

REVOLVED RECOLLECTION OF REVOLUTION IN WORDSWORTH'S PRELUDE

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*Abstract: This article examines Wordsworth's recollection of the French Revolution in Books VI, IX and X of *The Prelude*. It argues that Wordsworth's self-reflexive memories of this traumatic political experience suggest not only his personal ambivalence towards the event but also the ambivalent meanings of modernity as it is often associated with the French Revolution. Wordsworth's recollection shows a salient pattern of recurrence and revision, in which the "two consciousnesses" of the narrated and the narrating self exist both in affinity and in tension. The pattern reveals that Wordsworth's urge to restore the early ideals of the Revolution is in coexistence with a painful disillusionment that these early ideals are betrayed by the Revolution itself.*

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH was the only major English Romantic poet who witnessed the French Revolution at first hand. While still a university student, Wordsworth visited France briefly in 1790 on his walking tour and became inspired by revolutionary ideals. In 1791, Wordsworth graduated from Cambridge and went to France again in search of further inspiration. This time, among other things, he fell in love with a French woman, Annette Vallon. Monetary difficulty and the political troubles between France and Britain forced Wordsworth to return to Britain in 1792, before Annette bore their illegitimate daughter Caroline. Various personal and political circumstances—including Wordsworth's estrangement from the progress of the Revolution and the war between Britain and France—prevented him from returning to France and seeing Annette and Caroline until ten years later. It is thus not surprising that the French Revolution becomes a complex signifying process for Wordsworth in his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, which was never published while he was alive. In Books VI, IX and X of the 1805 *Prelude*¹ Wordsworth recollects his emotionally complex experience in France, a recollecting process that lasted virtually his entire life and bears a powerfully personal witness to a revolution that signifies the complexity of modernity that is our collective legacy.

This article argues that the relevant books in *The Prelude* offer valuable insights into the question of modernity, not just because they concern the most important historical event that defines modernity, but also because Wordsworth's self-reflexive exploration of the complex nature of memory forecasts the preoccupation with time and memory in many modernist works and the surge of studies of memory, especially traumatic memory, at the end of the 20th century. The French Revolution ushered in the modern era in social history and politics, but its connection with modernity and the values of the modern world exceeds its socio-political significance. The revolutionary experience can be seen as a sample of modernity in the ambivalence and contradictions it entails. In terms of its violent course of development and its diverse legacy, and in the various

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¹All references to and quotations from *The Prelude* in this paper are the 1805 edition.

historiographies and interpretations centering on it, the French Revolution is marked with paradoxes, schisms and multiplicity. “The French Revolution was the primary instance of that somber truth for the modern world it in many respects inaugurated.” (Best, 1988, 15) But *The Prelude* is not just a historical document. It deals with this most important modern political experience from the introspective perspective of a poet, highlighting the tension between history and memory and foregrounding both the therapeutic and the traumatic power of memory.

As an important literary text dealing with the French Revolution, *The Prelude* also illuminates many later literary works written on a violent political experience, including those recollecting the 1989 Democracy Movement in China. What happened in 1989 in China is not a revolution, but it is certainly the most significant political experience in contemporary Chinese history. Like the French Revolution, it is marked with contradictions. Started in enthusiasm and exaltation, it was concluded in violence and bloodshed; having inspired infinite hopes, it eventually caused disillusionment and spiritual crisis. Like *The Prelude*, many recollective works of 1989 reveal the tension between commemoration and repression, emphasizing both the disturbing and the healing power of remembrance.

Critical studies on *The Prelude* abound, including those on these books. Herbert Lindenberger remarks, “*The Prelude* bears enough affinities with the concerns of our present age that it no longer seems necessary ... to insist on the modernity of certain of Wordsworth’s themes” (Lindenberger, 1963, 280). He observes that Wordsworth prefigures the modernist “introspective fiction” of Proust, Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, and that “Wordsworth’s record of his disillusionment in the French Revolution re-creates more powerfully than any record by an English or American poet of the 1930s and 1940s the inner turmoil which Western liberals underwent during this period” (Lindenberger, 1963, 280). But he also suggests the need to look at these books on the French Revolution more closely: “We ignore the fact ... that the books on the French Revolution represent a type of poetry unique in the history of English verse” (Lindenberger, 1963, 102) but “as poetry they have been virtually ignored” (Lindenberger, 1963, 261). Stephen Gill also believes that this part of *The Prelude* calls for the most attentive reading. Books IX and X are often skimmed because they are about politics and apparently little more than a chronicle, but in fact no part of the poem is more demanding. In these books most clearly of all the verse registers the effort involved in re-invoking and analyzing past emotion without effacing it, the struggle of being true to the past *and* to the present. (Gill, 1991, 14)

