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Contents

Godwin and Hazlitt Estranged

By DUNCAN WU

HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH GODWIN being one of the first of Hazlitt's adult life, it is puzzling that they ceased to associate after early 1826. Hazlitt had another four years to live, and they had friends in common in whose company they must have been in constant danger of meeting (their final recorded encounter, in the company of Sir James Northcote on 4 February 1829, was such an occasion).[1] In the most recent scholarly biography of Hazlitt, Stanley Jones notes the paucity of evidence in Godwin's diary for determining the cause of their falling-out, saying that it 'appears to have come about with the publication of *The Spirit of the Age*, although there is no hint in the diary that there was such a connection.'[2] Since then, no further explanation for the rift has been suggested. Now, Godwin's correspondence with Henry Colburn, the publisher he had in common with Hazlitt, sheds new light on the matter.

They first met on 17 September 1794 at Thomas Holcroft's, to whose house they had been invited for dinner. Hazlitt was beginning his second year at the Unitarian New College in Hackney, preparatory (so he thought) to becoming a Unitarian minister like his father. Godwin already knew Hazlitt's brother John, with whom he dined at Holcroft's on 20 April. But the association extended much further back than that, for their mother Grace Hazlitt (née Loftus) had known Godwin in infancy, as both had grown up in Wisbech. Links between the Loftus and Godwin families extended even further: Margaret Hazlitt (Hazlitt's sister) later recorded that her mother's grandfather

> was a watchmaker, and came from Hull in Yorkshire (with the grandfather of William Godwin, author of *Political Justice*) to settle in Wisbeach. . . . Mr. Godwin, the father of William, was the minister at Wisbeach when my mother was a little girl. I have heard her speak of going, on a Saturday afternoon, to draw the still younger Godwins in their little coach.[3]

When Godwin's father was obliged to leave his post as minister of the dissenting meeting-house having had a 'doctrinal disagreement' with his congregation, the Revd. William Hazlitt took over from him. Godwin was only two-and-a-half at the time, but that history was surely in his mind when he encountered the Revd. Hazlitt's sons in London in 1794. This was quite a moment to have become acquainted with him and Holcroft. Hazlitt can be presumed to have known *Political Justice* (published February 1793), and *Caleb Williams* (published May 1794), and that both men were about to become embroiled in the Treason Trials (Holcroft's indictment was announced on 6 October).

After several years they renewed the acquaintance at around the time that James Mackintosh began his marathon lecture series 'The Law of Nature and Nations' at Lincoln's Inn in February

[1] Godwin noted in his diary: 'Call on Colburn & Northcote; adv. Ollier & Hazlit'. I wish to thank the Bodleian Library for permission to quote from Godwin's diary, as well as Bruce Barker-Benfield and Greg Colley for assistance in my survey of the Abinger papers.
[2] Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life* (Oxford, 1991) (hereafter Jones) 376.
[3] *The Journal of Margaret Hazlitt* ed. Ernest J. Moyne (Lawrence, Kansas, 1967) 34-5.

1799, which they are both known to have attended. From that month onwards Hazlitt makes regular appearances in Godwin's diary. It was natural for Godwin to assume the status of mentor to the younger man, so that when Hazlitt needed to find a publisher for his first book, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, it was to Godwin that he turned.[4] Why, then, did an association that lasted so long come to an end three decades after it began? Was it, as Jones suspected, because of *The Spirit of the Age*?

In the summer of 1824, when Hazlitt was preparing *The Spirit of the Age* for his publisher Henry Colburn, he was as close as ever to 'the philosopher'. Having married for the second time in Melrose during May, Hazlitt and his new wife spent the rest of the summer in London prior to departure for the continent on 1 September. During those months in which Hazlitt completed the new book and prepared it for the press, he and Godwin met on at least five occasions, including one (17 July) when Hazlitt supped at Godwin's home—not what one would expect had he feared that Godwin would take offence at its contents. (He would have known that attempts to conceal them would be in vain, because Colburn too was seeing Godwin with some frequency.) All of which suggests that Hazlitt had already given his friend prior warning of the essay on 'William Godwin', perhaps showing it to him in draft.

Hazlitt asked Colburn to give Godwin an advance copy of the book,[5] for on 21 October Godwin recorded in his diary: 'Call on Colburn. Spirit of the Age'. Again, this was not the kind of gesture Hazlitt would have made had he expected Godwin to take umbrage. Two days later, Godwin recorded his reading of the volume in his diary—'Spirit of the Age, ça la'. He held onto it for another month, during which time he must have perused it further, before returning it to Colburn on 24 November with a gracious note of appreciation.

> Dear sir
>
> It is with great regret I return you the Spirit of the Age, as I do not at all like to be without a copy. I read the book with pleasure, & the more so, as it appears to me to be written with admirable temper & fairness, except perhaps the article of Gifford.
> I will certainly do myself the pleasure of calling on you some evening this week, not before Wednesday, & am
>
> very truly yours
> W Godwin
>
> Strand,
> Nov. 22, 1824.[6]

[4] See my 'Hazlitt's *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*: A Bibliographical Note' in *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays* ed. Uttara Natarajan, Tom Paulin and Duncan Wu (London, 2005).

[5] I follow Herschel Baker's suggestion that Godwin saw a copy of the printed volume rather than the manuscript. Godwin held onto it for over a month, which presumably would not have been the case had he been lent the manuscript; see Baker, *William Hazlitt* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962) (hereafter Baker) 433n.

[6] This letter is in the Forster Collection at the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum (Forster 48.E.3, f.127); it is published by permission of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Godwins were at this time living at 195 The Strand.

Not only was Godwin unoffended by *The Spirit of the Age*, but he 'read the book with pleasure, & the more so, as it appears to me to be written with admirable temper & fairness'. That Godwin continued so to regard it is supported by his continuing friendship with its author; on his return to London in October 1825, Hazlitt (now separated from his second wife) again took to calling on him.

Contrary to Jones's speculation, *The Spirit of the Age* had nothing to do with the end of the friendship. Instead, we must look forward to May 1826, the month following publication of *The Plain Speaker*. Godwin's diary indicates that Hazlitt was making social calls on him until 3 February 1826, after which no further meetings are recorded. It is clear that they remained on excellent terms at least up to 9 April when Godwin sent Colburn a list of those he wished to be sent a copy of his latest opus, volume 2 of *History of the Commonwealth*, published on the 24th: Hazlitt is there included alongside Charles Lamb, Mackintosh, William Ayrton, Joseph Hume, James Marshal, and Mary Shelley.[7] At that moment, Hazlitt ranked among Godwin's closest friends and associates.

Both *The Plain Speaker* and Scott's *Woodstock* were published on 28 April 1826. Godwin was not sent copies of either (not that he had any right to expect that Longman would spontaneously favour him with Scott's latest production); however, he was working on the third volume of his *History*, and as *Woodstock* dealt with the Civil War, he wanted Colburn to obtain it for him. Having been certified bankrupt in July 1825 Godwin could not easily find money for books, so on 25 April he wrote to Colburn, explaining that *Woodstock* 'so precisely relates to the period I am this moment treating, that I cannot help thinking that it would suggest ideas for my mind to work upon'.[8] Colburn did not reply.

