The Mind of a Poet
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BOOK IX

BOOKS IX, X, and the first half of XI are devoted to the French Revolution, Wordsworth's connection with it, and its influence on his life and thought. They are of historical value and of great biographical interest but contain fewer outstanding passages, less philosophy, and, because of the unusual character of the experiences chronicled, throw less light on the development of the typical poet than do any other parts of the the work. True, they are less hampered by "system" than are some other books since they have less to do with the purpose for which the poem was written, but I cannot agree with the remaining points which Mr. Harper finds in their favor: that they are "more vivid and spontaneous, more fluently written, and . . . as a narrative . . . constitute . . . [the] climax" of the poem (II, 149-50). A. V. Dicey commends them on other grounds as giving "an invaluable record of first-hand reflection by a keen observer, endowed at once with sympathetic imagination and with profound thoughtfulness, on some of the leading events of the Revolution." Their value to historians of the period, he adds, "has hardly as yet received adequate acknowledgement." They should be compared with the similar picture of the Revolution given in The Excursion, iii. 706-834.

It was the French Revolution that made Wordsworth a great poet. This is not to say that his sojourn in France put into him something that was not already there nor merely that it called forth and helped to develop qualities that might otherwise have lain dormant. Mentally as well as physically it meant transplanting, with the fresh vigor that different food and the exertion required for adaptation to a new environment bring to men as well as to plants. With Wordsworth there were several transplantings—to France, to London, and to Goslar—and, although his enthusiasm for the Revolution soon faded, when he returned to country life (first at Racedown and Alfoxden, later at Grasmere) he saw it through new eyes. Mentally he had been greatly stimulated: his interest in men
had been aroused, his belief in the ministry of nature as well as in the value of instincts and emotions had deepened, had become more conscious and more sure, because he had doubted them and lived without them. It was in reacting against the Revolution and the theorizing and over-intellectualizing engendered by it that he became a man and a poet. As Sir Walter Raleigh has said:

The secret of the making [of a poet], if ever it should be divined, would be found, according to his [Wordsworth's] conception of it, exactly at that point where the free and vigorous life of sense and thought in any young creature is, by some predestined accident or series of accidents, arrested, surprised, checked, challenged, and turned in and back upon itself. Then for the first time the soul makes an inventory of its wealth, and discovers that it has great possessions, that it has been a traveller in fairyland, and holds the clue to that mystery. With the discovery the period of acquisition closes, or at least the incomings thenceforward are slower, less authentic, more liable to sophistication, and the newly awakened poet is left to make the best of what he has saved from the days when, all unwittingly, he enjoyed a royal revenue.  

To this admirable comment there is but one objection, namely the lack of evidence that Wordsworth himself ever looked on the Revolution as the accident which turned him back upon himself and led to the discovery of his great possessions, that he realized how essential to the exuberant springtime of 1778-1806 the severe winter of 1793-7 had been. He seems to have thought of his Revolutionary and rationalistic periods as disappointments and errors from which he recovered, not as “vales of soul-making” through which he found himself.

Book IX deals chiefly with eight months of Wordsworth's twenty-second and twenty-third years: his residence at Orleans and Blois from December 6, 1791, to the departure of Beaujuy, July 27, 1792. It summarizes the stay in London (February to May, 1791), omits the equally long visit to Wales (May to September) and the brief residence in Cambridge, and passes directly to Paris (November 30 to December 5). The remainder of the book is devoted to the development of Wordsworth's enthusiasm for the Revolution, at Orleans and Blois, and the story of Vaudracour and Julia. Aside from the implica-
tions of this story there is no reference to his love affair or to the other subject that must have taken a large share of his time and thought, poetic composition. For "much the greatest part" of *Descriptive Sketches* and, perhaps, some of *Guilt and Sorrow* were written at this time.

Professor de Selincourt believes (pp. xxxviii, xxxix) that IX was composed in April, 1804, immediately after VI and before VII and VIII. Yet the opening lines, which clearly mark a fresh start and an overcoming of the poet's reluctance to enter upon his revolutionary experiences (A 9-17, A 1-9), seem to refer to VIII, where the "motions" are all "retrograde" (A 8). Furthermore they suggest that the composition of IX was put off as long as possible and not that it was taken up before half the poem was completed. If Professor de Selincourt is right in thinking that VIII was written after IX, neither A 1-17 nor A 18-39 (which could not possibly come immediately after VI) could have formed part of the original manuscript, which has disappeared.

Except for the omission of the tale of Vaudracour and Julia few changes have been made in the revision of this book, even in the 227 lines for which we have the early manuscript Y. In the 300 lines between 236 and 540 very few alterations were made and between 285 and 315, 357 and 382, 393 and 430, 480 and 513 none save punctuation, spelling, and a letter or two (the punctuation and spelling of the 1850 text is not Wordsworth's). This is probably due to the uncomplicated subject matter, which is mainly narration and simple exposition.

