

**THE POLITICAL POETRY OF WILLIAM
WORDSWORTH
A CRITICAL STUDY IN SELECTED POEMS OF
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH IN 1802**

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ABSTRACT:

It's so easy to category writers, especially poets. Literature anthologies do it all of the time out of a need to limit the number of pages. In most anthologies, William Wordsworth who is been conveniently categorized as a Romantic poet broadly, and anature poet specifically. He's trapped in the Lake District, and his seventy-five years of published poetry is summarized as poetry about nature and the feelings and emotions nature inspires. However, even two of Wordsworth's most anthologized sonnets **London, 1802** and **Composed Upon Westminster Bridge** were published by Wordsworth in 1807 in his book **Sonnets on National Independence and Liberty**. The main objective of this study is to show that Wordsworth is not merely a nature poet but also a revolutionary poet who includes political point of view during that era in his poetry.

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This paper makes use of sonnets composed during August and September of 1802 that shows Wordsworth resents with Napoleon Bonaparte's dictatorship. Wordsworth displays his disillusionment with the aftermath of the French Revolution. Wordsworth recognizes the naiveté and confusion of the early days of the Revolution in the context of Napoleon's developing power. These political sonnets reproach France as well as England, Wordsworth starts with a claim that his fellow men should be free from the restraints of the French nation which chained with the new monarchy of Napoleon since they are the ancestors of Shakespeare and Milton.

The conclusion shows that categorizing William Wordsworth as a merely a nature poet, it will be truly unfair for such a huge writer. His political poetry is filling with patriotism and the criticising of the new era of dictatorship, which will be unfortunate for the readers to be not recognized.

INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before George III came to the throne, the population of England had begun to grow rapidly. Moreover, it continued growing rapidly during his long reign (1760-1820). Landowners brought more and more land under cultivation and increased the yield per acre enormously in order to provide bread for the expanding cities. Tenants who plowed the strips of the land that had come down to them from long line of "humble ancestors"¹ were often enforced, by the improved methods of agriculture, to become a day labourers

in the wide fields or to wonder hopelessly from town to town seeking work. The villages, too, were changing. A series of inventions enabled a few employees in a factory to weave as much cloth as all the homes in a whole town could formerly produce.² Numberless busy and contented cottages in the village were gradually replaced by a single factory in the city, where insanitary tenements were filled to overcrowding with hopeless and miserable workers and their own families who could no longer earn a humble living in the country districts. This transformation, which continued all through the reign of George III, is called the Industrial Revolution.³

The Industrial Revolution, which had begun in the middle of the 18th Century, was no sudden change from home manufacturing to a large-scale factory production. It was only in the second half of the 18th Century. that the process became rapid and spread all over Britain. Mines and factories changed the face of the country. Nevertheless, mechanization did not improve the life of the common people. It only meant a new form of slavery. Now the economic and social ills were clearly seen by the people: the diseases of the industrial towns, the misery of child labour, and the crowd of underpaid workers. The suffering of the new class, the proletariat, led to the first strikes, and workers took to destroying machines. This was a movement directed against industrial slavery. Workers, who called themselves “Luddites”⁴ after a certain Ned Ludd who in a fit of fury broke two textile frames,

naively believed the machines were the chief cause of their sufferings. These actions led to severe repression by the authorities.⁵

A simple question may come in mind why politicians did not look after the interests of these miserable poor. Painfully, the simple answer is that these poor had no vote. The “Glorious Revolution of the 1866”⁶ had given Parliament control of the country but this control of the Parliament remain in the most coldest and emotionless hands of wealthy men. Doesn’t matter what party was governed or in control, the neglected interests of the farmers and factory workers were in no way represented under the dome of Parliament .

The great French revolution was accepted as progressive by many in Britain, but when it involved all sections of the French population, it gave a shock of the rulingclasses. Under the influence of the Revolution, the Irishpeasantsplotted a rebellion against EnglishLandlordism. It broke out in 1798 but cruelly drowned in blood. TheBritish government took the lead in the counter revolutionary wars against France.⁷Now the belief of progressive-minded people in the ideal nature of the bourgeois system fell to pieces. As a result, a new humanist movement,theRomanticism, sprang up towards the close of the 18thCentury.⁸

Romanticism was a movement against the progress of bourgeois civilization, which had driven whole sections of the population to poverty and enslaved their personal freedom. It was an effort to do away with the injustice, the exploitation of man by man. However, no one yet knew what was to be done to achieve equality and freedom. New themes for writing arose: no longer were writers attracted to the domestic epic that had been the chief subject of the novel. Protesting against the bourgeois, they longed to depict strong individuals, endowed with “grand, tempestuous and even demonic passions.”⁹ The romanticists made emotion, and not reason, the chief force of their works. The emotion found its expression chiefly in poetry.