That was the start of it. The humiliation of the snub can only have been compounded when Godwin made the unhappy discovery that Colburn had just issued *The Plain Speaker*, a copy of which its author had neglected to send him. The discourtesy would have been painful enough: after all, Godwin had included Hazlitt among those sent *The History of the Commonwealth* a month before. More than that, Godwin was concerned to find it bruited in Colburn's advertisements[9] that *The Plain Speaker* contained 'anecdotes' about himself. In a state of justifiable irritation, he wrote a further letter to Colburn on 9 May.[10]

> 44 Gower Place,
> May 9, 1826.
>
> Dear sir
>
> I wrote to you ten days ago to request a sight of the new novel of Woodstock. Of this you took no notice; & you were right. At least I found (connected as it is with the

[7] See the list in Godwin's letter to Colburn of 9 April 1826, Forster 48.E.3, 130v.
[8] William Godwin to Henry Colburn, 25 April 1826, Forster 48.E.3, 131r.
[9] Presumably, Godwin saw *The Plain Speaker* trailed at the back of other volumes published by Colburn. I have not been able to find advertisements in periodicals of the time which publicised Hazlitt's 'anecdotes' of Godwin.
[10] This letter is in the Forster Collection at the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum (Forster 48.E.3, 133v); it is published by permission of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

> subject that now occupies me I could not do without it) I could gratify my curiosity more easily than I expected.
>
> Will you be more indulgent to me in my present request? In the larger announce of 'The Plain Speaker,' I find my name among others, as one of the persons of whom the author thinks proper to retail his anecdotes. No curiosity can be more natural, & few desires more venial, than the wish to know what sort of anecdotes respecting one's self any one of the lounging public may be amused with, that chuses it. I cannot procure the Plain Speaker, as I could Woodstock, from every petty library of twenty volumes apiece. Would you then oblige me with the loan of the book? I will promise not to detain it more than a week.

very truly yours
W Godwin

Colburn having declined to answer his earlier request, Godwin was now reduced to begging the loan of a book which, if his friendship with its author was worth anything, he should have been given weeks before. Doubtless he would have recalled the more diplomatic handling of *The Spirit of the Age*, which he had been allowed to read more than two months prior to publication. Such niceties had now been abandoned, and he must have guessed why. The answer was to be found (ironically enough) in 'On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life', which he cannot have missed as it began the second volume.

> The well known author of the 'Enquiry concerning Political Justice', in conversation has not a word to throw at a dog; all the stores of his understanding or genius he reserves for his books, and he has need of them, otherwise there would be *hiatus in manuscriptis*. He says little, and that little were better left alone, being both dull and nonsensical; his talk is as flat as a pancake, there is no leaven in it, he has not dough enough to make a loaf and a cake; he has no idea of any thing till he is wound up, like a clock, not to speak, but to write, and then he seems like a person risen from sleep or from the dead.[11]

That Hazlitt omitted to send him an advance copy is hardly to be wondered at; such a gesture could not have reconciled him to this. After over three decades of close association, Hazlitt slapped down his mentor with a series of bitingly funny insults which their victim was unlikely either to forgive or forget. And it was as a direct result that Godwin made what he described in a diary entry of 24 May as 'Notes on Hazlit'. Those notes appear not to have survived, but perhaps comprised a reflection of some sort on Hazlitt's character, and a rationalisation of the desire not to continue their association. Colburn must have told Hazlitt about Godwin's letter, and he would have guessed the outcome.

Godwin would have been even more upset had he known that this was not the essay's first outing: it had appeared in print as long before as June 1820 in the *London Magazine* when Godwin's identity had been concealed – he was there referred to as 'the well-known author of

[11] *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt* ed. Duncan Wu (9 vols., London, 1998) (hereafter Wu), viii. 185-6.

------- and -------'.[12] Those discreet dashes had spared him the humiliation of Hazlitt's ridicule, and their author the consequence of exposure. Since then they had met on countless occasions, sometimes at Godwin's home, where Hazlitt had enjoyed his hospitality and the company of his family. It was a bad enough act of treachery in 1820 and a worse one six years later. Godwin saw little choice but to break. It was a course that cannot have been lightly taken. He was now seventy, protective of old friendships; nonetheless, the affair had humiliated him in front of Colburn, to say nothing of the 'lounging public'.

This was not the end of Godwin's interest in Hazlitt. Within months he was re-reading *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft* (1816) (on 15-17 August 1826), which he had been responsible for sending Hazlitt's way at a time when the struggling author needed work. And little over a month after publication of the first two volumes of the *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* in early 1828, Godwin recorded his reading of them (between 30 March and 8 April 1828). It was not a cheap book, selling initially for £3.0.0 (though the bankruptcy of its publisher, Hunt and Clarke, soon led to its remaindering – Sir John Soane purchased his copy at the end of August for less than half price, £1.7s.0d.), and one wonders how Godwin obtained his copy. Later that year, 23-4 October 1828, Godwin was again reading *The Spirit of the Age*. It was a book of which he thought highly, and he returned to it once more on 8 August 1830, by which time he must have known that Hazlitt was gravely ill. As Jones observes, he also saw a pre-publication copy of Hazlitt's last book, *Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R.A.* (probably Northcote's), which he was reading at the end of June 1830:[13] its sour comments would have given scant cause for cheer. The dismissal of him as 'shocking on paper and tame in reality' would have stung, not to mention the view that 'Caleb Williams . . . is a decidedly original work: the rest are sweepings of his study'.[14] Nor could Hazlitt resist a further swipe at Godwin's talents as an interlocutor, remarking that 'I shall never think of repeating any of G----'s conversations. My indifference may arise in part, as you say, from their not being very new to me.'[15]

'Hazlitt dies', Godwin wrote in his diary for 18 September 1830. Two days later he called on Northcote. The two men are bound to have discussed the flawed character of a man whom both had known for more than thirty years. In that time Hazlitt had exploited his knowledge of them to the full, discomfiting both with his indiscretions.

The question arises: why did Hazlitt do it? For one thing, this was not the first time it had happened. In fact, he had by 1826 made something of a hobby of alienating friends and acquaintances by his treatment of them in print. One of the most dramatic instances was the drubbing he gave the then-unpublished *Statesman's Manual* in *The Examiner* in September 1816, which he followed with no less than three further attacks on the same work, a hostile review of *Christabel, Kubla Khan and The Pains of Sleep*, and another of *Biographia Literaria*.[16] That lost

[12] *London Magazine* 1 (June 1820) 646-54, 647. In the *London Magazine* text Godwin is also said to be wound up 'like an eight-day clock'.

[13] Jones, p. 377. Godwin was probably given it when he called on Northcote on 26 June 1830. He had read 184 pages of it by the end of the following day, 312 pages by the end of 28 June, and finished it the day after – as his diary shows.

[14] William Hazlitt, *Conversations of James Northcote, R.A.* (London, 1830) 123, 188.

[15] Hazlitt 322.

[16] The full story of these barrages is recounted in my 'Rancour and Rabies: Hazlitt, Coleridge and Jeffrey in Dialogue', *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review: Bicentenary Essays* ed. Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu (Basingstoke, 2002) 168-94.

him the friendship of both Coleridge and Henry Crabb Robinson, and established a pattern repeated (though less spectacularly) in the cases of Leigh Hunt (alienated by Hazlitt's rough handling of Shelley) and Benjamin Robert Haydon (attacked in an article of 1824). Challenged by Robinson in 1816, Hazlitt excused himself by saying, 'I am forced to write an article every week And I have not time to make one, with so much delicacy, as I otherwise sho[d]'.[17]

But Godwin was an older friend than these, to whom Hazlitt was greatly indebted, with a long family association, and in his case Hazlitt might have thought twice. The full explanation must have to do with his state of mind by 1826. By then he was a desperate figure on the fringes of literary society, almost an outlaw: constantly on the verge of penury, he had wilfully destroyed his first marriage for the sake of a young woman whose interest in him had never been more than superficial, blasted his reputation by publishing *Liber Amoris*, and was now so reviled that publishers omitted his name from title-pages lest it hinder sales. Something of his situation is revealed by a sighting of him in Godwin's house just over a year before the break. Put out by Hazlitt's notice of Shelley's *Posthumous Poems* (1824) in the *Edinburgh Review*,[18] Mary Shelley was not disposed to welcome him into her father's house, but when she saw him she

> could not be angry – I never was so shocked in my life, [he was] gau[nt] & thin, his hair scattered, his cheek bones projecting – but for his voice & smile I sh[d] not have known him – his smile brought tears into my eyes, it was like a sun-beam illuminating the most melancholy of ruins – lightning that assured you in a dark night of the identity of a friend's ruined & deserted abode.[19]

If such was his condition in October 1824, how much worse must he have been on his return from the continent a year later, separated from his wife, desperate to produce another collection to satisfy the demands of his creditors? Until the moment of his death nearly five years later he would remain under unremitting financial pressure,[20] in a state of compulsive, frantic industry that, combined with the feeling that he was far beyond the pale of polite society, made him more than usually careless both of himself and of others. He must have convinced himself that to name Godwin in the reprinted 'On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life' would in some sense be more honest than not to do so; he must have realised that it would also stimulate sales – something that, as Godwin observed, Colburn had been quick to exploit.

