The Mind of a Poet

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BOOK X

BOOK X is devoted to the two years in which Wordsworth's enthusiasm for the Revolution was at its height, that is from mid- or late October, 1792, when he left Orleans for Paris, to late August, 1794, when he learned of the execution of Robespierre. As the biographical part of IX ends with the conversations with Beaupuy (who left Blois July 27), and as "Vaudracour and Julia" throws no light on the later history of Wordsworth's love, nothing is said in The Prelude about the last two and a half months of his life at Blois and Orleans. The title, "Residence in France," is applicable only to the first third of the book. Wordsworth's life between his return to England and his joyous departure for Racedown, with which The Prelude opens, is summarized in xiv. 349-54. Still another book, XIII, which traces his recovery and his development as a poet, describes the three days he spent in September or October, 1793, wandering over Salisbury Plain and refers to the composition of Guilt and Sorrow, a part of which was conceived at this time (see xiii. 312-378). After leaving France he was a homeless wanderer, poor, often dependent, doubtless lonely, and certainly much disturbed by the course of the Revolution, by uncertainty as to his own future, and by thoughts of Annette and her child. He did not see his sister until a year after his return, that is, until February, 1794. The Prelude very properly omits all of this except his concern for France, just as it says nothing of the matter which occupied much of his attention during his early days in London—the publication of his first two volumes of verse. Nor does it mention the sermons of Joseph Fawcett, to which he listened, or the appearance in February of Political Justice, which he may have read at this time and discussed with his radical associates. But what is much more strange is the absence of any reference to his prose pamphlet in defence of the Revolution, the Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, to which, although he never published it, he devoted much labor. It is well to remember that he had not yet reached the middle of his twenty-fifth year when the last event described in this book took place.

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According to Professor de Selincourt (pp. xxxix-xl), X was composed, along with VIII and XI and the greater part of VII, between mid-October and the end of December, 1804.

1-11. Like VI, this book opens with a description of autumn and with the poet's leaving the country for the city, and, in each case the loveliness of the scene was intensified for the young Wordsworth by wistful regret at leaving it and by eager anticipation of what lay ahead. The lines take on a deeper beauty and significance when it is realized that the farewell look which he cast upon the rich domains of the Loire was, though he little suspected it, also a farewell to Annette, whom he was not to see again for ten long years, a farewell to the ecstasy of youthful passion, and even to youth itself.

It is interesting to follow the development of this passage, rich in the mature beauty of the season it describes. Lines 4-5 were added in B and several changes were made in C, which, though ineffectual in themselves, were admirably developed in the final text. Yet in the process, the beautiful "Calm waters, gleams of sun, and breathless trees" (B 6) was lost. Another line omitted from the later texts is of significance since it tells us that Wordsworth left Orleans not to watch the Revolution in Paris but to return home: "I . . . turn'd my steps Their homeward way to England" (B 7-8). Such had certainly been his intention a little earlier, for he wrote Mathews on May 17, "I shall return to England in the autumn or the beginning of winter," and in a letter to his brother Richard of September 3 he said, "I shall be in town [London] during the course of the month of October." His stay of two months or more in Paris—it would have been much longer but for lack of funds—was due to a change in plan occasioned by his increased enthusiasm for the Revolution.


13-15. A good figure.

17-24. Wordsworth's love of romance (see vii. 77-84 n.) comes out in these stately, Miltonic lines, which were developed in 1832 or 1839 from B 14-15. They are similar in style and imagery to viii. 75-81.

31-2. Apparently Wordsworth did not notice the unpleasant
alliteration in "State ... stamp," "seal ... security," in "free from ... for" (45), in "progress passed The prison" (50-1), or in "some sort seeing" (124). See iii. 28 n.

44-7. The same idea is expressed four times in these lines. See ix. 112 n.

49-50. More compact and otherwise better expressed than B 38-40. The growth of the change may be traced in B² and C.

55-63. MS C has several interesting details that might well have been retained: the first, fourth, fifth, and last lines of the variant of A 46-9 and also the variants of A 55.