Poets were seized with panic and an irresistible desire to get away from the present. They wished to call back “the good old days”¹⁰. When people worked on “England’s green and pleasant land”¹¹, these poets spoke for the English farmers and the Scottish peasants who were ruined by the industrial revolution. They idealized the patriarchal way of life during the Middle Ages (a period that seemed to them harmonious and peaceful. Their motto was: “Close to Nature and from Nature to God”¹², because they believed that religion put man at peace with the world. One of these poets, the father of the romantic era, is William Wordsworth.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770-1850)

A reflection of this enthusiasm is to be found in the early life of William Wordsworth, one of the greatest English poets of the romantic era. He was born in a region called the Lake District, which is beautiful not merely for its lakes but even for its mountains. His first poems, begun before his sixteenth year, dealt with his wonderings through the region. When he went to Cambridge University, the outbreak of the French revolution stirred him to zeal for the rights of man. So ardent was his new hope of seeing the world made over after receiving his degree at Cambridge. G.M. Harper comments on Wordsworth's fervent hope of visiting France and living the democratic atmosphere that the oppressed people smelled for the first time after the fall of the suffocated monarchy.

He prevailed on his guardians to
let him spend
a year in France. There a captain
in the army of the
recently established republic
became a firm friend,
who fired him still more with
democratic aspirations for
mankind.¹³

When the revolutionary leaders in Paris began in September 1792, to massacre the nobles who had been put in prison as enemies of the republic; English lovers of freedom were horrified. Wordsworth's guardians, by cutting off the young funds, forced him to return to England. There public opinion had

almost uniformly turned against France. Harper says that chaos and lawlessness spread all over France until the French armies began to enforce power.

Even the working classes joined the
aristocracy in
attacking anyone with radical French ideas

But it was not until French armies began to
subjugate other people that a doubt came
over

Wordsworth himself concerning the
principles underlying
the whole movement.¹⁴

After his return, he settled in the west England, where he sought calm by writing poetry. The fruit of this dramatic changing in the world and the truly friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a revolutionary volume **The Lyrical Ballads**. In the Preface to the second and the third editions of this book, Wordsworth laid down the principles on which he thought the composition of poetry should be founded. He was insistent that the language of poetry should be the language of ordinary men and women, found at its most unspoilt in the speech of the rural people.¹⁵ Wordsworth's attitude to nature was original and remarkable. "Nature is a great teacher of morals, and the prime bringer of happiness, but Nature is much more than that: in Nature resides God."¹⁶ Wordsworth was aware, in contact with the woods,

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mountains, lakes, and trees of his own country, or less rugged region, of....

a presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

(Tintern Abby: lines 94-9)

Man and nature become fused through participation in “mighty being”¹⁷, so the most elemental natural objects become “humanised”¹⁸

The birds around me hopp’d and play’d ,
Their thoughts I cannot measure-
But the least motion which they made,
It seem’d a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

(Early Spring: Lines 15-20)

John Purvis comments that Wordsworth is commonly bowdlerized into a “Nature poet”¹⁹, and his frequent accounts of human beings in economic difficulties are dismissed as his “revolutionary growing pains”²⁰ – to be omitted from the safe anthologies in which he is commonly presented to the adolescent mind. Clearly, there is more to this “nature poet”²¹ than images of meadows, pastures and walks near Grasmere.

Wordsworth mastered the sonnet form during the space of a few short months in 1802. During May of this year, his sister Dorothy started reading Milton’s sonnets aloud to her brother William. Kenneth R. Johnston contends that “two months later, under the intense pressure of one of the most difficult trips of his life, he began writing sonnets at a level that had not been achieved in England since Milton”²². Wordsworth wrote twenty-five sonnets during August and September, many of which dealt with political issues. Johnston claims that these sonnets, “especially his political ones, surpass Milton’s sonnets,”²³ which are on “virtually the same theme: the disappointment of revolutionary hopes for human redemption”.²⁴ Hazlitt in **The Spirit of the Age 1825** says, “Milton is his great idol, and he sometimes dares to compare himself with him. His sonnets, indeed, have something of the same high-raised tone and prophetic spirit.”²⁵ In addition, A. C. Bradley, in his book **Oxford Lectures on Poetry, 1909**; says, “the sense of massive passion, concentrated, and repressing the utterance it permits itself, is that

which moves us in his political verse.”²⁶

John Worthen has connected these sonnets with different parts of Wordsworth's and his sister's trip to Calais.²⁷ Worthen identifies two sonnets as having been drafted during the trip to France: **Composed Upon Westminster Bridge** and **Composed by the Sea-Side, near Calais, August, 1802**. Both of these are political in nature; both present London and England positively. In the first sonnet, London is described as wearing “the beauty of the morning” and as being more beautiful than valleys, rocks and hills.

EARTH has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could
pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment,
wear
The beauty of the morning; silent,
bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and
temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the
smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or
hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so
deep!

The river glideth at his own sweet
will:
Dear God! the very houses seem
asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying
still!

*(Composed Upon Westminster
Bridge)*

In the second sonnet, Wordsworth calls on the “*Fair Star of evening*” to be England’s “glorious crest” and emblem. He prays for “blessings” on both the star and England; they share “one hope, one lot, one life, one glory”.

FAIR Star of evening, Splendour of the west,
Star of my Country!--on the horizon's
brink
Thou hangest, stooping, as might seem,
to sink
On England's bosom; yet well pleased
to rest,
Meanwhile, and be to her a glorious
crest
Conspicuous to the Nations. Thou, I
think,
Should'st be my Country's emblem; and
should'st wink,
Bright Star! with laughter on her
banners, drest
In thy fresh beauty. There! that dusky
spot

Beneath thee, that is England; there she
lies.