Jones quite reasonably supposed that it was *The Spirit of the Age* that brought about the break; it was there, after all, that Hazlitt remarked that Godwin 'has sunk below the horizon, and enjoys the serene twilight of a doubtful immortality',[21] and there that he observed: 'In common

[17] Henry Crabb Robinson, Diary 5 (1 January 1816-7 July 1817), entry for 22 December 1816, 116r. Quoted by permission of the Librarian and Trustees of Dr Williams's Library, London.
[18] See *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt* ed. P. P. Howe (21 vols., London, 1930-4), xvi. 265-84, originally published in the *Edinburgh Review* of July 1824.
[19] Mary Shelley to Marianne Hunt, 10 October 1824, Bodleian Library, Shelley adds. c. 6, 32r; I have returned to the manuscript so as to produce my own reading of the letter, particularly those words obliterated by the seal. A different formulation may be found in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* ed. Betty T. Bennett (3 vols., Baltimore and London, 1980-88), i. 452-3.
[20] He was imprisoned for debt seven months before he died; see Baker 467.
[21] Wu vii. 87.

company, Mr Godwin either goes to sleep himself, or sets others to sleep'.[22] But despite such nudges of the scalpel, the essay on 'William Godwin' placed its subject alongside Bentham and Coleridge as one of the intellectual powers of the age, which must have enabled its subject, when shown a copy two months prior to publication, to take its equivocations on the chin. Jones was well aware that Hazlitt's comments on Godwin in *The Plain Speaker* were more cutting, and understandably read them as symptoms of a rupture that had already taken place: but, as Godwin's letters to Colburn indicate, these are correctly viewed not as the consequence, but rather as the *cause* of that rupture.

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[22] Wu vii. 97.

The Prelude and the French Revolution

By GEORGE SOULE

A revised version of a talk first given at the Wordsworth Winter School, Grasmere, Cumbria, on February 8, 2004, and given again at the Lawrence McKinley Gould Library's Athenaeum at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, on April 13, 2004.

I

YEARS AGO, THE LITERATURE I READ in my high school textbooks was always accompanied by pictures of the authors. I was haunted by the faces of such men as *Alfred, Lord Tennyson* and *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, who not only had triple-barreled names, but were old men with wonderful full beards cascading down their chests. Only much later I discovered a picture of the young Tennyson, the poet who wrote the poems I loved, looking as full of zest as did the young Ted Hughes in a superb picture on a recent *TLS* cover. I first knew D.H. Lawrence as a cadaverous, tubercular, prematurely-aged man squinting under an Arizona sun. Only later I found a photo from about the time of *Sons and Lovers*—he was young, good-looking, smiling, happy, even jaunty.

So it is with Wordsworth. My first impression of him came from the fine Haydon portrait showing the poet at age 72. I soon found several more youthful pictures. The finest, also by Haydon, shows him at 48: a handsome, wiry, strong middle-aged man—not aged, but not young either. We are concerned today with the much younger Wordsworth who wrote *The Prelude*. Perhaps the best portrait drawn about this time was by Henry Edridge. This shows a young but mature man: confident, unsmiling but not somber—serious rather, and calm, even resolute.

I dwell on portraits because if we are to think about Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, and the French Revolution, we must visualize, not an old man or even as a weathered middle-aged man, but the poet Wordsworth of 1804, a youngish man, moving into his 34th year. Even though Duncan Wu may be right that at this time Wordsworth felt doubts about his success as a poet,[1] 1804 was in many ways a good year, an *annus mirabilis* for Wordsworth himself. It began well, with a climb to high above Grasmere where he read to Coleridge "the second part of his divine Self-Biography,"[2] that is, Book Two of the *1798 Prelude*. Coleridge left for the Mediterranean on January 14, 1804, and his departure brought on a remarkable burst of poetic activity on Wordsworth's part, writing most of the Intimations Ode and a number of short poems, but especially working on his autobiographical poem. By March, he had expanded the 1798 *Prelude* by almost two thousand lines and divided those into five books. Then, deciding to expand these even further, he wrote over four thousand more lines of what would eventually become Books VI-X of the 1805 *Prelude*.[3]

[1] William Wordsworth, *The Five-Book Prelude*, ed. Duncan Wu. Oxford (Blackwell, 1997) 11.
[2] Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London: Viking, 2000) 312.
[3] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979). My calculations here and other similar observations elsewhere are based on

Personally, 1804 must have been a happy year. He parted from his closest friend on moderately happy terms. He was newly married and had an infant son. His wife Mary and sister Dorothy provided him with enviable love and support. His daughter Dora, on whom he was to dote all his life, was born. Dove Cottage was full, but not too full. The summer brought many visits to friends and relatives. Money from his father's estate was beginning to be paid. His brother John was about to embark on a voyage to make them all rich. The Wordsworth we deal with today was, I would have to think, a happy man.

On New Year's Day, 1805, one blow struck: on a drive over Kirkstone pass, Wordsworth's eyes became inflamed—the beginning of a malady that plagued him seriously for the rest of his life. (If the later Wordsworth seems prematurely old, my theory is that his eyes had a lot to do with it.) Then the blow that most of Wordsworth's readers know about: the drowning of his brother John in February. Wordsworth recovered well enough to finish the 1805 *Prelude* by May.

That, in short, is the biographical context for the books of *The Prelude* that deal with The French Revolution. In reading them, we need to envision the author as a confident, calm, youngish-looking 34-year-old man in happy and settled circumstances. I'll call him **Wordsworth B**, for we must distinguish him from **Wordsworth A**, the much younger man who, when he was 20, 21, and 22, made two trips to France at the time of the Revolution. (I ignore the possible third trip, for he did not write about it.[4]) A problem: there are no portraits of **Wordsworth A**. I must ask older members of the audience to try very seriously to remember what you looked like at 20, and then imagine the young Wordsworth: naïve, slim, serious yet perhaps smiling, *detached*—a student, not yet an adult.

Let us begin by considering *The Prelude* as a narrative. First, what does it tell us about **its central character Wordsworth A**, what he did and what he thought? Second, what does **the narrator Wordsworth B**, the same man but older, think about all this? (Many narratives make it hard to distinguish between the ideas of the principal character and those of the narrator. When this confusion happens in Jane Austen's *Emma*, we credit Emma with being smart enough to share her creator's opinions. Likewise, I think most of the time we must assume that Wordsworth A understood what happened unless Wordsworth B tells us differently.)