57-63. These lines of characteristic subtle self-analysis recall vi. 767-9; ix. A 23-5, 71-3; and perhaps iii. 30-5, 80-2. Yet the idea of the present passage is somewhat different since Wordsworth seems to refer here to the baffling sense of unreality that often arises in a place where one knows what has happened in the past but cannot realize, cannot feel it.

A 54-6. But . . . felt most: The sixteen successive monosyllables (cf. ii. 41-5 n.) and the alliteration "most mov'd" (see iii. 28 n.) were probably responsible for the elimination of A 55.

70-93. "Pressed on me" (72) and the vivid A 66 suggest the working of a powerful imagination; 87-8 may imply that this led to a terrifying dream. Lines 87b-90 are clearer than A 77b-9, and 87b-92 more vivid than A 77b-81.

93. An admirable line.

94-120. Although Louvet’s speech was probably hawked about at least until November 5, when Robespierre answered it (and "recently pronounced" [103] would hardly mean "delivered yesterday"), the first morning on which it could have been sold was October 30. Yet one hesitates to deduce from this that Wordsworth arrived in Paris between October 29 and November 4. For it should be observed that on the preceding evening he had thought of the massacres of September 2-5 as "divided from me by one little month" (74) whereas, on an evening between October 29 and November 4, they would be almost if not exactly two months distant. Furthermore, he may not have meant by "that night" (63) and "The first" (C variant of A 55) the first night after his return to Paris; and if he did he might easily, twelve years later, have been mistaken.
120-3. This is not inconsistent with v. 192-7; Wordsworth means, "I am giving an account of the Revolution only as it affected my development as a typical poet."

124. proper: Own.

136. reason: Regarded by many of the revolutionists and by their philosophers as the key to all truth and progress (341-3).

138. The unpleasant piety of this line has crowded out the emphasis on plain living in B 121.

140. Perhaps a reference to Acts, ii. 2, 3, 5: the "sound... as of a rushing mighty wind" which accompanied "the gift of tongues," and likewise the men "out of every nation under heaven" who were dwelling in Jerusalem at the time.

142-5. Wordsworth had no doubts as to the ultimate success of the Revolution ("the end of things," 144) although he feared that its triumph might be unduly delayed and that in the meantime much harm might be done by extremists.

146-236. These lines, taken in connection with 134-42 but apparently contradicted by 225-8, indicate that Wordsworth wondered at times whether he, an outsider, might not become the leader whom France needed. Such an idea will seem less fantastic if we recall his confession that as a child "nothing" was

So welcome, no temptation half so dear
As that which urged me to a daring feat...
With impulses that scarcely were by these
Surpassed in strength, I heard of danger, met
Or sought with courage; enterprise forlorn
By one, sole keeper of his own intent,
Or by a resolute few who for the sake
Of glory, fronted multitudes in arms.

(Recluse, i. i. 703-20)

By a final bit of tragic irony the leader for whom Wordsworth so earnestly looked proved to be the man he loathed—Napoleon!

154-90. One sentence thirty-six lines long. See v. 197-222 n.

156-60. A survival of that rationalistic uniformitarianism which was a marked feature of eighteenth-century thought. Deism, for example, was supposed to be a universal religion "transcendent to all local" beliefs and prejudices, and based on
the "one nature" which is shared by men of all races and all degrees of civilization. Wordsworth's remark that great objects are seen by humblest eyes recalls the belief of the Uniformitarians that to the savage, uncorrupted by education and convention, all essential, universal truths must be clear.\(^1\)

164-6. Substituted for A 147. "Firm sense" is ominously dropped from the final text. The variants in B\(^2\), C, and D are given on de S., 370.

A 149. See vi. 505 n.

168. *Society's unreasoning herd*: Not in A and probably not in Wordsworth's mind at the time, since he asserts that "in the People was my trust" (xi. 11). But see 213-16. The similar vii. 621 is a late addition.

173-5. Had Wordsworth forgotten the unmarried mother in Orleans?

179-81 first appear in D\(^2\); 182-90 in B\(^2\). Even if he should fail he would do right in following the voice of conscience.