Blessings be on you both! one hope,
one lot,

One life, one glory!--I, with many a
fear

For my dear Country, many heartfelt
sighs,

Among men who do not love her,
linger here.

*(Composed by the Sea-side, near Calais, August,
1802)*

Worthen then identifies nine sonnets as having been drafted in Calais.²⁸ Five of them are distinctly political in nature, in **Drafted in Calais: Calais, August 1802**. In the Calais sonnets, Wordsworth recognizes the naiveté and confusion of the early days of the Revolution in the context of Napoleon's developing power. Finding himself in France for urgent personal reasons, Wordsworth is disgusted by the parade of his fellow citizens who have come to France to stare shamelessly at the spoils of Napoleon:

IS it a reed that's shaken by the wind,
Or what is it that ye go forth to see?
Lords, lawyers, statesmen, squires of low
degree,
Men known, and men unknown, sick, lame,
and blind,

Post forward all, like creatures of one kind,
With first-fruit offerings crowd to bend the
knee
In France, before the new-born Majesty.
'Tis ever thus. Ye men of prostrate mind,
A seemly reverence may be paid to power;
But that's a loyal virtue, never sown
In haste, nor springing with a transient
shower:
When truth, when sense, when liberty were
flown,
What hardship had it been to wait an hour?
Shame on you, feeble Heads, to slavery
prone!

*(Calais,
August 1802)*

During his previous trip to France in 1791-1792, Wordsworth was an ardent sympathizer of the Revolution. He counted his friendship with Michel-Arnaud Bacharetie de Beaupuy as the first important male friendship of his life²⁹. General Beaupuy died protecting the Revolution in 1796. Although Wordsworth was involved in a romantic relationship with Annette Vallon, a loyal supporter of the Royalist cause, Beaupuy converted him into a wholehearted supporter of the Revolution.

However, after Wordsworth returned to England without the pregnant Annette Vallon, “the Reign of Terror”³⁰ began to change his sympathetic support of France. He felt that the ideals

of the Revolution were being betrayed by the executions of his French friends such as the Girondins in October and November of 1793. In July 1794, he changed his feelings again because of the death of Robespierre and began to trust the French government again. He felt that the members of England's Tory government were "vermin"³¹. However, when Napoleon began France's campaigns of conquest, Wordsworth's support squandered and wasted. Wordsworth saw Switzerland as the symbol of true Liberty, so Napoleon's conquest of it in 1798 permanently dissolved his support for France.³² Although many English liberals continued to support Napoleon, the invasion of Switzerland confirmed Wordsworth's suspicions about Napoleon.

Wordsworth is demoralized by the apparent willingness of English men and women to worship the "new-born Majesty" of Napoleon, in betrayal of their own legacy of freedom. The language here suggests that these people "Sick, Lamé, and Blind" foolishly look to Napoleon as if he would reward their loyalty with a miracle. In **Composed Near Calais, On The Road Leading To Ardres, August 7, 1802**, Wordsworth also contrasts past and present, remembering when a "homeless sound of joy was in the sky" in the early days of the Revolution. How could he fail to connect this youthful joy and hope for the Revolution with his own youthful indulgences, which brought forth an illegitimate child and connected him with a young woman who had remaining hopes that they might one day be reunited? In returning to Calais, Wordsworth experiences nostalgia for the innocent days of youth and revolutionary hopes as well as guilt for the excesses he remembers and the ruin he now sees. In 1802 he is faced with a changed world: the birth of an illegitimate

tyranny and the presence of an illegitimate daughter. In these sonnets, Wordsworth emphasizes lasting and permanent values over transient attachments:

A seemly reverence may be paid to power;
But that's a loyal virtue, never sown
In haste, nor springing with a transient show.³³

In 1802, two additional things happened which inflamed Wordsworth and inspired three of the sonnets that he wrote in Calais. First of all, Napoleon declared himself Consul for life on August 4th. Secondly, 16,000 English travellers made their way through Calais en route to Paris to celebrate this declaration and Napoleon's birthday on August 15th.³⁴ Since France had been effectively cut off from London for almost ten years, the English welcomed the peace brought by the Treaty of Amiens and flocked to Paris. Wordsworth was disappointed to discover that Charles James Fox, The Whig leader that Wordsworth admired was part of this visiting mob. Fox came because he was in favour of making peace with Napoleon.

Since [Wordsworth]
regarded the French
leader as a despot
and a menace to free
institutions, the only

course open was to
support that party in
England which
wanted to continue
the war, namely the
Tories.³⁵

Wordsworth's "patriotism was inflamed"³⁶, and he wrote the sonnets that later appeared in **Sonnets on National Independence and Liberty**. In his sonnet **Calais, August, 1802**, he expressed his disgust with these English visitors. He asks, "What is it that ye go forth to see?" He calls them "men of prostrate mind," and he tells them: "Shame on you, feeble Heads, to slavery prone!" Wordsworth's disillusionment with Napoleon and the current results of the ideals of the French Revolution is frankly portrayed in **Composed near Calais, on the Road Leading to Ardres, August 7, 1802** and **Calais, August 15, 1802**. In the first sonnet, he contrasts the present state of France with the joy and hope he and his traveling companion Robert Jones felt in France in 1791:

Two solitary greetings have I heard,
Good morrow, Citizen! 'a hollow word,
As if a dead man spake it!