1-7, 9-16, 23-4, 51. Imagery; cf. vi. 158-60 n. The first figure is particularly apt but becomes badly mixed in A 3. With the second, which is not in A, compare Wordsworth's letter to his sister of September 6 to 16, 1790: "Again and again, in quitting a fortunate station, have I returned to it with the most eager avidity, in the hope of bearing away a more lively picture."

3. *fear*: Explained in 21-2 and more definitely in A 15-17. Wordsworth dreaded to enter on the Revolution, although it offered none of the difficulties of expression presented by more metaphysical passages of other books, because it had so grievously disappointed him. This was the only part of his story
that ended in despair. Even the first happy months in France were unpleasant to dwell upon because of the concealment they involved and the political disillusionment that followed. Furthermore, in his relations with Annette, in his absorption in abstract theory, and in the uncertainty of mind and of life which characterized the later years of this period he found much to regret.


26-8. Though Wordsworth enjoyed a good deal of such intercourse he never sought it.


28. *a year*: Note "month after month" (25); yet he had spent only three and a half months in London! A possible explanation of this apparently incredible mistake is that he is consciously or unconsciously confusing with this early stay the six to eight months he spent in London immediately after his return from France and perhaps also the visit of about the same length between the death of Calvert and the departure for Racedown. There is no reason why he should not have done this deliberately just as he blended his second with his third year at Cambridge, and his residence at Orleans with that at Blois, and just as he omitted the visit to Wales and the brief post-graduate sojourn at Cambridge and said nothing about the latter half of his Swiss tour. He may well have felt that one long book and part of another would seem too much space to devote to an uneventful three and a half months and that VII and VIII had really been concerned with the second visit as well as the first—the two together extended to "scarcely a year." The poem, which is a study in development not a biography, certainly gains from such a simplification of reality. See 40-41 n.; v. 389-425 n. and pp. 270-1, 283, 394 above.

A 23-39. Only half a dozen or so words of this passage are retained in the final text, which adds the rather pompous lines 34-40. A 25-30 comments on the ministry of the city to the poet's development, concerning which little is said in VII (see pp. 436-7, 451 above).

31. *art*: Wordsworth seems never to have realized what the
other arts—which are represented in *The Prelude* by Le Brun's *Magdalene!* (see 74-80 and note vii. 240-59)—may contribute to a poet’s development. Wherever in his poems, his notes to them, or his letters, he touches on painting or sculpture it is the idea alone or (as in the fine sonnet to Haydon) the character needed by the artist that interests him. This was one of the unrealized inadequacies of his education—how little realized is shown in his remark that “there were three callings for success in which Nature had furnished him with qualifications—the callings of poet, landscape-gardener, and critic of pictures and works of art.”* He acknowledged, however, “The statues and pictures of the Louvre affect me feebly in comparison” with the Jardin des Plantes,* and Crabb Robinson observed:

I did not perceive that Wordsworth enjoyed much the Elgin Marbles, but he is a still man when he does enjoy himself and by no means ready to talk of his pleasure except to Miss Wordsworth. But we could hardly see the statues. The Memnon, however, seemed to interest him very much. I have thought that Wordsworth’s enjoyment of works of art is very much in proportion to their subserviency to poetical illustration. I doubt whether he feels the beauty of mere form.*

Yet Hazlitt, who himself painted and wrote extensively about painting, praised Wordsworth’s comments on Poussin’s landscapes; and Haydon wrote, “His knowledge of art is extraordinary. He detects errors in hands like a connoisseur or artist.”*  

32. book-stalls: "I well remember, that, twenty-five years ago, the booksellers’ stalls in London swarmed with the folios of Cowley."*  

