is retrospectively finding a seedbed for his own revolutionary enthusiasm in the rural community he has known since his earliest years (21).

We have discussed how the English tradition of republicanism had influenced French radicals in the late eighteenth century, and how Wordsworth could have been under this influence while staying in France in 1791-92. I would not contend that in *A Guide to the Lakes* Wordsworth reverts to his earlier days in France and makes a conscious use of this English republican tradition. It is unmistakable, though, that his private conviction that republican egalitarianism is indigenous to the Lake District society remains his belief as late as in 1835. Hence it is deducible that, after the period of intense belief in "One Life," the notion of the English native republicanism, replacing this religious belief, makes it compatible for Wordsworth to retire to Grasmere and at the same time to continue to hold on to his republican ideal inspired by the French Revolution. For to retreat to Grasmere is to go back to the origins of that republican revolution. It is possible now to put the first half of Wordsworth's life, spanning his Cambridge days, French residence, the Race-down-Alfoxden period, and his living at Grasmere, into a unified perspective. Although his intellectual career shifts dramatically over time, sometimes too drastically for common understanding, he keeps to his identity as a republican thinker throughout the decade of the 1790s.

Home at Grasmere includes one extremely agoraphobic passage witnessing the love of an restricted, enclosed space that Wordsworth came to have around the turn of the century. From the perspective of the English republican tradition, the psychology shown in these lines can be given a more positive interpretation:

A termination and a last retreat,
 A Centre, come from wheresoe'er you will,
 A Whole without dependence or defect,
 Made for itself and happy in itself,
 Perfect Contentment, Unity entire.

(*Home at Grasmere* MS. B 166-70)

While it is to some extent appropriate to read here the poet running away from the sociopolitical sphere of the real world and seeking a refuge in the Vale of Grasmere, we could also claim that from a different perspective this is a politically positive return to the core of the revolutionary spirit of English republicanism.

A similar image appears in a document influential among British radicals in the late eighteenth century, David Hartley's *Observations on Man* of 1749: "... our highest and ultimate Perfection, our End, Centre, and only Resting-place" (1. 497). By these similarly centripetal images Hartley refers to the highest achievement for the human being, the perfect recognition of God. Importantly, Hartley's book, especially its argument in reference to the spiritual growth of the human mind, was later interpreted by its radical followers to signify a millenarian renovation of the whole of humanity; through these radical readings, therefore, *Observations* had become a theoretical basis for republican radicalism by the late eighteenth century (Patton and Mann lxiii). Among Hartleyan interpreters, Coleridge in a 1795 lecture redefined Hartley's notion of human spiritual growth and propounded a theory of human benevolence in the image of expanding circles of love: "... the Love of our Friends, parents and neighbours leads us to the love of our Country, to the love of all Mankind" (*Revealed Religion* 163). Given this Hartleyan inheritance, the inward-turning imagery dominant in *Home at Grasmere* might have carried a forward-looking attitude handed down from Hartley and his interpreters. In this perspective Wordsworth's return to Grasmere could have meant a positive step towards the ultimate millenarian attainment which lay ahead for mankind. And at the same time his settling in Grasmere could have been a fresh starting point for a subsequent outward move to give blessedness "To all the Vales of earth and all mankind" (*Home at Grasmere*, MS. B 256); in other words, an embodiment of those expanding circles of love Coleridge had speculated. As a young undergraduate travelling in Revolutionary France, Wordsworth felt that he was witnessing a rebirth of human nature; fifteen years later in Grasmere Vale he could still write that he held a firm trust in human "redemption, surely yet to

come" (*Thirteen-Book Prelude* 13. 441). Here advanced is the unchanged faith of the poet, who once declared that he belonged to the class of "men called democrats, and of that class forever continue" (*Letters* 119).

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