This apathetic response continues in the next sonnet. While celebrating "young Bonaparte's natal day . . . Heaven grant that

other Cities may be gay! Calais is not.” Each of these three political sonnets has the powerful immediacy that comes from returning to a place that is saturated with strong emotional memories. Wordsworth’s strongest emotional memories from France stemmed from his past relationship with Annette Vallon. In fact, Annette and his daughter Caroline, not Napoleon, were the reason for Wordsworth’s trip to France in 1802. Wordsworth had left France in 1792 before Caroline’s birth determined to marry Annette someday when he had the financial means and when the political climate had improved. There must have been some contact between them over the next ten years in order to warrant the British government’s surveillance of Wordsworth once war was declared in 1793.³⁷ However, nothing was publicized about the existence of his illegitimate daughter. During the spring of 1802, Wordsworth became engaged to Mary Hutchinson, a frequent traveling companion on earlier trips with him and Dorothy. However, before he married, he had to conclude and finish his affairs with Annette Vallon and his daughter Caroline. When Dorothy and he left for France in late July, it was “the opposite of a wedding trip”³⁸; it was instead “a trip of divorcement”.³⁹ There’s been much speculation on what was said or decided with Annette during their month in Calais, other than legally making Annette the guardian of Caroline.⁴⁰ As John Worthen states:

We have very little idea of what he and Dorothy did during the four weeks they spent in Calais and no idea at all what it was like for Wordsworth to be with Annette and Caroline after such a very long time.⁴¹

However, biographers know that he bought a wedding ring for Mary Hutchinson in France. Choosing to buy the ring in France confirmed both “the occasion’s links with the past, and [the] leaving behind his younger self (and the person who had very nearly been his marriage partner)”.⁴² Not only was Dorothy’s usually detailed journal silent on the topic of Annette Vallon, but Wordsworth’s sonnets that he drafted during the trip were “almost entirely political”.⁴³ “Biographers sigh at these political sonnets [because] he wrote not about Annette but about the public events which so deeply moved him”.⁴⁴ “Instead of displacing the political into the personal as he usually did, he reversed the process and pushed the personal into the political”.⁴⁵

Wordsworth’s choice of the sonnet over other types of poetry fits his emotional needs at the time. Sonnets, with their closed

form and poetic requirements of fourteen lines and a set rhyme scheme, require much of the intellect. Sonnets are best suited for expressing ideas and emotions that are reflected in tranquillity, which is one of the basic tenets of poetry writing according to Wordsworth and the other Romantic poets. Choosing to focus on topics such as France and England in his sonnets allows Wordsworth to keep his mind off “forbidden ground”.⁴⁶ Therefore, absolutely nothing is known about the relationship that was formed with Annette or with Caroline during August. In his **Calais Sonnets**, Wordsworth has reversed his usual poetic method.

What political discussions Annette Vallon and William Wordsworth could have had in Calais! After he left her with an illegitimate child in 1792, she accepted her status as “‘Widow William’ and [threw] herself into underground resistance on behalf of God, king, and country”.⁴⁷ Over the years, her family suffered imprisonment for their Royalist views. In Calais when Wordsworth complained about Napoleon’s actions in Switzerland or his naming himself as Consul for life, she would have been justified in telling him, “I told you so”.⁴⁸ Johnston described Wordsworth as “a great ventriloquist [who threw] his own voice through other persons”. Wordsworth acted as Annette Vallon’s ventriloquist. In these sonnets, Wordsworth echoed her beliefs in the voice of “La Belle France, secure in the knowledge that his critical comments about the sad decline of

Liberty in France would not be taken personally by Annette if she should ever chance to read them”.⁴⁹ Therefore, the voice that was critical of France in the political sonnets he wrote in Calais was also the imagined voice of Annette Vallon, the “Widow William.”

One of the two nature poems drafted in Calais contains his only mention of his illegitimate daughter. In **It is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free**, he describes an evening walk along the beach at Calais as a “holy time” that is as quiet “as a Nun breathless with adoration.” “The gentleness of heaven broods o’er the Sea.” Then he addresses Caroline directly as: “Dear Child! Dear Girl! that walkest with me here.” Ironically, this poem has often been misinterpreted as referring to his legitimate daughter Dorothy who was born in 1804. In addition, Annette Vallon or Caroline are rarely mentioned in biographies for literature anthologies. Moorman indicates that,

The sonnet indeed shows that
he was by no means
indifferent to his lively little
French daughter. He had
evidently hoped to find in her
some repetition of his own and
Dorothy's mystical ecstasies
when brought into
communion with Nature. He
found it not, but his

disappointment was
tender and fatherly, as he
listened to her screams of
delight.⁵⁰

Moorman implies that Wordsworth uses imagery of natural tranquillity and religious veneration to convey this harmonious vision⁵¹

It is a beautiful Evening, calm and free;
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
The gentleness of heaven is on the Sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder everlastingly.
Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me
here,
If thou appear'st untouched by solemn
thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner
shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