The Prelude relates to the French Revolution because it tells us what happened when one young Englishman, Wordsworth A, encountered it. Wordsworth A was a Cambridge man, but not one heavily involved in university life. In fact, he was proud that he had *detached* himself from academic competition. In the summer of his third year, he decided to break out of his usual habits and journey to the sublime Alps—very much the destination of young imaginative men of the age (like young people making a pilgrimage to San Francisco in the summer of 1966). The route he and a friend took landed them in Calais on July 13, 1790, the eve of the Fête de la Fédération in Paris and the first anniversary of the Fall of the Bastille. As they walked toward Switzerland, they came upon villagers celebrating the new regime. They were enthusiastically welcomed, especially since Britain was associated with Liberty since 1688. They enjoyed themselves. Wordsworth A (or at least Wordsworth B) understands the moment: "France [was] standing on the top of golden hours, / . . . human nature seeming born again" (VI 353-354). But

this volume's essay "The Texts: History and Presentation," 510-526. All quotations from all texts of *The Prelude* are cited by book and line number from this edition. Quotations are from the 1805 *Prelude* unless otherwise specified.

[4] Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York: Norton, 1998) 358.

the *detachment* he cultivated at college remains. In spite of their welcome, he and his friend were "A lonely pair / Of Englishmen" (VI 391-392), not really part of the festivities. Their business was ahead of them, and they soon found Mount Blanc and crossed the Alps. On their way back to England, they encountered Brabant armies fighting for Liberty, but Wordsworth A "looked upon these things / As from a distance—heard, and saw, and felt, / Was touched but with no intimate concern . . . ." (VI 694-696).

By Book IX, Wordsworth A has grown up somewhat. (Remember that now in November, 1791, he is all of 21. Continue to picture this young man as *young*.) He was sent to provincial France to learn to speak the language better. To get to his destination, he had to go through Paris, and there he visited the sites of various Revolutionary events and found the people far different from the happy villagers of 1790. Wordsworth A found Paris a chaos of "worst and best" (IX 53), a mix of "Joy, anger, and vexation, in the midst / Of gaiety and dissolute idleness" (IX 61-62). Although he did pick up a stone from the rubble of the Bastille, he knew he pretended more emotions than he really felt.

This same *detachment* continued when he reached his destination, a city on the Loire. (The city is not specified, but we know Wordsworth B conflated what happened in Orleans and Blois.) Even though Wordsworth A read the pamphlets of the hour, he was (as he tells us) as indifferent as a hothouse flower would be to a storm outdoors. He was "without a vital interest" (IX 108). His detachment was aided by the company he at first kept: fashionable people who avoided any serious talk.

But then Wordsworth A changed. He entered "a nosier world, and thus did soon / Become a patriot" (IX 124-125)—that is, he became a backer of the Revolution. Here is where the history of Wordsworth A becomes confusing. (For good reasons: Wordsworth B did not want to tell the story of Wordsworth A's love affair with a slightly older French woman, Annette Vallon, an affair that produced a child late in 1792.) Although he tells us he became a *supporter* of the Revolution, in the next passage he tells us that he began to spend his time with men from noble families who *opposed* the Revolution, many of whom joined the Austrian and Prussian armies ready to invade France. In my early readings of *The Prelude*, I could not understand this inconsistency.

Here is how we can sort it out: after Wordsworth began to associate with the military men (and Annette), he was forced to give over the detachment that had from the beginning been his response to the Revolution (and to adult life in general). He slowly became engaged with the "nosier world" of current affairs. On one hand, his sympathy with the officers began to melt his detachment; on the other, so did the plight of young men leaving to fight in the Revolutionary French army. Annette must also have played a significant pert in involving the poet with Life.

More important than feeling, Wordsworth A began to think. Soon we hear about one particular officer, Michael Beaupuy, who offered him friendship as well as a way of making sense of the situation. Beaupuy was charismatic. He combined noble bearing and ancestry with revolutionary sympathies for the common people of France. He and Wordsworth talked a lot about what government should be like, about the natural nobility of humankind, and about the ideals of Freedom and Equality. This would seem to be how Wordsworth A became a patriot—that is to say, how he became an advocate of the cause of Liberty and Equality for the French people.

The two men also talked about how their ideals would triumph soon. After seeing a "hunger-bitten girl" (IX 513), Beaupuy and Wordsworth "believed / Devoutly that a spirit was abroad /

Which could not be withstood, that poverty / At least like this, would in a little time / Be found no more" (IX 520-524). What a world was about to be created! One memorable quotation (from a later section) sums up how Wordsworth felt:

> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven! (X 692-693)

Nobody who, especially when young, was ever stirred by social and political ideals can fail to recognize himself or herself in those lines. According to Wordsworth A, in 1792 these ideals were to be realized *not* in

> some secreted island, heaven knows where—
> But in the very world which is the world
> Of all of us, the place in which, in the end,
> We find our happiness, or not at all. (X 724-727)

Just as he would do in the "Prospectus to *The Recluse*" written perhaps six years later, the young Wordsworth called for Paradise Now.[5]

Let me note a very important distinction, one which I also failed to grasp on my first readings: we must differentiate between advocating the ideals of the Revolution and approving the people in Paris who were running the country. Wordsworth A knew that even in 1792, before the Reign of Terror, "the best" did not rule the nation (IX 216-217). Wordsworth A could be a patriot and still be against the course the Revolution was taking.

In October, 1792, Wordsworth A had to return to England, leaving Annette and his unborn child behind (his money ran out). He stopped in Paris on his way home. Though he realized some terrible things had just happened (the king had been deposed in August and his Swiss guards massacred), Wordsworth A still hoped that the new regime would implement the ideals of the Revolution. But sometimes he doubted. He dreaded that "the earthquake is not satisfied at once" (X 74). He seemed to hear a voice (from *Macbeth*) "that cried/ To the whole city, "Sleep no more!" (X 76-77). At other times, he kept the faith. Tyranny, he thought, cannot last; it is always weak because "nothing hath a natural right to last / But equity and reason" (X 172-173).

He returned to England, but the French Revolution continued to concern him. He hoped things would get better. But when Britain joined the war against France in the summer of 1793, Wordsworth A suffered a severe shock, as he tells us the most severe shock of his life (X 233-35). Part of him wanted France to win: he rejoiced when British forces were defeated in a battle. Yet he was tortured by being at odds with the people of his native land. He became even more confused when Robespierre came to power in Paris and the Reign of Terror began—all that carnage in the name of Liberty! Wordsworth A was in misery, and began to try out different attitudes and evasions.

Then there was a ray of hope. In 1794, Wordsworth A visited the Lake District and had a very significant day, perhaps a "spot of time." In the morning, his consciousness was raised when he visited the grave of William Taylor, the headmaster at Hawkeshead who had

[5] Clarification: the poet in 1804 writes about what he thought in 1792; the "Prospectus" was probably written around 1798 or 1800, though not published until 1814.

encouraged him. In the afternoon, as he walked along the familiar Leven sands in Morecambe Bay, a traveler electrified him by telling him that "Robespierre was dead"! Wordsworth A was overwhelmed by joy—not that the Revolution had been defeated, but because after the fall of the bloody Robespierre, the true ideals of the Revolution could be realized. "Come now, ye golden times" (X 542) he said to himself, "The mighty renovation would proceed" (X 555).

Note in passing that he felt even more exhilarated because years before, as reported in Book II, he had joyously galloped over the same Leven sands. Wordsworth's account of this exhilaration fits well into his idea of how the memory works. In an account of his childhood written before 1804, Wordsworth tells of finding a gibbet by the Penrith Beacon, a gibbet on which a murderer's body had hung. Years later he visited the same spot with his wife-to-be and found the intensity of that experience was intensified by memories of the earlier one. In each case a later experience is intensified by an earlier experience that had happened at the same place—even though the earlier experience was very much different in content and in tone from the later one.