A 36-7. Dorothy wrote to Jane Pollard on December 7, 1791, "William is ... at Orleans ... for the purpose of learning the French Language which will qualify him for the office of travelling companion to some young gentleman’’; yet here he seems to go out of his way to say that his "wish To speak the language more familiarly’’ was "personal,” that is, non-professional. In his Autobiographical Memoranda he declared, "I ... went to Orleans, with a view of being out of the way of my own countrymen, that I might learn to speak the language fluently” (Grosart, III, 222). He wrote Mathews on
November 23, 1791, that he expected "considerable pleasure . . . and some little improvement" from his sojourn in France and that he had consented to devote himself to Oriental languages on his return. From the final text of *The Prelude* he removed all reference to learning the language and said simply, "France lured me forth." He had felt the lure during his trip with Jones, for in his letter to Dorothy of September 6 to 16, 1790, he spoke enthusiastically of the French people, their courtesy, "real benevolence," "cheerfulness and sprightliness" and added, "It was a most interesting period to be in France." Clearly his mind was unsettled, his plans vague, his motives mixed; yet the selection of Orleans points strongly to an interest in the language rather than in the Revolution (his comparative indifference to the Revolution is also clear from 67-120). 40-1. The name is not given because the "pleasant town" is a fusion of Orleans and Blois and perhaps for the same reason that neither Cockermouth nor Hawkshead are named in Book i—the desire to avoid the merely personal. Since in his Autobiographical Memoranda Wordsworth mentioned both Orleans and Blois and pointed out what happened of public interest when he was in each city, there is no reason to suppose that he sought here to suppress the facts. For artistic reasons he simplified them, and if this had not been the time of his affair with Annette no one would have questioned the wisdom of his doing so. See 28 n. 42-3. According to his letter to his brother Richard of December 19, 1791,* the dates of Wordsworth's trip are as follows: on Tuesday, November 22, he went from London to Brighthelmstone, where he was detained until the night of November 26; he "got to Dieppe" the morning of Sunday the 27th "and the same night to Rouen," where he was "detained two days"; he reached Paris the evening of Wednesday the 30th and remained there until Monday, December 5th; the following day he was in Orleans. 48-51. In the letter to his brother Richard of December 19, 1791, Wordsworth wrote, "I was at the national assembly, introduced by a member of whose acquaintance I shall profit on my return to Paris." 57-8. Is the alliteration ("st" in 57, "h" in 58) unintentional? See iii. 28 n.
71-3. Cf. A 23-5; vi. 766-78; x. 55-63. The reason is given in 92-5: Wordsworth knew too little about the Revolution and was too little interested in social and political questions to be moved. A further reason is given in 243-8. As usual, his analysis of his own state of mind (note also 75, 82-92, 98-9, and A 73-4) is both keen and honest.

74-80. Much better than the early versions. Note "most . . . utmost" (A 72) and the wordiness of A 76-7. Le Brun's work pleased him because it appealed to his emotions; cf. viii. A 841-2 and n.

85. A 84-5 adds "at first" and "and satisfied."

96-7. These lines give a different impression from that made by "eagerly" (A 95).

106-7. Cf. 74-80, 123-4, and viii. A 841-2 and n. Apparently the pamphlets had been largely political and theoretical, and politics and theory had, as yet, little interest for Wordsworth (198-204). It was not until his heart was touched and his enthusiasm aroused (262-87, 509-22) that he gave much thought to the Revolution; the rights of man made little appeal to him until he had sympathized with the wrongs. His approach was through the concrete not the abstract, through human contacts not through reasoning. The "arguments" which proved the justice of the cause were "passing spectacles" by which his "heart was oftentimes uplifted" (281-7), and it was not a book but a man, and one who was both enthusiastic and attractive, who interested him in theory.

112. must be compelled to do: "Must" would have been sufficient. See 74-80 n.; iii. 506-11 n.; iv. 312-16 n.; x. 44-7 n., 364-74 n.; xiv. 293-6, footnote 33; de S., xlv.

117. The chiasmus is not in the earlier texts. Cf. xi. A 869-70; xii. 13-14; xiii. 180.

121-4. Each of these lines has an "and" near the middle.

125-6. See de S., xlv. "Band" is likewise better than "knot" (A 126).

125. We now pass to Blois and to February or March, 1792, although 113-22 are doubtless applicable not only to Orleans but to the first part of his stay at Blois.

139-61. The reader is likely to assume that this is the person
referred to in 132 and described in 288-321,—that is, Beaupuy. But this man was clearly a Royalist (143-53); 152-8 is inconsistent with the description of Beaupuy; and 288-9 must refer to 132 and not to 139-61, which is too long to be termed a hint.

140. prime: Cf. xiii. 122 and n. He was really young but looked old.

A 152. The reading of A³C avoids the "lovely" of A and the pomposity of the final text (149-50)—a fault which reappears in 154-5.

155-61. It is remarkable that after more than twelve years Wordsworth still remembered these details, especially the gesture described in 159-60. To be sure they may be due in part to the unconscious working of the creative faculty. See x. 532-3 n. and pp. 280-2 above.

167-80. Wordsworth missed the dignity, the concern with large interests, and the idealism that he had associated with great historical events (cf. 204-8). All was passion, strife, and pettiness—violent discussion of men who in a few months were forgotten.

188-97. An illustration of that "shrewd discernment" which Wordsworth notes as characteristic of his native region (A 218, variant in A³C).

198-201. Cf. xi. 75-98. This defect together with his indifference to history should have been remedied at Cambridge.

203. Clearer and more definite than A 205. The meaning is, "in comparison with my interest in unworldly matters."

204-8. On Wordsworth's indifference to history see viii. 617-25 n.; xii. A 90-1 n.; xiii. 41-4.

208. This line explains "fair forms."

212-14. "But rather [I found] what I . . . ill could brook, . . . [viz.] that the best Ruled not." The omission of "loath'd" (A 215) makes the passage less radical.

215. and which: There is no preceding "which" for "and" to connect with the "which" in the text. Cf. A 289; iii. A 584; xiv. 142, A 268.