The political sensitivity that was heightened by Annette Vallon's presence can also be seen in the last three sonnets that were drafted in Calais. These political sonnets rebuke England instead of France. Two of the sonnets are obviously political poems: **There is a Bondage Worse, Far Worse, to Bear** and **Great Men Have Been Among Us; Hands that Penned**. In the first of these sonnets, Wordsworth starts with a claim that "there is a bondage worse" than that of the French under "a Tyrant's solitary Thrall." The worst bondage is for people who belong to a nation wearing "their fetters in their souls." He questions whether anyone in such a situation could be free "from self-reproach, reproach that he must share with Human nature?" He then identifies the people who are so fettered as the English by his use of the first person plural pronoun:

Never be it ours
To see the sun how brightly it will shine,
And know that noble feelings, manly
powers,
Instead of gathering strength, must droop
and pine.

Wordsworth then exhorts the English to develop the "noble feelings" and "manly powers" that they once had.

And earth with all her pleasant fruits and
flowers
Fade, and participate in man's decline.

In the second sonnet, **Great Men Have Been Among Us; Hands that Penned**, he echoes this sentiment. Wordsworth listed earlier republican writers from the time of the English Civil War “Sidney, Marvell, Harrington, Young Vane, and others who called Milton friend.” These men had “hands that penned and tongues that uttered wisdom.” He calls them “moralists [who] could act and comprehend,” and men who “knew how genuine glory was put on.” They even taught the English “how rightfully a nation shone in splendour.” He then noted that France “brought forth no such souls as we had then.” Instead France had “perpetual emptiness,” “unceasing change,” and “a want of books and men.” This sonnet demonstrated Wordsworth inner tension at Calais. He had a low estimate of England, and an even lower estimate of France. Wordsworth unhappily accepted his “need to hang on, if to nothing else, at least to England’s past reputation for liberty and manliness”.⁵²

Perpetual emptiness! unceasing change!
No single volume paramount, no
code,
No master spirit, no determined road;
But equally a want of books and men!

Knowing the political context of these sonnets also reveals a political undertone to a third sonnet written in Calais: **The World is Too Much with Us; Late and Soon**. Although it is often described as a nature poem, it can also be read as a

political poem too. This sonnet contains lament that people do not appreciate the beauties and wonder of nature and that we are “out of tune” with nature so that “it moves us not.” It also includes Wordsworth’s emotional nostalgia to be “a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn” so that the sea could make him “less forlorn.” However, the first four lines of the poem explain what has caused people to be so blind and deaf to the wonder of nature.

The world is too much with us; late and
soon

Getting and spending, we lay waste our
powers:

Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid
boon!

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;

Wordsworth convicts his fellow Englishmen for being so concerned with “getting and spending” that they “lay waste [their] powers. Since they see little “in Nature” that they can own or spend, they give their “hearts away, a sordid boon!” This conviction of greed echoes Wordsworth’s belief that the social evils of his day were caused by England’s development of material elements at the expense of spiritual elements.⁵³

And are up-gathered now like sleeping
flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of
tune;
It moves us not.--Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less
forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed
horn.

This reproaching tone echoes Wordsworth's tone in the two political sonnets about England that were just discussed: **There is a Bondage Worse, Far Worse, to Bear** and **Great Men Have Been Among Us; Hands that Penned.** Without knowledge of the political context of this poem, however, anthologies have bowdlerized it into a simplistic statement of the Romantic belief the people need to commune with nature.

Worthen further identified eight of the twenty-five sonnets from August and September of 1802 as having been drafted on the return trip to England or in London.⁵⁴ One of these sonnets **Dedication** "used the traditional poetic device of addressing the reader directly as" "you," and citing the Greek muse of poetry who was believed to inspire all great poets. "For You" the Muse

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“wrought” these poems. Only you “can supply the life, the truth, the beauty” to the poems, and the Muse hopes “that for You her verse shall lack not power the” meeting soul to pierce!” The other seven sonnets are strongly political, and six of them are patriotic exhortations of England.

Dear Fellow-travellers! think not that the
Muse,
To You presenting these memorial Lays,
Can hope the general eye thereon would
gaze,
As on a mirror that gives back the hues
Of living Nature; no—though free to
choose
The greenest bowers, the most inviting
ways,
The fairest landscapes and the brightest
days —
Her skill she tried with less ambitious
views.
For You she wrought: Ye only can supply
The life, the truth, the beauty: she confides
In that enjoyment which with You abides,
Trusts to your love and vivid memory;
Thus far contented, that for You her verse
Shall lack not power the meeting soul to
pierce!

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The only poem that did not deal with England condemned of one of Napoleon's decrees. Napoleon had recently decreed that all Negroes were expelled from France. In **September 1, 1802**, Wordsworth described a female passenger who was on the same boat from Calais. She was a "white-robed Negro" who was "a lady gay, yet downcast as a woman fearing blame." He described her using heroic images such as eyes that "retained their tropic fire" and a "burning indepen[dence] of the mind." He concluded the sonnet with a plea to Heaven to be kind and an admonishment to the Earth to feel "for this afflicted Race." Alfred Cobban shows Dorothy Wordsworth's description of the return voyage, she and William took after the month in Calais.