Back to 1794. If the Revolution would now be true to Revolutionary ideals, perhaps English institutions might change as well. But as events failed to fulfill Wordsworth A's hopes, he became disillusioned and turned elsewhere for support—to the utopian, reason-based radicalism of William Godwin. When that "philosophy / That promised to abstract the hopes of man / Out of his feelings" (X 806-808)—when that too did not satisfy, Wordsworth A was left with destructive speculations that "set foot / On Nature's holiest places" (X 877-878)—and despair. (Remember again that Wordsworth A was a young man. I've known students who were similarly cynical, and I seem to remember similar attitudes when I was the age of Wordsworth A.)

Thus ends my account of the relation of *The Prelude* to The French Revolution insofar as the poem tells about one young man who lived through part of it. It is interesting and moving. It is particularly valuable, I think, because it shows what the Revolution was like, not in an historian's summary, but as it was lived through, day by day. How important this is Southey tells us years later: "Few persons but those who have lived in it, can conceive or comprehend . . . what the French Revolution was, nor what a visionary world seemed to open up upon those who were just entering it."[6] As Wordsworth A says, the pages of history will not "reflect / To future times the face of what now is!" (IX 176-177). Wordsworth A's story *does* give us the "face of what" it was like to live those actual days. As Wordsworth B puts it, he has been "tracing faithfully / The workings of a youthful mind, beneath / The breath of great events . . ." (X 942-944).

II

Now what about **Wordsworth B**, the narrator of Wordsworth A's story? We know, because we have read the earlier books of *The Prelude* that he is an older version of the person who went to France. The narrator in fact tells us that, when he is writing Book VI, he has just turned 34. Passages toward the end of Book X point to dates later in 1804.

[6] Letter of 1824 quoted in *The New Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*, ed. Jonathan and Jessica Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 2001) xxv.

Wordsworth B is an intrusive narrator. Sometimes he hints at his judgments subtly, as when he smilingly belittles the young Wordsworth and his friend as they "sallied forth" (VI 340) or when he describes the Paris of 1791 as a "hubbub wild" (IX 56), echoing as the Norton editors point out, Milton's description of Chaos. Sometimes he looks ahead, as when he speculates on what might be the long-term effects of Wordsworth A's idleness at Cambridge or when he notes meeting his future wife, or when he reports Beaupuy's death. He expresses his disgust at the Pope's crowning Napoleon late in 1804. Once he confesses he has forgot a name.

Usually Wordsworth B's intrusions are variations on one idea: half-way through Book X he says: "juvenile errors are my theme" (X 637). What Wordsworth A called his virtuous guilt at not competing at Cambridge, Wordsworth B labels "cowardise," "over-love / Of freedom" and "indolence" (VI 44-46). He is pained to record that Wordsworth A rejoiced at a British defeat, yet he is sometimes circumspect and "cryptic" (to use the Norton editors' word: X 289n) when English policy under Pitt is treated. [In 1804, the wiser Wordsworth B does not seem eager to elaborate his earlier subversive ideas—and they were very subversive.] Many of Wordsworth B's intrusions underline Wordsworth A's youth and his early detachment from the events of the Revolution. Even when he discusses Wordsworth A's patriotism, he is careful to emphasize that the young man was not wrong in all respects: his ideals were worth holding, and Wordsworth B has continued to hold some of them in a different form.[7]

I'd like to emphasize that Wordsworth *meant what he said*, at that time and later. Despite what has been charged, the older poet was faithful to the ideals of Liberty and Equality held by the younger Wordsworth A. His insistence that the lowliest of human beings had inner lives of worth was what provoked many negative responses to *Lyrical Ballads* and what many years later brought on even nastier ones to *The Excursion.*

Back to Wordsworth B: one other kind of intrusion needs to be mentioned. As he does earlier in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth B addresses Coleridge as "friend" or "dear friend"—often, and at length. Now Coleridge is present throughout *The Prelude* as its implied audience, but when Wordsworth B uses the word *friend*, it is almost always the signal of a lengthy intrusion. Often these intrusions divert our interest from Wordsworth A, the poem's ostensible subject, to Coleridge himself and Wordsworth B's sincere and tender concern for him.[8] Book VI tells us that Coleridge has departed for "milder breezes" (VI 250) and presents an edited history of Coleridge's unhappy youth. Wordsworth B wishes he could have been there to help. In Book X, written later in 1804, Wordsworth B locates Coleridge in Sicily and hopes his trip will be restorative.

Wordsworth B's devotion to Coleridge can be seen when he admits he can almost picture Coleridge with Dorothy, Mary, and himself in about 1787 and when he inaccurately says that Coleridge's friendship helped him recover his mental health in 1795, when they had barely met that year. (This misstatement was later removed from the manuscript of *The Prelude* by someone who has not yet appeared in my story: Wordsworth ***D***—the older man who edited and revised the

[7] Stephen Gill stresses that Wordsworth did not so much repudiate his earlier ideas as imply that his later ideas developed out of earlier ones. That Wordsworth's attitude toward the government of France had changed is shown by the fact that he joined the local Volunteers to help repel any French invasion. *William Wordsworth: A Life*, 233-235.

[8] This comment is made in a slightly different context by Robert Woof, quoted by Duncan Wu in *The Five-Book Prelude*, 5.

poem after 1805.[9] I'll not mention him again, but his existence implies there is a Wordsworth ***C***. I will introduce Wordsworth **C** shortly.)

Sometimes and significantly these addresses to Coleridge underscore an important point, such as why Wordsworth A was not immediately enthusiastic about the Revolution. But usually these intrusions signal that Wordsworth B is about to reveal intimate details of Wordsworth A's mental life—details that can only be told to a close friend or at least must, for rhetorical reasons, be presented as such. In Book VI, Wordsworth B tells Coleridge about how important Dorothy was to him after their reunion in 1787. He refers tenderly to his wife as well. In Book IX, he asks Coleridge to realize that Beaupuy was not only a thinker but also a man of action—unlike those who did their speculating on the banks of the Rothay, the Greta, and the Derwent, far from any conflict. In Book X, with surprising intimacy Wordsworth B tells Coleridge how deeply wretched he became when he heard about the Reign of Terror and how these atrocities caused him to have bad dreams then and for years to come—"I speak bare truth, / As if to thee alone in private talk" (X 371-372).

Wordsworth B's addresses to Coleridge (and his talk about his sister) appear to be digressions from the story of Wordsworth A. How much more digressive Wordsworth B seems when he ends Book IX with 400 or so lines of the story of Vaudracour and Julia. This tale does illustrate the harshness of life under the *ancien regieme*--but *400 lines*? We know now that with this tale Wordsworth B was both acknowledging and covering up Wordsworth A's affair with Annette Vallon. So Wordsworth B can be a bit devious.

III

Now to introduce my last main character, **Wordsworth C**. (I promise no more Wordsworths.) Wordsworth C lived in the same body as Wordsworth B in the same year, 1804. But whereas Wordsworth B was simply the narrator of and commentator on his younger life, **Wordsworth C is a narrative poet** writing a long poem that would include Books VI, IX, and X—and much more besides. While we often think of *The Prelude* as a spontaneous natural growth, my thesis here is that *Wordsworth C was also constructing his poem as a coherent work of art.*

A narrator must worry about his *ethos*, the character he presents to his audience. Although Wordsworth C's audience was in one sense Coleridge, it was also the reading public. From early on, certainly by 1804,[10] Wordsworth admitted the poem would be published someday; later on, he revised it for publication. So Wordsworth C the artist must think about the *ethos* he presents. What does this narrator seem to be like? He is believable: he certainly has the facts; years before, he was there and did that and thought that. The narrator is no fool: he realizes that Wordsworth A is a young man and makes many mistakes. The narrator is wise. He sometimes judges harshly and sometimes less so, yet he is always sympathetic.