216. Both A 219 and the A³C variant of A 218 were probably rejected because it seemed unwise to claim for the lake district more moral virtue and shrewd discernment than any other part of England possessed.
222-32. See iii. 512-33 n.
233-5. What Wordsworth first wrote (A 236-8) would seem to mean that he was not dazzled by royalty or "the pomp Of orders and degrees" (209-10) because he had grown up amid manifestations of much more awful Power and conscious of subjection only to God and Nature. Presumably the possessive goes with God-and-Nature. It is clearly implied that God is not the same as Nature but that in the poet's youth the two were inextricably blended. But as The Excursion had been much criticized for pantheism, Wordsworth changed both the wording and meaning of these lines and thereby took away the reference to the ministry of fear (A 238) but not the suggestion of animism in "presences" (234, A 238).
A 289. Cf. 215 n.
245-6, 248. Pedestrian lines that are largely monosyllabic; see ii. 41-5 n.
250-1. Inflamed . . . injury: The addition of this line and a half so late as 1818 shows that Wordsworth did not become more favorable to the Royalists in later years. See 284-7 and n. The unnecessary "Whom I have mention'd" of A 255 was later dropped.
254-87. These lines indicate that there were two causes besides the conversations with Beaupuy which led Wordsworth to become a "patriot": the intemperate attacks on the Revolution and on democratic principles made by prejudiced Royalists whom he met, and the sight of enthusiastic, unselfish young republicans on their way to the front. Although these are mentioned before anything is said of Beaupuy we are not warranted in concluding that they came first chronologically.
255-6. A good figure.
258-60. A reference to the inferiority of the reasoning faculty to intuition, of Verstand to Vernunft; see xii. 45 n., A 134-7.
267-70. In his youth and in private Wordsworth was easily moved to tears; see viii. A 841-2 n.
278-80. It is surprising to find this kind of susceptibility in
Wordsworth. Cf. Whitman's "Faces," "To a Stranger," "Give me the splendid silent sun."


284-7. There is no apparent reason for the vehemence of these lines, in which adjective is piled on adjective as if the poet wished to pour out upon the opponents of the Revolution his entire vocabulary of condemnation. Yet even this was not enough, for about 1817 he added a line and a half more in the same strain (250-1). It will be remembered that Annette's family were Royalists; Wordsworth may have quarreled with them on both political and personal grounds and may be here expressing the opinion he held of them as typical Royalists. Such a quarrel would explain many things: his failure to marry Annette, his leaving her before their child was born, and his not returning to see her and the child during the two or three months he spent in Paris. Since the other officers spurned Beaupuy with an oriental loathing because he was a "patriot," they probably treated Wordsworth in much the same way when he went over to the people.

288. Except for eight lines corresponding to viii. A 68-73, this is the beginning of MS Y.

It is noteworthy that Beaupuy, Dorothy, Coleridge, and William Taylor (master of Hawkshead school, see x. 532-52) are the only persons mentioned in The Prelude as exerting any significant influence on the poet's development. See v. 168-9 n.


300-2. See vii. 77-84 n.


324. loyalty: A has "prejudice"; A 330 was omitted later. Cf. xi. 159-61, which deals with this same period.

326-8. "In the few" is contrasted with "in the labouring multitude."


True dignity abides with him alone
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart.

See also iv. A 297-8 n., xiii. 80-1 n., 373.
See de S., xlv.

Beauzuy and Wordsworth were infected by the prevalent "belief in the natural goodness and virtue of the people and in popular emotion as being the voice of God." Observe that these were "dearest themes."

Both his instinctive, impulsive emotion and his conscious reason reveal "clear truth" to man (the ordinary man, it should be observed). The first destroys, breaking the chains of custom and statute; the second constructs, establishing a firm, orderly, enduring liberty.

Through knowledge a high type of social life is widely diffused and is rendered imperishable.

"Individual" is contrasted with "social" (360): "making social life . . . as pure As individual [life is] in the wise and good [man]."

They recalled instances of truth preserved etc. Apparently they ignored instances of the opposite kind and believed that truth is victorious in every encounter.

A mixed figure: the multitudes feed one another with truth and fan the flame of truth in one another.

The wide diffusion and rapid growth of Calvinism, of the Jesuit order, and of the Methodist church show what lovers of political liberty may hope to achieve.

To put the appropriate nature on: To coast off conventions and other restrictions and be what is commanded by or implied in their religion.

The spread of Mohammedanism?

It is clear from xi. 173-5 that xi. 98-172 refers to these discussions as well as to later meditations.