On Sunday the 29th of August, we left Calais at 12 o'clock in the morning, and landed at Dover at 1 on Monday the 30th. I was sick all the way. It was very pleasant to me when we were in harbour at Dover to breathe the fresh air, and to look up and see the stars among the Ropes of the vessel.⁵⁵

Dorothy's journal hints at the Wordsworths' personal anxieties of 1802 but does not prepare the reader for the range of topics in the sonnets. In particular, her description of the return crossing includes no mention of what is central in William's poetic record: their encounter with a black woman on the vessel, a woman, according to Wordsworth, who was expelled from France along with all others of her race. This poem was perhaps completed by 1 September 1802, a few days after the crossing.⁵⁶ In its earliest form, as published in the *Morning Post* on 11 February 1803, the sonnet is a protest against this latest outrage of the French government.⁵⁷

If the poems written in Calais reveal the interrelationship of Wordsworth's personal and political anxieties, the sonnet describing his return voyage (revised repeatedly throughout his career) reveals that these anxieties remained with the poet for many years. In the return-voyage sonnet, Wordsworth continues to focus on what he sees as the mystery of the woman, even when the political questions have come to seem more certain to him, following the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in Britain.

As far as Moorman knows, this sonnet is Wordsworth's most explicit treatment of a racial subject. Besides its specific reference to the plight of blacks in France, the poem is interesting because, as the polemical immediacy of 1802 passed, Wordsworth revised the image of the woman. Rather than

reconstruct an image of a historical woman, Wordsworth relies more and more on conventions of race and gender, none of which explains what he sees as her mysterious otherness.⁵⁸ The sonnet of 1802, entitled **The Banished Negroes** , reads as follows:

We had a fellow-Passenger that came
From Calais with us, gaudy in array,
A negro woman, like a Lady gay,
Yet silent as a woman fearing blame;
Dejected, downcast, meek, and more
than tame:
She sate, from notice turning not away,
But on our proffer'd kindness still did
lay
A weight of languid speech, or at the
same
Was silent, motionless in eyes and face.
She was a Negro Woman driv'n from
France
Rejected like all others of that race,
Not one of whom may now find footing
there;
What is the meaning of this ordinance?
Dishonour'd Despots, tell us if you
dare.

THE POLITICAL POETRY OF..... RAGHAD SHAKIR DEAIR

In the other six poems refer to both France and England in a critical way. In **September, 1802**, Wordsworth portrays his final view of France and how far it has diverged from its revolutionary ideals.

Inland, within a hollow vale, I stood;
And saw, while sea was calm and air
was clear,
The coast of France —the coast of
France how near!

The coast of France is near, and he shrinks from it as the boat is “drawn almost into frightful neighbourhood.” He sees the power that is in France, the “mightiness for evil and for good.” He also sees that God only protects people if they are “virtuous and wise.” Strength and power “in themselves is nothing.” His conclusion is that “by the soul only, the Nations shall be great and free.”

How a nation gained the type of soul that made it great and free was the subject of several of Wordsworth’s remaining sonnets. In **London, 1802**, he called on Milton to be the virtuous model for England to follow.

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this
hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and
pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and
bower,

Have forfeited their ancient English
dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish
men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom,
power.

On a professional level, Wordsworth felt a strong attachment to Milton. He not only used Milton's sonnets as stylistic models, he also wanted to "devote his pen to the Radical cause" as Milton had done.⁵⁹ According to Susan Cockcroft, Milton not only wrote sonnets like **On the Late Massacre in Piedmont** that discussed current political events, she also wrote pamphlets against the established church, in defence of the execution of Charles I, and in favour of the free press and divorce on the grounds of incompatibility⁶⁰. Like other Romantic poets, Wordsworth identified with Milton for not being afraid to publish such radical beliefs. F.A. Len concludes that by 1802 Wordsworth emerged as "the Miltonic spokesman of England" because of the spirit and form of Wordsworth's patriotic sonnets.⁶¹ Thus it makes perfect sense that Wordsworth addresses Milton in **London, 1802** with the statement that "England hath need of thee" because "she is a fen of stagnant waters" where the "altar, sword, and pen, fireside, [and] the heroic wealth of hall and bower, have forfeited their ancient English dower of inward happiness." He condemns the English

for being “selfish men,” and entreats Milton to “raise us up, return to us again, and give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.”

In another political sonnet, Wordsworth uses the same poetic structure as he does in **London, 1802** . He begins **Written in London, September, 1802** by addressing an unnamed “*Friend*.” Whether this is Milton or a living friend, this sonnet presents the same negative picture of England ***as London, 1802***. He sees the heavy focus on materialism by the English middle class and the aristocracy. He laments that “our life is only dres[sed] for show” and that “we must run glittering like a brook in the open sunshine, or we are unblest.” He criticizes that people now put more value on “the wealthiest man” and see no delightful value in “nature or in book.” The English adore “rapine, avarice” and expensive things, instead of “plain living and high thinking.” They’ve lost several things because of this: “the homely beauty of the good old cause,” peace, “[their] fearful innocence, and pure religion breathing household laws.”