Wordsworth C has a special task. He must convince the reader that he is not now the same person who twelve to fourteen years before did foolish things and was seduced into revolutionary

[9] *The Prelude*, X 907n.
[10] Letter to De Quincey, March 6, 1804, *The Prelude*, 531.

enthusiasms. The passages in which Dorothy, Mary, and Coleridge are thanked for their support all help the narrator establish the fact that he is now a *changed man*—a wiser man than in his youth, a man to be trusted. Note too that Wordsworth C makes sure that his narrator does not seem jaded. He reassures us that, even though he is 34 years old, "the morning gladness [that I had back when I was 20] is not gone" (VI 63). This statement presents a very different view of aging than does the *Immortality Ode*: "But yet I know, where'er I go, / That there hath past a glory from the earth" (17-18).[11] Even though The *Ode* was finished at about the same time as the quite different passage in *The Prelude* was written, I do not wish to tax the poet with inconsistency. My point is that *The Prelude* passage had to say something quite different because *The Prelude* required a different sentiment to establish the *ethos* of its narrator.

The artistry of Wordsworth C is even more apparent when we ask why Books VI, IX, and X were written in the first place. (And Book VII, for that matter.) In 1799, Wordsworth wrote a two-part poem about himself, the theme of which was in the words of J. R. MacGillvray, "the awakening of the imagination."[12] Wordsworth seems to have felt the poem was not truly finished and added material over the next few years.[13] After Coleridge left Grasmere in January, 1804, Wordsworth worked on the poem again (perhaps because he and Coleridge realized it could be incorporated into the *Recluse* scheme).[14] By mid-March, he finished what we now call the *Five-Book Prelude*, in which the material of 1799 was rearranged and augmented by details of Cambridge and his first two summer vacations. Yet, although the *Five-Book Prelude* does not mention the French Revolution, its ending bears upon my argument. Its final book probably incorporated the newly-composed ascent of Snowdon in its climax.[15]

In mid-March, 1804, when Wordsworth C decided to expand the *Five-Book Prelude*, he spent the rest of 1804 (and a bit of 1805) doing just that. Why did he want to expand? The Norton editors suggest that Wordsworth did not want to work on the *Recluse* without Coleridge near at hand and that he wanted to incorporate more biographical material, in particular his journey in 1790 to France and the Alps, into his poem.[16] But why exactly would he want to do that? Moreover, the editors do not speculate at all on why Wordsworth C wanted to write about his French trips—the material that has most to do with the French Revolution. (Or about London, for that matter.) I can't believe that Wordsworth just wanted to rattle on about his life. That's not how great poems are made.

To the question "why did he want to expand?" I answer that Wordsworth C, the narrative artist, realized that his experiences of the French revolution and also (I must emphasize) his despair after he returned to England—these were *necessary* for his poem. There were two main reasons. First of all, as Mary Moorman said many years ago, an account of these experiences was needed to tell the full story of his development as a poet—and that is what his poem was about.[17] The years 1791-95 were tempestuous ones for Wordsworth. His enthusiasms and mental

[11] William Wordsworth, *The Poems*, ed. John O. Haydon (London: Penguin, 1977) I, 524.
[12] Cited in *The Prelude*, 512.
[13] *The Prelude*, "The Texts: History and Presentation," 513, 516.
[14] Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth: An Inner Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 192.
[15] *The Prelude*, "The Texts: History and Presentation," 516-517.
[16] *The Prelude*, "The Texts: History and Presentation," 517.
[17] Moorman, Mary, *William Wordsworth: The Later Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) 12. But Moorman is not very helpful on other reasons for these books. She gives us a poet who is "started off again" by seeing some birds (16) and who every once in awhile is unable to resist writing to Coleridge (16-17).

conflicts about France, his conversion to Godwinism and his subsequent despair were states through which he passed before being rescued by his sister's love and by getting back to his roots in the countryside. He needed to tell the details of much of the story of these years or at least hint at them (like the affair with Annette Vallon) to round out the story of his mind's development. (Perhaps even more would have been told if, as Kenneth Johnston suggests, John's death had not caused the poet to hurry to a conclusion.[18])

The second reason Wordsworth wanted to expand was that ***the French Revolution material* was *necessary to give form to the poem itself*.** Let us look back. The 1799 poem was essentially cheerful. Duncan Wu argues that this poem is missing a logic that the longer *Five-Book Prelude* supplies, material that recalls "the archetypal sequence of fall and redemption."[19] Wordsworth, Wu tells us, found his fall in the "aimlessness of [his] undergraduate career" and in his seduction by "the mechanistic habits of the picturesque."[20] Wu here disagrees with the critic Jonathan Wordsworth, who earlier in his book *The Borders of Vision* had argued that, even though Wordsworth announced that his Cambridge experiences represented a descent from glory, they really did not. According to Jonathan Wordsworth, the poet Wordsworth fully understood Cambridge's temptations, and he knew he did not yield to them. Likewise in his accounts of other experiences in Books IV and V of *The Five-Book Prelude*, the poet cannot convince his readers or himself that very much bad really happened. As a result, Jonathan Wordsworth says the conclusion of this work is at odds with its structure.[21] It has a moment of redemption, but not much of a fall to go before it.

Exactly. I agree with Jonathan Wordsworth, and I wish to elaborate and extend his argument. I'd guess that as Wordsworth C worked on his *Five-Book Prelude* in March, 1804, he realized that he had already written his triumphal conclusion, the ascent of Snowdon passage. To get to that moment of renovation, he needed something to renovate. To get to salvation, he needed a fall. But his material for that fall in the *Five-Book Prelude* was not adequate.

Greater depth was necessary—and at hand. To this end, he (probably) first thought of an experience to add: the crossing of the Alps, in which terrible and inscrutable powers contended with themselves and with the tranquil heavens and led to a vision that subsumed them all—an unsettling foreshadowing of Snowdon. He also had many experiences in London, then in France, and then back in England in which he participated in politics and in the "noisy" affairs of men (and women)—experiences which when described would show him as an adult actor deeply involved in a fallen world. These experiences, I think he saw now, were not only essential to his development as a poet and a man, but they were essential to the structure of his poem.

We can see Wordsworth C constructing his poem at the opening of Book IX, where the poet tells us that his narrative course in Books VI, VII, and VIII has been like a river avoiding the not very welcoming "devouring sea" (IX 4) which is about to appear in Book IX. Now he will begin "afresh" to write a new part of his long work, of which the "argument" is "much unlike the past"—that is, unlike the stories of the poet's growth. The new argument is "One which, though bright the promise, will be found / Ere far we shall advance, ungenial, hard / To treat of, and forbidding in itself" (IX 9-17). Wordsworth C knew his Milton, and it easy to see a conscious and deliberate parallel here (and also in Book XI) with the invocations of *Paradise Lost* that

[18] Johnston, 813.
[19] *The Five-Book Prelude*, 6.
[20] *The Five-Book Prelude*, 6-7.
[21] Quoted by Wu, *The Five-Book Prelude*, 167-178.

announce a change of topic—and a deepening tone. The most notable parallel is with Milton's Book IX, which tells of mankind's fall from innocence. *In both poems, a Book IX brings in a deeper note, a very deep note, of human evil*. In Milton, the fall of man. In Wordsworth C's account of France, a fallen world of confusion and bloodshed in which lovers are estranged, beauty is destroyed, children suffer, and the central character loses his innocence. (I suppose that makes Annette Vallon into Eve.) Placed about two-thirds of the way though the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth's account provides the new and darker notes necessary to go before the poem's climax, the Snowdon passage, in order to give that passage the power it needs.