The Rotha, or Rothay, flows from Dunmail Raise eight miles through Grasmere Lake and Rydal Water to the Brathay, near its influx to Windermere. The Greta flows to the west at the foot of Skiddaw, past Greta Hall (where Coleridge lived for some years), and empties into the Derwent half a mile beyond Keswick. For the Derwent see i. 269-300 and i. A 277 n.

nature: Human nature.

devoted: To the cause, i.e. Beauzuy, whose conversation was "far more sweet" than that carried on later between
Coleridge and Wordsworth because Beaupuy was about to embody his ideas in action—to risk his life for them.

408-17. Wordsworth's enthusiasm for the French Revolution owed little, at least at its inception, to knowledge or reason. It was due largely to the influence of Beaupuy, to youthful idealism and devotion to abstract principles, and to admiration for the heroes of Greek liberty. This last feeling as well as most of the others he shared with the Girondists, whom he admired, and with the young Southey, who said that his *Joan of Arc* "was written in a republican spirit, such as may easily be accounted for in a youth whose notions of liberty were taken from the Greek and Roman writers, and who was ignorant enough of history and of human nature." 11 Note also viii. 617-25, x. 198-200, and Wordsworth's admiration for Plutarch (de S., 503); and see H. T. Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries*, Chicago, 1937.

422. *With like persuasion honoured*: Referring to 416-7 or 409-10 or 404-7; the Revolution was a "philosophic war, Led by Philosophers," Beaupuy and its other leaders were Dions engaged in "a Deliverer's glorious task" "by an authority Divine Sanctioned."

431-3. Contrasted with 424-6: "the unhappy Loire" stained with "civil slaughter" recalls the "Loire, with festal mirth Resounding" of these early days.

434-6. Much better than A and, since the construction of "footing" (A 441) is no longer uncertain, clearer.

437-501. See vii. 77-84 n.

440-6. These excellent lines, which furnish an admirable introduction to what follows and of which there is only a hint in A, were apparently added about 1828.

446-8. Not only is this better expressed than in A but, through the addition of "Heard, though unseen," an element essential to the mastering of the poet's fancy is emphasized.

472. Keen self-scrutiny. Presumably Wordsworth wrought up within himself a feeling for the Revolution that was more sentimental than Beaupuy's since it was in part divorced from reality and from the willingness to sacrifice himself for the cause.

479. Cf. de S., xlvi.

483-4. name now slipped From my remembrance: These two pedestrian, incongruous half lines are not only most awkwardly expressed, but unnecessary. See Chapter I.

501-41. Beaupuy and Wordsworth shared the "excessive confidence in the beneficial effect of political and especially of constitutional reforms" which prevailed at the time and which is "closely connected with inordinate trust in the virtue of the people." 12

508, 522, 540, 549. Monosyllables.

524. The substitution of "meek" and "patient" for "industrious" is an improvement in euphony but not in thought.

539. not: I do not see that "the sense clearly requires 'but'" (de S. note to A 539). The meaning would seem to be, "unless, indeed, the air should be free," i.e. unless punishment be abolished.

A 542. as my purpose was: Wisely omitted, though of interest to the student. Lines 541-2 are an improvement over A 541-3.

547-52. Unlike the final version, A does not assert, although the context may suggest, that the story is told to illustrate the evils of the ancien regime. This moral is also pointed out in "Vaudracour and Julia," 149-50, which is not in A.

553-85. General comment on the story of Vaudracour and Julia, on Wordsworth's relations with Annette, and on the omission from The Prelude of any direct reference to them will be found at the end of the notes to the present book.

The principal differences other than verbal between "Vaudracour and Julia" and A 554-993 are the omission from "Vaudracour and Julia" of the following lines that are in A: 683-93, 715-40, 750-62, 764-95, 815-38, 861-70, 882-6; and the addition of the following lines that are not in A: 25-31, 51-3, 94-101, 138-50, 164-5, 193-5, 207-9. "Vaudracour and Julia" is 72 lines shorter than the A text owing principally to its summarizing some of the numerous separations and reunions of the lovers which A gives in full detail. 13 Of the lines omitted, A 686-93 are much better than most of those retained; A 781-4 are unpleasantly reminiscent of Pamela's coffin and of the edifying sentimental tale; A 816-17 contain a most unhknd
and unchivalrous remark; A 819-26 give realistic details interesting in themselves which are not in the spirit of the rest of the piece and which add nothing to its effectiveness. One of the additions cannot be praised too highly—"Vaudracour and Julia," 94-101. Yet, like several of the others (134-5, 193-5, 207-9, and perhaps 138-50), it is not in the tone and manner of the poem as a whole. Another inharmonious but interesting addition effective in a florid, antithetical, un-Wordsworthian way is 155-6.


A 582-93. Professor Legouis remarks that the "attitude of wonder is more in keeping with the youth's [i.e., Wordsworth's] sudden passion for the foreigner, than with Vaudracour's long and tender love for his Julia, known from the cradle." 14 Concerning A 582-3, see vii. 77-84 n.