Contrasting the present faults of England, Wordsworth refers to England’s glorious past in the last three political sonnets: **It is Not to be Thought of That the Flood, When I Have Borne in Memory What Has Tamed, and England! The Time Is Come When Thou Shouldst Wean.** In the first sonnet, Wordsworth states that it is unbelievable that “the Flood of British freedom, which, to the open sea of the world’s praise” has flowed, should now “perish” and “to evil and to good be lost forever.” He reminds the English that their halls are decorated

with medieval armour from “invincible Knights of old.” He urges his fellow countrymen by saying: “We must be free or die, who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake” and who hold the “faith and morals which Milton held.” He ends with a politically incorrect description of England as being “sprung of Earth’s first blood” which gives England “titles manifold” that other countries “like France” do not have.

In a similar mood, Wordsworth urges his native country to “wean [its] heart from its emasculating food” in **England! The Time Is Come When Thou Shouldst Wean.** Wordsworth states that England might have seen “better harvest. . . but for thy trespasses.” He sarcastically remarks that “if for Greece, Egypt, India, Africa, aught good were destined, thou wouldst step between.” “All nations in this charge agree;” however, “thine Enemy” “France is even worse than England because it is “more ignorant in love and hate.” Therefore, Wordsworth sees “the wise pray for thee [England], though the freight of [England’s] offences be a heavy weight.” He ends the sonnet with “Oh grief that Earth’s best hopes rest all with Thee!” This ambivalent concluding line may not sound patriotic, but it clearly places his loyalty with England instead of France. Stephen Gill explains it this way: “As all effective moral censors do, Wordsworth [simplifies] the past in order to alert the present to its degeneration and to provide a positive image of the better way”⁶².

In When I Have Borne in Memory What Has Tamed, his last political sonnet, Wordsworth continues his role of “effective moral censor”.⁶³ He presents himself as a student of history who has seen how the “ennobling thoughts” of “Great Nations” have departed “when men change swords for ledgers, and desert the student’s bower for gold.” These observations make him fear for his country’s well-being in light of the way that the Napoleonic Wars has stimulated the economy and the Industrial Revolution itself.⁶⁴

When I have borne in memory what has
tamed
Great Nations, how ennobling thoughts
depart
When men change swords for ledgers, and
desert
The student’s bower for gold, some fears
unnamed
I had, my Country! - am I to be blamed?
Now, when I think of thee, and what thou
art,
Verily, in the bottom of my heart,
Of those unfilial fears I am ashamed.
For dearly must we prize thee; we who find
In thee a bulwark for the cause of men;
And I by my affection was beguiled:
What wonder if a Poet now and then,

Among the many movements of his mind,
Felt for thee as a lover or a child!

Although he wouldn't have used historian Pat Hudson's terms, Wordsworth seems to have noticed and been concerned by the emergence of the "fiscal - military state" in England.⁶⁵ He would have felt that it was an important, negative transformation of the English government. However, Wordsworth did not lose all hope in his country. When he thinks of what England truly is and has been in the past, he says he is "ashamed" of his fears. He prizes England and finds in her "a bulwark for the cause of men." He explains his past- wavering of affection which implies his past conflict over whether or not to support the French Revolution and France as the natural "movements of [a poet's] mind [which] felt for [England] as a lover or a child." Since the ardent passion that lovers and children feel still allow them to be critical of the objects of their affection, Wordsworth feels his poetic patriotism should involve both passion and criticism. Once again, he is the "moral censor" of England ,the land of Shakespeare and Milton, the land that he loves.

John Worthen identifies six other sonnets that were drafted sometime during August or September 1802. None of them are political. Three of them are titled **To Sleep** and feel like poetic exercises on the topic of sleep or rather insomnia. It could be conjectured that Wordsworth's interest in insomnia suggests the emotional turmoil of his reunion with Annette Vallon and his

return to France.⁶⁶ A fourth sonnet, **Methought I Saw the Footsteps of a Throne**, seems to recount the allegorical details of a vivid dream. After walking through “mists and vapours,” Wordsworth sees a king on a throne. The king is Death himself. Wordsworth continues through the mist and finds a “mossy cave” where a beautiful woman sleeps alone “with her face up to heaven.” She is to him “a lovely Beauty in a summer grave.” It could be speculated that Annette Vallon is this “lovely Beauty.”

The fifth poem was dedicated **To the Memory of Raisley Calvert** who had died in 1795 and left a legacy to Wordsworth. The legacy gave Wordsworth the means to continue writing full-time. In this sonnet, Wordsworth is glad that any of his past verse that is “pure, or good, or great” will “be [Calvert’s] praise.” The sonnet formally thanks Raisley Calvert for giving Wordsworth “many years of early liberty” with the money he left to him.

The last poem, **Beloved Vale**, I said “**When I Shall Con**,” seems to express his melancholy when he returned to London after Calais. He is attacked “by doubts and thousand petty fancies,” and he is so depressed that even the brooks seemed “narrow” and “the fields so small.” Biographer Stephen Gill describes Wordsworth’s return to London and his visit to writer Charles Lamb. Lamb guides him on a walk down the streets of London, “past the jugglers, tumblers, musicians, ventriloquists, hucksters, and catch-penny freaks such as “The horse of

knowledge, and the learned pig”.⁶⁷ Lamb hopes that Wordsworth can enjoy this varied array of people and activities. This experience seems to be referred to at the end of this sonnet when Wordsworth states: “A juggler’s balls old Time about him tossed; I looked, I stared, I smiled, I laughed; and all the weight of sadness was in wonder lost.” It seems as if Lamb’s guided walk succeeded in lifting Wordsworth’s depression at least momentarily.