187. *either sacrifice*: Presumably life or death (185), that is devoting one's life to a cause or dying for it.

188-90. Although against such a sacrifice our feeble human nature, earnest and blind, pleads for our obligations to others and our affection for them.

191. *truths*: Enumerated in 200-8; lines 193-200 are parenthetical. The entire passage shows how literary and theoretical in its origin Wordsworth's idealism was and how little it rested upon observation of men and conditions about him. But he was not yet twenty-three. Cf. ix. 364-89, 408-17.

205. *natural right*: A favorite subject of discussion at this time.

213-16. See 168 and n.; xii. 57-67.

215b-16a. A late addition meaning that the willingness of the people to follow false teaching is a sadder proof than their ignorance of their inability to govern themselves.

223-4. This observation, though it might be deduced from A 195-7, is not to be found in A or B, nor is the vivid image of 222. The excellent figure in 227-8 was added in 1832 or 1839.

225-8. Wordsworth here declares that he knew at the time how little he could do to help France—which seems inconsistent with the implications of 146-221.
229-31. According to his nephew's Memoirs, "If he had remained longer in the French capital, he would, in all probability, have fallen a victim among the Brissotins, with whom he was intimately connected" (1, 76-7).

236-45. This grandiose passage, which is marked by false diction and by the effort to be poetical, is not in A. A 211-19, A 228-9, A 242-54. Omitted from the final text. A 215-19 introduces a good image and an idea not in the final text, but A devotes to negro emancipation more space than its slight influence on the poet warranted. With A 228-9 compare "the unity of all," ii. 221 and n. A 249-54 contains keen analysis; "foretasted" is vivid.

261. The pains taken to destroy slavery were superfluous since with the triumph of the Revolution it would disappear. Cf. xi. 189-94.

266-76. In xi. 173-88 Wordsworth explains more fully the nature of this shock, which, he declares, first threw him out of the pale of love, soured and corrupted his sentiments, diverted his affections and interests into new channels, and opened the way for intellectual errors. Thus he twice affirms that nothing, not the horrors of the September massacres nor the joy and remorse of his relations with Annette, had made an impression on him comparable to the effect of England's declaration of war. The strength of this impression was due not so much to Wordsworth's deep patriotism as to the peculiarly local and associational sources of his spiritual life. The roots of his being were twined round the rocks of Westmoreland and Cumberland, and drew their nutriment from the lakes, the streams, and the mists among which he had grown up. It was with these and the dalesmen who lived among them that his poetry was mainly to deal. From all these he was suddenly "torn" (note 282 and 300) and "tossed about in whirlwind." A gulf had opened between his earlier life and his new interests, and a "most unnatural strife" ravaged his heart (A 251-2), since his exultation "when Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown" (285-6) lay "at enmity with all the tenderest springs Of [his] enjoyments" (A 253-4). He felt strongly the importance of continuity in development. He wished his "days to be Bound each to each by natural piety,"—that is (Latin
pietas), he wished each day, each stage of growth, to be joined to the preceding by affection and reverence. The break in continuity caused by his years in France and in London and by his enthusiasm for the Revolution, for abstract principles, and for theory had much to do with his ensuing crisis.

276-81. Except for its prettiness an effective figure, developed from that in A 254-7.


299. A vigorous line. Observe that Wordsworth tried “judgment” in place of “vengeance” but rejected it.

300-10. By depriving young men of their faith in England the government tore their roots, at a time when storms were fiercest, from the rock which would have steadied them. “The reference is chiefly to Pitt,” writes Nowell Smith, who cites the letter to Sir George Beaumont of February 11, 1806, to show that Wordsworth thought that Pitt’s political career was disfigured by personal ambition.

304. worst losses: It is hard to see how “the loss of the American colonies” (de S. note) could “wear The best of names.” The meaning may rather be much the same as that of 309-10: the loss of ancient faith was called enlightenment or liberality and the loss of patriotism was termed universal benevolence or emancipation from insularity.

306-8. John the Baptist said of Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John, iii. 30, cf. i. 30, Luke, iii. 16, etc.).