A 599. This line, which was later dropped presumably because of its obscurity, may mean that he was uncertain as to how the marriage was to be brought about, or as to the outcome, or as to whether he was justified in turning from law to nature. A 596-602 may be applicable to Wordsworth's own case.

A 602. Nature: Contrasted with "law and custom," hence presumably refers to the spontaneous and instinctive; at the same time the phrase "entrust himself To Nature" seems to mean something like "trust Providence" so that Nature is also the cosmic order personified as a benevolent power. Cf. 571 n.

A 638-40. Perhaps in these beautiful lines also Wordsworth is to some extent "drawing on his own experience" (de S., 573). A 633-6 and A 640-3 recall Peter Bell, 131-45 (quoted in v. 573-7 n.).

"Vaudracour and Julia," 94-101. Seldom did Wordsworth in his revisions introduce a completely new passage so notable as this one, which seems to have been added between 1817 and 1819. It is unfortunate that lines which for magic and passion he never excelled are hidden in what Matthew Arnold regarded as its author's only unreadable poem. 35 "Galaxy" (97), the Milky Way.
A 643-8. Some will find support in these lines for the belief that Wordsworth left Annette in order to secure from his guardians the funds wherewith to marry. On the other hand, we know that in A 777-8 there is no parallel to Wordsworth's case.

A 654. Cf. the last line of *Paradise Regained*, "Home to his mother's house private returned."

A 744. *travers'd*: Thwarted.

571. "Nature" is here contrasted with "monstrous law" as, in the interesting A⁸ variant of A 722-3, "wicked institutes" are contrasted with "Nature and... God." The meaning is apparently "whatever is prompted or required by the instincts common to man and all animals."¹⁸

553-85. VAUDRACOUR AND JULIA, WILLIAM AND ANNETTE.

Wordsworth's love affair with Annette Vallon, first discovered by Mr. Harper, but most fully narrated by M. Legouis, has been interpreted by Herbert Read, by Hugh l'Anson Fausset, by O. J. Campbell, Paul Mueschke, and others as the key to much of the poet's life and work. Although Wordsworth's admirers have been too eager to put a favorable interpretation on his conduct, some of their arguments together with those of Miss Edith Batho and the sane, dispassionate review of the whole case by Dean Willard L. Sperry leave little ground for believing that remorse for his neglect of his French sweetheart was a force that corroded his thought and sapped his poetic vitality. The development of any individual is far more complicated than any reconstruction of it is likely to make it appear, since we know very few of the "little nameless unremembered" happenings that largely determine that development and since external events such as one would expect to be important often leave almost no influence. A love affair may be as transient as it is passionate. Furthermore, in the words of Mr. T. S. Eliot, "Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality." If anything is clear from The Prelude it is that the significant events of Wordsworth's early life were those which only he remembered.

Anyone who makes a careful study of the matter, distinguishing sharply between conjecture and fact, must be impressed with how little we know about some of the most important aspects of it, and how little attention has been paid by commentators on it to the matter-of-factness which was strong in Wordsworth's nature. For we are not sure that Wordsworth ever intended to marry Annette, and if he did why the ceremony was not performed when her condition was discovered, why he left her at Orleans before Caroline was born and did not return afterwards. We do not know how he reconciled his conduct with his plan of entering the church nor how
we are to reconcile his supposed absorption in love with his growing interest in the Revolution. His feeling for Annette almost certainly developed first, and as she was a Royalist the two passions may have come into serious conflict and the later one have crowded out the earlier. Certain it is that while she was awaiting the birth of their child he was giving himself to the Revolutionary cause with such ardent enthusiasm that, had he not been compelled to return home, he would have perished for it. Even at Blois he had found time not only for politics but for poetry—for completing his *Descriptive Sketches.*

In view of all these uncertainties, it is unsound to build up theories which assume that we know Wordsworth's state of mind in 1793-8. As far as it concerned Annette we cannot know it, for we do not know how largely she herself was responsible for her fall, whether he looked upon her as his wife in all but name or as the passion of a few months. Disquiet he must have felt and some remorse; yet it is noteworthy that in this, the only poem certainly inspired by the affair, Vaudracour expresses remorse for the murder but never for his relations with Julia.

The omission from *The Prelude* of any explicit reference to the experience is another matter, and one that is more understandable than creditable to the poet, who was placed in an embarrassing predicament. The insertion of Vaudracour's story at this point indicates that he felt that some allusion should be made to his relations with Annette; but later, although he may not have been fully aware of how badly he had handled it, he apparently realized that an insert tale of this length (the only one in the poem) was artistically a great blemish. Even so he did not omit it but substituted a forty-line summary; hence it may be argued that what he lacked was not the will but the skill to handle the matter effectively. Perhaps he may have made other attempts that proved still less satisfactory, for there was need of a delicacy, a deftness, and a tact which he did not often command. Here as elsewhere *The Prelude* may well represent, not what its author wished and attempted, but the best he could bring to pass. The merely personal side of the affair—details as to where and how it began, its outcome, the
personality of Annette, and the like—was, of course, no concern of the public, but (as the work was to be posthumous) the poet might have told, as other biographers have done, that he loved, might have shown (as he did in two breathless passages) what that love meant to him, and have traced the part it played in making him a creative artist. Had he done so we might have accepted his assertion that in his "history"

the discipline
And consummation of a Poet's mind,
In everything that stood most prominent,
Have faithfully been pictured;