Elsewhere[22] I have called attention to another narrative pattern, one that resembles that of fall and redemption. We find Descents into Hell in many narratives, especially in *The Excursion*. Northrop Frye once said that such descents, such narrative patterns usually lay bare some ugly truths that an age is trying to avoid thinking about.[23] In *The Prelude* we do not exactly have a descent,[24] though much of the action of Books IX and X takes place near low-lying rivers, as opposed to more inspiring experiences on the Lake District fells, in the Alps, and on Snowdon. But we do have our poet shedding his detachment and getting emotionally involved with the affairs of men. He enters (descends into?) the ordinary world and discovers its conflicts and horrors.

An even greater horror in this case lies in what these conflicts do to his mind. And what they did to his mind and to the minds of others like him is exactly what Wordsworth thought his age failed to grasp. Over and over he laments that the best young men of his generation (I am reminded of *Howl*!) are being tortured by many conflicts—between their love of the ideal of the French Revolution and their knowledge of its horrors, between love of one's native land and the policies of the British government—and by their reaction into Godwinism and destructive reasoning. The torture is magnified because most Britons are indifferent to their anguish. (It is hard to resist seeing parallels with the experience of many people during the Vietnam War.) The sufferings of a young man of this sort make up one of Wordsworth's central stories: we find it soon in *The Borderers*; it is implicit in "Tintern Abbey"; it was his concern years later in *The Excursion*. In this later poem, The Solitary suffers deeply and may or may not be on the road to recovery by the poem's end. By the end of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth A fares better, much better.

So: before Wordsworth launched into the 1805 *Prelude*, he knew how it would end. He had already written the Snowdon passage and most of the rest of the ending. He had already experienced material which would provide the low point from which he would emerge. The structure of the poem was to be essentially comic, with the poet's imagination triumphing at the end. The low point of Books IX and X corresponds to a similar low point in *Paradise Lost* before Adam and Eve begin their long journey toward what will be a happier future. Wordsworth's situation in Books IX and X of *The Prelude* corresponds to Rosalind's in Act IV of *As You Like It*, or to Tom Jones's at the beginning of his last book, or for that matter to Lucky Jim's a few pages before the end. The last two characters are made happy by finding their lovers. Wordsworth is rewarded by reclaiming his Imagination.

[22] "'Spots of Earth" in *The Excursion," Charles Lamb Bulletin,* N. S. 85 (January, 1994): 19-24 and "True and False Princesses in *The Excursion*," *Wordsworth Circle*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Summer, 1995): 137-140. Both essays are reproduced in revised versions on my website.

[23] Northrop Frye, *Words With Power* (New York: Harcourt, 1990) 238-43.

[24] But see III 195-6.

"*The Prelude* and the French Revolution" is my title. *The Prelude* shows that Wordsworth A suffered because of the French Revolution; Wordsworth B learned from that pain. But Wordsworth C, the artist, turned the tables. He took his memories and made the French Revolution an integral part of *his* story, of *his* poem.

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Reviews

PETER ACKROYD. *The Lambs of London*. Chatto & Windus, 2004. Pp. 228. ISBN 0-7011-7744-6. £15.99.

IN JULY 1796, ALONGSIDE LETTERS from Thomas Beddoes about the nature of grammar, and heated discussions about a plan to build wet docks at Wapping, the *Monthly Magazine* dryly noted the unmasking of William Henry Ireland's spurious Shakespeare manuscripts: 'a most laborious, but most impudent forgery'. News of Ireland's remarkable discoveries had been transfixing London during 1795: his book-dealer father Samuel had published a lavish four guinea folio containing numerous 'Shakespeare' letters and plays. He had even established a small Bardic shrine at his shop in Norfolk Street, where devotees, like James Boswell, could come to pay their respects to the originals. The hysteria culminated in a production of Shakespeare's 'lost play', *Vortigern*, at Drury Lane on 2 April 1796. But Ireland had over-reached himself. The audience, egged on by John Philip Kemble in the leading role, greeted it as a farce, with hisses, boos, catcalls and rotten fruit. As the *Monthly Magazine* put it, 'Vortigern and Rowena was acted – and the mask fell off. The publications, and the whole transaction, will soon be forgotten; or will only be remembered, and preserved, as a monument of credulity'. Having summarily dismissed Ireland's presumption, the *Monthly Magazine* moved on to some genuinely 'original poetry', including that of a young writer making his first appearance in its pages: 'Charles Lamb, of the India House'. His sonnet, 'We were two pretty babes', was his first independent appearance in print. As Ireland's *Vortigern* failed, Charles Lamb's creative star began to rise.

It is this moment of connection which provides the setting for Peter Ackroyd's semi-historical novel, *The Lambs of London*. He weaves together the stories of Ireland, Charles and Mary, spinning intricate fictions out of their slight literary connections, playing, like Ireland himself, with our credulity. The premise is an exhilarating one. We know that Charles Lamb was interested in Ireland; he'd probably assisted his school-fellow Jem White to write his own forgery, 'Original Letters of John Falstaff and his friends', which, in Lamb's words, 'took the hint from *Vortigern*'.[1] Indeed, in its second edition, this little collection of 'genuine manuscripts' was dedicated to none other than 'Master Samuel Irelaunde', William's book-dealing father. So what better opening gambit for Ackroyd's novel than an actual meeting between William and Charles? Lamb, on his weary way to the East India House, is drawn into the Irelands' shop by the glimpse of a sixteenth century manuscript. Within that shop is an Elian world of 'moth-scented coverings', old folios and quartos, and rising from it, like a flame-haired apparition, is William Ireland himself, an ambitious seventeen-year-old. Not only does this revivified Chatterton capture Charles's imagination by selling him a copy of Greene's *Pandosto*—with a Shakespearian inscription in the front—he also entrances Mary.

Longing for an escape from suffocating family life, and the duty of caring for her infirm parent, Ackroyd's Mary is excited and moved by Ireland, and by his literary discoveries: Shakespeare's will; his seal; his love-letters to Anne Hathaway; finally, triumphantly, the lost

[1] See T. W. Craik's excellent article detailing the links between White, Lamb, and Ireland, 'Jem White and *Falstaff's Letters*', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 91, July 1995.

play, *Vortigern*. Reading Ireland's Shakespeare, Ackroyd would have us believe, Mary Lamb falls in love with Ireland himself. But as the reality of Ireland's manuscripts comes into question, so too does Mary's grasp on reality itself become more tenuous. Ackroyd shows her loneliness spiralling into madness, 'as if someone had drilled a hole in her skull, and had blown in warm air'. In Ackroyd's fiction, it's the final unmasking of these forgeries which leads to the Lambs' 'day of horrors' in September 1796, when Mary kills Mrs. Lamb with—apparently—a crumpet fork. After the murder, Ackroyd speedily disposes of Mary: following a hasty mention of some 'stories taken from the plays of Shakespeare', she is killed off in an asylum in 1804. Meanwhile Charles, who by this reckoning has not written anything worthwhile since 1796, merely grows 'old in the service of the East India Company'.

Ackroyd's Lambs are, like Ireland's Shakespeare, characters of his own invention. From an Elian viewpoint, this makes the novel simultaneously compelling and frustrating. Indeed, Elia is written out of this narrative entirely: here, it is Ackroyd's prerogative to play with the concept of authorial identity. Although he weaves in wonderful Elian phrases on the subject of roast pig or reading or dreaming, he does so without acknowledgement, playing, like Ireland, with the idea of literary property. We hear of Charles writing essays on Munden, and on poor relations, but these are transposed to the 1790s, and published in something called *Westminster Words*. The 'Salutation and Cat' is lovingly evoked, but all its 'associated circumstances' have been stripped away: no intoxicating talk of poetry or Pantisocracy, no Coleridge.