The research concludes that William Wordsworth is not simply a “nature poet.” During his life, he wrote many poems that he hoped would have a positive effect on public policy, sometimes by presenting the lives of people of the lower classes or outcasts, sometimes by being the “moral censor” of an England that he loved. However, it was his political poems that “most nineteenth-century readers chose to ignore”.⁶⁸ They were omitted from Victorian anthologies in favour of his nature poems. These Victorian anthologies spawned future literature anthologies that continued to simplify Wordsworth’s poetic range to brooks, vales, lakes, and violets. Contemporary anthologies need to avoid the Victorian collections and return to the sonnets Wordsworth wrote two hundred years ago. Among these twenty-five sonnets of August and September of 1802, editors will find examples of a patriotism tempered with needed censure. They will find a patriotism which cries that people “must be free or die, who speak the tongue that Shakespeare

spake” at the same time as it warns that “ennobling thoughts depart when men change swords for ledgers, and desert the student’s bower for gold.” It is time to stop reprinting only William Wordsworth’s nature poems. Freedom in any nation demands both praise and “moral censor” doesn’t matter how uncomfortable it makes people.

Notes

1Nina Bayman et al. ,Eds. **The NortonAnthology Of The British Literature, The Romantic Period**.Vol.2, 5th ed., 2004, pp.1-19.

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3 Ibid, p.12.

4 Hudson, Pat. **The Industrial Revolution**. London: Edward Arnold, 1992, p.27.

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6 Ibid, p.35.

7 Nina, p.15.

8 Ibid, p.15.

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11 Ibid, p.18.

12 Ibid, p.18.

13 Harper, G. M., **William Wordsworth**. Volumes II &I. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1967, p.34

14Ibid, p.40.

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18Ibid, p.6.

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22Ibid, pp.780-3.

23 Ibid, p.784.

24Ibid, pp.784-5.

25Ibid, pp.784-5.

26Ibid, pp.784-5.

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29Worthen, John. **The Gang: Coleridge, the Hutchinsons and the Wordsworths in 1802.** New Haven: Yale University, 2001, p.330.

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35Moorman, p.57.

36Worthen, p.228

37Ibid, p.25.

38Ibid, p.25.

38 Ibid, p.25.

39Johnston, p.335.

40Ibid, p .783.

41 Ibid, p.783.

42Worthen, p.225.

43 Ibid, p.25.

44 Ibid, p.225.

45 Ibid, p.227.

46Ibid, p.229.

47Johnston, p.784.

48Worthen, p.229.

49Jonston,p.784.

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51 Ibid, p.784.

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64Gill, Stephen. **William Wordsworth: A Life** . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p.209.

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الملخص

انه من السهل جدا على الكتاب تصنيف الشعراء . فالكتب الأدبية تنتقد هؤلاء الشعراء بغض النظر عن عدد الصفحات. وفي معظم تلك الكتب صنف و على نطاق واسع الشاعر وليام وردزورث كشاعر رومانسي وكشاعر الطبيعة بوجه خاص. على الرغم من انه كان محاصرا في مقاطعة ليك ، لخص ما كتب خلال ٧٥ عاما من الشعر فقط حول الطبيعة و المشاعر والعواطف و الاهومات الطبيعية. ومع ذلك ، حتى اثنين من السوناتات لندن ، ١٨٠٢ ومؤلفة عند جسر وستمنستر ، والتي نشرتها في كتابه عام ١٨٠٧ في سوناتات عن الاستقلال الوطني والحرية. الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو إظهار أن وردزورث ليس مجرد شاعر الطبيعة. لكن أيضا الشاعر الثوري الذي تعرض اتجاهاته و آرائه السياسية من خلال عرض تلك الحقبة في شعره.

هذه البحتاستفاد من استخدام السوناتات التي كتبت خلال شهري أغسطس وسبتمبر من ١٨٠٢ حيث تظهر ردزورث و هو يمقت ديكتاتورية نابليون بونابرت.ايضا وردزورث يقوم بعرض خيبة الأمل في أعقاب الثورة الفرنسية. وردزورث يبين السذاجة والتخبط في الأيام الأولى للثورة الفرنسيه في سياق السلطة النامية لنابليون . هذه السوناتات السياسية تلوم كل من فرنسا وكذلك بريطانيا ، وردزورث يبدأ الادعاء بأن الرجال يجب عليهم التخلص من القيود و السلاسل التي كونها النظام الملكي الجديد بقياده نابليون لانهم بنظر وردزورث هم أسلاف شكسبير وميلتون.

الاستنتاج يظهر أن تصنيف وليام وردزورث كمجرد شاعر للطبيعة ، فإنه لن تكون حقا عادلة لكاتب ضخم كهذا. فأن شعره السياسي هو مليء بالوطنية وانتقاد لعهد جديد من الدكتاتورية و التي من المأسف اهمالها .