(xiv. 303-6)

but as it is, I do not see how we can. A force which ranks as one of the chief in the development of most poets is omitted from *The Prelude*. In his own case, since it directly inspired so little of his work and since he wrote no significant poems until four or five years after meeting Annette, he presumably came to believe that his love for her had little influence on his poetry. But if so he overlooked the stimulus that a tumultuous passion with its later repercussions is likely to have on any imaginative artist and especially on one of a vigorous, but reserved temperament. "There is another," as M. Legouis remarks, "an aesthetic, reason for regret. The reality was richer, more complex and humane than the simplification of his experiences given us by Wordsworth. His poetry suffers from his over-expurgation of Nature." 25 There can be no question that the intimacy with Annette influenced his development more profoundly than did many of the episodes narrated in *The Prelude*, but these are introduced as illustrations of the working of important forces: nature, boyish sports, books, university life, city life, the Revolution, the imagination. His love for Annette may have affected him more than some of these; we cannot know; presumably he thought it did not. But in any case if the significance of romantic love for the poet were to be discussed it would require more than a hundred or two lines.

Yet it is doubtful whether, even if Wordsworth had married Annette, *The Prelude* would have said much about her or would have included any adequate consideration of the ministry of romantic love to the poet's development. He had
previously cared for Mary Hutchinson and he mentions this attachment as "the blessed time of early love" (xii. A 318), but that is all. Not only was he profoundly reticent in such matters but he had something of a prejudice against most love poetry. The Pastor in The Excursion exclaims:

Pangs are there not enough in hopeless love—
And, in requited passion, all too much
Of turbulence, anxiety, and fear—
But that the minstrel of the rural shade
Must tune his pipe, insidiously to nurse
The perturbation in the suffering breast,
And propagate its kind, far as he may? (vii. 367-73)

The function of the poet as Wordsworth saw it was not to "nurse perturbation," not to give vivid pictures of the passions as Byron did, but to uphold us, cherish, to embody visionary power in the mystery of words, and to invest the material universe with a glory not its own. Since love poetry rarely does this and since it rouses emotions which it does not allay, Wordsworth was not favorably inclined towards it. Great poetry springs from passion but from such passion as "is highest reason in a soul sublime" (v. 40-1), from

those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will. (xii. A 270-3)

For Wordsworth the transports of the lover have none of this revealing virtue. This comes out not only in the passage cited from The Excursion but in his remark as reported by Aubrey de Vere:

. . . that if he had avoided that form of composition [love-poetry], it was by no means because the theme did not interest him, but because, treated as it commonly has been, it tends rather to disturb and lower the reader's moral and imaginative being than to elevate it. He feared to handle it amiss. He seemed to think that the subject had been so long vulgarised, that few poets had a right to assume that they could treat it worthily.

These last two sentences express what was certainly another powerful deterrent, "He feared to handle it amiss." The
"raptures" of lovers, he confesses, have "been set forth In more delightful verse than skill of mine Could fashion" (A 633-6), and with the ministry of such rapture to the making of a poet he felt disinclined if not unable to cope.

The more one studies the insert tale of "Vaudracour and Julia" the more amazingly inept and inexplicable it becomes. Presumably Wordsworth chose it because the first part was close to his own love affair while the latter part and the character of the hero were so clearly not autobiographical that the parallel would not be too obvious. Yet therein lay the cause of his failure, for most of the incidents and the personality of the hero lay outside of his experience and of his imaginative comprehension. Wordsworth's interests were fairly wide but his insight, though profound, was narrow in range and he sometimes courted disaster by embarking on a subject that interested him but failed to touch his imagination and of which, accordingly, he had no real understanding. Furthermore, as told in A, the story is too involved, has too many separations, reunions, escapes, and imprisonments, to be narrated in 380 lines. But even when several of these are summarized, as in "Vaudracour and Julia," there remains an incongruous mixture of youthful romance and dreary realism which it would be most difficult to harmonize and, with a hero like Vaudracour, to make effective.