309. ancient faith: Moral principles, standards, attitude towards life, rather than religious beliefs. The loss of these last would not have troubled Wordsworth in 1804.

312-14. A good figure, better expressed in the final text than in A.

315-30. The rimed fragment which Professor de Selincourt has entitled “At the Isle of Wight, 1793” (P. W., Youth, pp. 307-8, 374) gives a more vigorous expression to Wordsworth’s feelings on these occasions.

327. seldom heard by me: Why not “Which I seldom heard?” Cf. iii. 74. The diction of the preceding five lines is unduly Latinic and grandiose.

331-4. “In the whole of Wordsworth’s account of the Revolution, there is nothing with more insight than this wise
political judgment." Wordsworth "points with statesman-
like sagacity to the one fact which, as every candid historian
now sees, provides a main explanation, though not the justifica-
tion, of the Reign of Terror." 2

336-50. "One of Wordsworth's great merits is that he
forces us to see that these causes [of the Terror] were compi-
lcated." 8 Wordsworth enumerates eight groups who, for widely
different reasons, supported the Jacobin extremists. As to 339-
41 see 437-60n. "Vengeful retribution" (341) is more
cautious than "anger and . . . vengeance" (A 318).

360. An anacoluthon. Wordsworth begins the clause as if
he intended to conclude it with "all were torn."

364-74. A good figure diffusely expressed. Here A is better.

382. composure: Settlement [of her difficulties], i.e. death.
The word may have been used for the sake of contrast with
"agony."

386-9. A troublesome passage. Wordsworth does not, as
might be expected, distinguish those who never hoped, those
who lost hope, and those who continued to hope, but, after
referring to the first class in 385, omits the second and in the
third (who continued to believe in the Revolution) distin-
guishes a small group who still had faith in man. These last
he speaks of as "flattered," as if the kind of faith in human
nature bred by the Revolution was false, a point of view borne

391-3. Hercules, while still an infant in his cradle, was
attacked by two snakes, which he throttled with his hands.

393-6. The victory of France over her enemies was as it
should be but it brought little comfort to those whose interest
in the Revolution was not political but arose from their faith in
human nature. This faith, it should be remembered, was
shaken not only by the wanton cruelty of the Terror but by
the perfidy of the English government. It received a staggering
blow a year or more later when the French, "become oppressors
in their turn . . . changed a war of self-defence For one of
conquest" (xi. 206-8). With the shattering of his hopes of
the Revolution and the undermining of his belief in man,
Wordsworth's world was falling in ruins about him.

393-5. Two and a third lines made up of monosyllables!
Cf. ii. 41-5n.
402-15. Mr. Harper believes that these lines reflect the fears that beset Wordsworth during a secret visit made to Paris in September-October, 1793. Mr. Herbert Read interprets 414-15 as remorse for the treatment of Annette.4

416-36. As is often the case in *The Prelude*, the connection of this passage with the one that precedes it is not clear until a number of lines have been read, not until 428 and not fully until 435-6: how different were the results, the evidences, of this absorption in the improvement of human society from those that marked my early yielding myself to Nature.

Wordsworth seems here to imply what he would hardly have maintained: that because the service of man was attended by discouragement, sleeplessness, and "ghastly visions" it was therefore less noble than the service of Nature, which brought only joy. The nobility of a cause cannot be judged by the emotions called forth by devotion to it. But noble as in many ways was his devotion to the Revolution, it was not founded on "right reason" and his deep discouragement was the inevitable result of "impatient or fallacious hopes . . . [the] heat of passion . . . excessive zeal . . . vain conceits . . . Of self-applauding intellect . . . over-fondly set On throwing off incumbrances" (xiii. 22-34).

416-17. Presumably the period described in ii. 276 ff. is referred to; ii. 386-418 would hardly be spoken of as "at first," nor seventeen (ii. 386) as "early youth" (A 382); 416 seems, however, to be a correction of A 382 and may refer to the later period. Cf. also *The Excursion*, i. 108-300.