Instead, Ackroyd insistently returns to the frail boundaries between fiction and history, dreams and reality. Again and again characters are made to question 'what is real and what is false'. A viewer of *Vortigern* exclaims, 'it may be real and yet unreal. Do you understand me?' Ackroyd's point is certainly understandable, and it might seem pedantic to quibble over his dreamy, trans-historical reordering of the facts. As in his earlier novel, *Chatterton*, he is fascinated by the process of creation: how people create their own stories, such as the orphan Chatterton searching for his origins, or William Henry Ireland seeking hopelessly to impress his father. The place of creation is important too: all these secret stories are brilliantly mapped onto the alley-ways and passages of eighteenth-century London, 'those dark threads woven into the city fabric'. As he proved with *London: A Biography*, Ackroyd is adept at capturing the smells, sounds and sights of city streets, strewn with orange peel and horse dung, alive with whores, beggars, and pick-pockets. Here, where his repeated patterns of imagery lend the novel the incantatory effect of a prose poem, he comes closest to the spirit of the Lambs' writing, and their love of the London streets. There are also wonderful imagined descriptions, particularly the disastrous performance of *Vortigern* (worse, even, than Mr. H–) which Charles and Mary watch stoically to the accompaniment of boos and the thud of rotten fruit being flung on stage.[2] Mr. and Mrs. Lamb become comically Dickensian characters; so too does the showy Samuel Ireland with his Shakespeare shrine.

Yet in the closing chapters, Ackroyd's playful attitude toward the past starts to take on a plundering aspect. While at the start of the novel his allusions, coinages, and inventions have a pleasingly Elian quality, his fictionalisation of Mrs. Lamb's death has an uncomfortable, almost exploitative feel. Admittedly, Ackroyd wants to question the reader's own perception of

[2] Although Ackroyd insists on his own creative rights here, rather unaccountably, the leading role in *Vortigern* is given to Charles Kemble, rather than his more famous brother John Philip.

historical figures, and the importance of particular events or documents. Even so, there is something awkward about his use of Lamb's poignant letters to Coleridge, written in the immediate aftermath of his mother's death, chopping and changing and fictionalising them, so that they are now addressed—rather strangely—to De Quincey. Ackroyd is eager to point out at the start of the novel that 'this is not a biography but a work of fiction,' and that he has 'changed the life of the Lamb family for the sake of the larger narrative'. But what this larger narrative emphasises is the rather clichéd idea of Mary as madwoman, and the matricide as the focal point of the Lambs' lives. The lively polemical Mary of the essay 'On Needlework', or of the letters to Sarah Stoddart is written out: so too are Lamb's own fictional constructs, the Burtonian forgeries and the *Essays of Elia*. The Ackroydian Charles comes across instead as a rather humourless young man, haunted by his shadowy drunken self: the intensely intelligent Mary, marked by small-pox, is constantly, exhaustingly, on the brink of mania.

Ackroyd's is an exuberant mixture of fact and forgery and fiction, and *The Lambs of London* is an ingeniously plotted novel. Ultimately, however, its title is misleading—this is Ackroyd's London, his own creation. It offers the reader an entrancing trip through his historical imagination: but one which has disappointingly little connection with the Lambs themselves.

Felicity James

Society Notes and News from Members

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

A gratifyingly large number of members attended the lecture given by Duncan Wu on 4th December at the offices of John Murray, the publisher. The meeting, chaired by our President, was held in the historic, book and portrait-lined first floor rooms, the setting of so many literary gatherings in the nineteenth century. With Lord Byron looking down, we were presented with a most stimulating account of his relationship with Hazlitt. Mr and Mrs John Murray proved excellent hosts, and not only supplied a most enjoyable tea, but also had laid out for examination a fascinating selection from the family's literary archives, including manuscripts of *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*, and mementoes of Dickens and Jane Austen. The occasion was a truly memorable one.

Members are reminded that subscriptions for 2005 became due on 1st January. Those who have not already paid or who have a standing order, should now forward a cheque to the Treasurer.

Plans are proceeding for the Alliance of Literary Societies weekend in London on 21st and 22nd May, which this year the Charles Lamb Society is hosting.

In the meantime, tickets are still available for the Society Luncheon to be held on 19th February, when the guest of honour will be Professor David Fairer of Leeds University.

FROM D.E. WICKHAM

Financial Comparisons

I have always sensed, but never previously proved or disproved, that Charles Lamb was not very well paid. In fact Lucas's *Life* gives several fascinating pointers to the contrary, which can be usefully compared with the income of Charles Dickens and his father.

Charles Lamb joined the South Sea House staff on 1 September 1791, when he was sixteen and a half at 10*s*.6*d* (52½ p) a week. On 8 February 1792, two days before his seventeenth birthday, he left after twenty-three weeks and collected £12.1*s*.6*d* (Lucas, pages 88-90).

On 5 April 1792 he joined the Accountant's department staff at East India House, ineligible for a salary during three probationary years. In April 1795 he began to be paid £40 a year. This rose to £70 in 1796 (page 93). Later that year (page 119), when considering outgoings involved with Mary's time in an asylum, he reckoned that 'if my father, an old servant maid, and I, can't live and live comfortably on £130 or £120 a year, we ought to burn by slow fires . . .'.

In 1815 a reorganization of labour and salary at East India House resulted in his salary suddenly doubling from about £240 a year to £480 (pages 434-5). He also had letter-franking privileges, apparently to any reasonable extent, a matter which could lead to instant dismissal if over-exploited in a modern office. In 1819, when he was aged forty-four and proposing marriage to Fanny Kelly, his annual salary was £600 (page 510). In 1821, it was £700 (page 435).

At the end of March 1825, after thirty-three years' service with the East India Company, his salary was £730 per annum. That was when he retired 'on account of certified ill health' at fifty with a pension of £450 a year, less £9 for a provision for sister Mary if she survived him (pages 666-7)

Given the situation of many of today's retirees with expectations from private pension schemes, one of his comments has special poignancy. 'Here I am then . . . a freed man, with £441 a year for the remainder of my life, live I as long as John Dennis, who outlived his annuity and starved at 90'.

This note was prompted by a recent reading of Christopher Hibbert's book *The Making of Charles Dickens*. Hibbert says (page 271) that 'In 1817, £200 a year was a very respectable income'. He quotes *A New System of Practical Domestic Economy*, 1824, to show that a man earning £150 a year was entitled to call himself a gentleman and that £400 a year was considered sufficient to allow the employment of two maidservants and to keep a horse and a groom. Further, he quotes a detailed budget for £250 a year and says that the 'system' shows that it was possible for a couple with three children to live 'quite comfortably' on £125 a year.

John Dickens, Charles's father and the improvident original of Mr Micawber, was first paid 5*s*. a day: this was in 1805, when he was aged about twenty. He was paid 'rather more than £100 a year' four years later and on this he married; and over £200 a year in 1817. About 1827, aged forty-one, he was obliged to retire from the Navy Pay Office on a pension of £145.6*s*.8*d* (Hibbert, page 117).

Charles Dickens himself was paid £7.7*s* a week, at least £380 a year, as a twenty-three-year-old newspaper reporter about 1835 (Hibbert, page 158) and, shortly afterwards (Hibbert, page 169), he felt able to marry on a regular assured income of £11 a week, about £575 a year, plus a growing but still uncertain income from his writing.

Thus, to my surprise, in 1836, aged twenty-four, Charles Dickens could rely on £575 a year; his father retired early, about 1827, aged forty-one, on £145.6*s*.8*d* and had to find a new job; and in 1825 Charles Lamb earned £730 a year and retired on £441 a year aged fifty.