The discords are not harmonized by Wordsworth; the best parts of his account, the earlier, reflect the ecstasy of his own love affair, whereas the remainder is deliberately kept low in key and matter-of-fact in detail and style. Apparently the poem was intended to be like "The Ruined Cottage" (Excursion, i. 469-916) or the short, simply-told narratives of humble life written during the Lyrical Ballads period, which culminate magnificently in "Michael." It resembles Wordsworth's early pieces of this period in its sentimental morality, its attack on class privilege and class prejudice, and its exemplifying the principle of poetic art expounded in the preface to the Lyrical Ballads. The style is conversational, loose, and wordy and the diction strongly monosyllabic. The pedestrian style and the profusion of irrelevant details (which result in a lack of focus,
each fact appearing as important as every other) are well shown in the lines leading up to the murder:

the Son

Was left with one Attendant in the house.
Retiring to his Chamber for the night,
While he was entering at the door, attempts
Were made to seize him by three armed Men.

(A 671-5)

But the coup de grace is the character of the hero. Impulsive, passionate, and stubborn in the first part of the story, meek and colorless in the remainder, he seems consistent only in his weakness and general futility. He is powerless not only before his passion but before the consequences of it. He cannot extricate himself from difficulties; he adds to Julia's unhappiness instead of relieving it; he allows his child to die and melancholy to overpower his reason. He remains in our memory as he lay supported by the long-suffering woman whom he had wronged, and to whom he exclaims, "How much thine eyes Have cost me," languidly propping his melancholy face upon one of her breasts "while from the other The Babe was drawing in its quiet food."
NOTES


3 Reminiscences of R. P. Graves (Grosart, III, 468). In a letter to Rogers of September 20, 1827, he spoke of himself as "a passionate lover of the Art" of painting.

4 Letter to Lord Lonsdale of October 7, 1820.

5 Diary for November 20, 1820.


7 "Essay, supplementary to the Preface" (Oxf. W., p. 947).


10 A. V. Dicey, The Statesmanship of Wordsworth, p. 25.

11 Preface to Joan in Poetical Works, 1837, i, p. xxix.


13 A few slight changes were made in later years, the most important of which is the substitution of "Was in his judgment tempted to decline To perilous weakness" for 61-2a (A 600-1a).

14 William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon, 1922, p. 16.


20 The Sacred Wood, 2 ed., 1928, p. 36.

21 See 284-7 n. In his presidential address before the English Association (The Early Wordsworth, 1936, pp. 16-19), Professor de Selincourt shows that Wordsworth's old love for Mary Hutchinson was reawakened so early as 1794.

22 A minor perplexity is offered by the visit he and Dorothy made in August, 1802, to Calais, just before his marriage, in order to see Annette and Caroline. Why did they stay four weeks? A strange meeting—the first in ten years; Wordsworth spent part of the time writing political sonnets against the French. The silence of Dorothy's journal as to Annette is disquieting.

23 There are many others. Professor Legouis, for example, believes that Annette met Wordsworth when she was visiting her brother in Orleans and was pregnant when she returned to Blois; but as there is some reason for thinking that the poet was in Blois in February and as Caroline, unless a pre-
mature birth, must have been conceived early in March, the first meeting may have occurred at Blois. Likewise we are by no means certain that Wordsworth could not bring himself to put the sea between himself and Annette" (William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon, p. 25) until he learned of the birth of his child; certainly he intended to do so for he wrote his brother on September 3, 1792, that he should return to London in October. Caroline was christened December fifteenth and he left France in December or early in January; he would have stayed much longer but for "absolute want of funds" (x. A 191-2). This lack of funds may well explain his not returning to Orleans to see Annette and his child. But see 284-7 n.

Mr. Harper declares "there is good reason to believe he risked his life to bring Annette and his French daughter to England" (Saturday Review of Literature, New York, April 4, 1931); yet the reasons for thinking that Wordsworth returned to France in 1793 can hardly be termed "good," and as to the purpose of the journey, if it was ever made, we know nothing.

84 Professor de Selincourt's remark, "Doubtless he omitted it in part to avert suspicion" (p. 573), is open to serious question, for the tale is summarized not omitted and the reader is referred to the complete poem. Artistically the better way would have been to omit all mention of it and perhaps to continue IX to the return to England (x. 236). Wordsworth may have realized this but may have felt that he must include at least a hint of his intimacy with Annette.

85 William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon, p. 117.

86 Adapted with slight changes from Walter Raleigh's Wordsworth, p. 202. Professor Grierson, who thinks Dorothy the heroine of the Lucy poems, agrees with Legouis that they "express Wordsworth's sense of relief in escaping from a love of passion to a love of affection" (Milton and Wordsworth, Cambridge, 1937, p. 155).

87 "Recollections of Wordsworth" (Grosart, III, 491). De Vere said of Wordsworth: "There was in his being a region of tumult as well as a higher region of calm, though it was almost wholly in the latter that his poetry lived. It turned aside from mere personal excitements" (ibid., 489).


89 The following lines in A are completely monosyllabic: 660, 667, 713, 743, 790, 800, 826, 909, 912; but there are many more (e.g., 723, 726-9, 734, 736, 739, 741, 834, 836-7, 841, 855, 857-8, 862-4, 867-8, 873-5, 878-9) that have eight monosyllables.