417-20. For the violence of all Wordsworth's feelings see the latter part of the note to iv. 316-19 and viii. A 841-2 n. The "oppression" of the "strong And holy passion" for nature which "overcame" him recalls the picture, probably autobiographic, of the youth of the Wanderer, who was "o'erpowered"

By Nature; by the turbulence subdued
Of his own mind; by mystery and hope,
And the first virgin passion of a soul
Communing with the glorious universe.

(*Excursion*, i. 282-6, cf. 136-9)

A 386-8. The transcendence of the Deity is here clearly affirmed.
A 391. all these: "Every kind of life" (A 388) except man. Man's preeminence is insisted upon also in viii. 485-94 and xiv. 448-54 (see notes).

427. reason: To which he owes his preeminence. See iv. A 296 n.

428. sequestered: Kept by itself apart from man's other powers.

430. countenance: Demeanor, behavior.

434. Tumult: Cf. vii. 44-8 n.; fear: see Chapter III.


437-60. The final text of this difficult passage is more obscure and involved than the earlier, perhaps because Wordsworth hesitated to express frankly an idea which is opposed to the spirit of Jesus although not to that of the Hebrew prophets, to whom he refers, nor to his previously mentioned feeding "on the day of vengeance yet to come" (299), nor to the "anger and . . . vengeance" of Providence (A 317-18), nor to the line, later removed, in "Imagination—ne'er," "Yea, Carnage is thy daughter," nor to the "Dread Minister of wrath!" paragraph in "To Enterprise" (104-18). The thought appears to be that as the Hebrew prophets, though inspired, derived a grim human satisfaction from beholding the punishments which they had predicted would fall upon sinful cities, so I, in their spirit, lifted up at times above pity and sorrow, found something to glory in, saw in the suffering of those fierce days punishment in accord with sublime laws; and even in the chastisement which I could not understand I felt awe and a kind of sympathy with the terrible manifestations of divine power. Lines 437b-9, 446b, 447, 449-52, 456 (omitted in de S.), 457a, 458-60 are not in A; A 411-13, A 418-19, A 425 are not in the final text; 440b-441a are substituted for A 403b-404a.

A 412. rage and dog-day heat: More vivid than the 1850 text.

446. consummate: Consummated.

455. In the first edition of de S., between 455 and 456 the line "Not only acquiescences of faith" was dropped, making the number of each subsequent line of the 1850 text of this book one less than it should be.

458. Motions: Inward prompting or impulses, emotions, as
in viii. A 80. Before A 418 (a clumsy, unrhythmical line), "I felt" is understood.

461. "Music" is emphatic; there was beauty, melody, to be heard amid the dissonance of the tempest.

470. Nature's: Most persons would have written "God's"; the reference is not to the out-of-doors but to the general ordering of the universe.

475-6. wild belief . . . false philosophy: Indifference to the sanctity of human life, false ideas of religion, of the relations between the sexes, and of the general conduct of life which purported to be derived from "liberty, equality, fraternity." Since Wordsworth was not as yet particularly interested in abstract theory whether French or Godwinian and would not at this time have called such theory "false," he must here have reference to irregularities of conduct and to the theories of life by which they were justified which shocked the English people.

477-80. An effective figure. France was paying the penalty for ages of wrong-doing and for the ignorance in which the common people had been allowed to grow up—ignorance which precluded the wise use of their newly acquired power. Cf. "At Bologna," 1-5:

Ah why deceive ourselves! by no mere fit
Of sudden passion roused shall men attain
True freedom where for ages they have lain
Bound in a dark abominable pit,
With life's best sinews more and more unknit.

493-504. This passage differs from A 452-60 through a number of slight changes made in 1832 or 1839, all of which are improvements except the cacophonous "that did then" (504).

511-603. Although The Prelude opens with a walk probably taken in September, 1795, this incident, which happened about August 20, 1794, is the latest narrated in the body of the poem. Subsequent events—Napoleon's summoning the Pope to crown him (December 2, 1804, xi. 359-60) and the death of John Wordsworth (February 5, 1805, xiv. 419) are the latest—are, however, referred to and later developments are traced.
A 467-9. have . . . Tribe of: Eighteen successive monosyllables (cf. ii. 41-5 n.). The $A^2$ variant of A 468 (de S., 581) is a wretched line.

A 472-7. In his note on "Elegiac Stanzas . . . Peele Castle," appended to a reprint of Wordsworth's Poems in Two Volumes (II, 225), Mr. Thomas Hutchinson writes:

The Peele Castle of these stanzas is the Piel at the southern extremity of Furness, opposite Walney Isle, and hard by the village of Rampside, where, says Bp. Christ. Wordsworth [I, 299], "the Poet spent four weeks of a college vacation at the house of his cousin, Mrs. Barker." Prof. Knight (Eversley Wordsworth, III, p. 57) assigns this visit to 1794, but gives no reason for so doing. Wordsworth's college vacations fell in the years 1788-1790; but several considerations indicate 1794 as the more likely year of the visit.

A 472-5, A 489-99. The omission of most of these lines from the final text illustrates Wordsworth's desire to eliminate from his poem the unessential and the merely personal.

528-31. A late addition. With 528-9 compare "Resolution and Independence," 22-5:

But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low.

530. even: "Now," which occurs in the $D^2$ variant of A 488-93 and which would make better sense, may be what Wordsworth originally wrote.

531-52. See ix. 288 n.

532-3. I turned aside To seek: Seemingly a contradiction of A 490, "I had chanced to find," just as 571, "no salutation given," appears to contradict A 533-4, "I . . . inquired . . . he replied" (likewise $A^2$ and C). Possibly both changes are corrections, but they suggest that Wordsworth invented or that his imagination unconsciously supplied some of the many details which he enumerates in his descriptions of past incidents or scenes. See ix. 155-61 n. and pp. 280-2 above.


548-52. Despite his absorption in politics and social reform, Wordsworth now thinks of himself as a poet. His notable
experiences in Sarum’s Plain (xiii. 312-78) had occurred a year before (August or September, 1793) and he had recently completed or was still engaged upon Guilt and Sorrow.

553-4. Less flowing than A 516-18 owing to the omission of “Without me and within” and “or communed with,” which were presumably removed because they are implied in “all that I saw or felt.”

554-61. This description though pleasing in itself (561 is an admirable line) is too long and much too detailed for the purpose it is intended to serve. Our attention is distracted and we are not helped to visualize the scene of this important announcement by eight lines devoted to the scarcely-visible remains of an island chapel, especially as the announcement itself is crowded into six lines of awkward prose. See pp. 15-16 above.

568. Heaved: The substitution of “Heaved” for “Was” (A 550), though merely the change of one monosyllable for another, makes a remarkable difference.

571-2. According to the punctuation of the 1850 text, which is frequently mistaken, 572 modifies “given” and not, as in A 534-5, “replied.” This makes rather better sense than taking “no salutation given” by itself and 572 as modifying “Cried” (573).

571. Cf. 532-3 n.

576-93. Excellent evidence that “in me, confidence was unimpaired” (xi. 7).

576. More pious, seemly, and solemn but less vivid and probably less true than the “glee” and “vengeance” of A 540-1.

583. They: “He and his supporters” (575).

586. their own helper: The “river of Blood” (584). The figure, which is continued to the end of the line, is apt since it was two rivers, the Alpheus and the Peneus, which Hercules diverted into the stables of King Augeas in order to cleanse them.

A 556. The unpleasant alliteration, “though through,” was eliminated in A². Cf. A 54-6 n.

595-603. We may apply to these lines Wordsworth’s comment on his second visit to another scene already memorable,
"So feeling comes in aid Of feeling" (xii. 269-70). For the beauty of this passage is due in part to the reader’s recollection of the beauty of the earlier one (ii. 115-37) and to his wistful sense of the contrast between the glad animal spirits of the first occasion and the shadows overhanging this one.

601-2. The dash after "sea," which presumably was inserted without manuscript authority by the editors of the 1850 Prelude (see de S., xx), would be much better after "home."

601. their: Since "we" is used in 603, "our" would seem to be the proper pronoun.
NOTES

3 Dicey, p. 43.