So what more can we “learn” about Wordsworth’s thoughts on the French Revolution and thus on modernity by focusing on the working of memory in this part of *The Prelude*? As modern studies of memory have made us increasingly aware, recollection is never a simple retrieval of ready-made historical facts. Instead, the past is constantly being reconstructed in the recollector’s mind, so that recollection is always a complex interaction between the past experience and the reprocessing of that past experience and is constantly motivated and reshaped by perceptions and needs in the present. Wordsworth is clearly aware of this:

... so wide appears
The vacancy between me and those days,

Which yet have such self-presence in my mind
 That sometimes when I think of them I seem
 Two consciousnesses – conscious of myself,
 And of some other being. (Wordsworth, 1979, II:28-33)²

As Wordsworth says, “those days” still have a strong “self-presence” in his mind, while his present self seems sometimes so far apart from his past self as to be some “other” being. So “the two consciousnesses” paradoxically distance themselves from as well as connect with each other.

Memory, generally reconstructive with regard to any kind of past, is understandably much more so when faced with a pervasive, violent political event such as the French Revolution. This remembrance necessarily involves the taking of a stance or perspective and can be further complexified when conflicting perspectives emerge. The violence of the Revolution, moreover, burdens the recollector with traumas. In the case of Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, remembering it takes a complex form in which repression and persistence coexist, and in which re-creations and revisions betray an urge for sense-making and recovery. In Wordsworth's own words:

I cannot say what portion is in truth
 The naked recollection of that time,
 And what may rather have been called to life
 By after-meditation. (III:645-8)

The remembrance is therefore a mixture of the “naked recollection” of the past, what might be called “archaeological memory” on one hand, and what may be termed “processual memory” (Olney, 1998, 19) called up by “after-meditation” on the other. Wordsworth is one of the first poets to make this duality of memory explicit in a self-reflexive manner.

Several points in the revolutionary books clearly suggest that “the naked recollection” has been processed by “after-meditation.” Many critics, for example, have discussed Wordsworth's suppression of his love affair with Annette and its reconstruction in the tale of Vaudracour and Julia, as well as the confusion of chronology in recounting the attack on Chartreuse, Beaupuy's death and the climbing of Snowdon³. A more profound discrepancy than these obvious gaps, however, is between the past and present self visible throughout these books. On the one hand, the experience has been so significant in the formation of the self that “the naked recollection” remains powerful and persistent, with some core values of the past self being firmly retained in the present self. On the other hand, however, the experience has been so violent in its changing course that the “after-meditation” has to constantly intrude, correcting the past limited perspective with a retrospective and more knowing viewpoint of the later self. The two consciousnesses coexist at times in close affinity, where the narrating

²Subsequent quotations from *The Prelude* will be in-text references with book and line numbers.

³See Stephen Gill's *William Wordsworth: A Life*, p.38, Nigel Wood's “Introduction” to *The Prelude*, pp.8-10, and James A. W. Heffernan's chapter, “History and Autobiography: The French Revolution in Wordsworth's *Prelude*” in his *Representing the French Revolution*.

self obviously grows out of the past narrated self. More often, however, the tension between the two is fierce, for the narrating self has been transformed from the narrated self by the very experience that is being narrated. This is clearly revealed in how Wordsworth retraces the formation and the transformation of the self in the Revolution. Remarkably, this violent transformation of the self is described as a “revolution” by the poet:

And now the strength of Britain was put forth
 In league with the confederated host;
 Not in my single self alone I found,
 But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,
 Change and subversion from this hour. No shock
 Given to my moral nature had I known
 Down to that very moment – neither lapse
 Nor turn of sentiment – that might be named
 A revolution, save at this one time:
 All else was progress on the self-same path
 On which with a diversity of pace
 I had been traveling; this, a stride at once
 Into another region. (X:229-41)

Several levels of meanings converge in the word “revolution.” The word was undergoing significant changes in this time period. Etymologically the word denotes a “periodic return of a celestial object to a particular point in the sky” (*OED*). When it began to be used in the political field in the 17th century, it still kept this meaning of “return,” so it was actually an antonym of the present word with its meaning of revolution as a complete change or reversal. The word was therefore used to refer to the events of 1660 in England when “the overthrow of the Rump Parliament” and “the restoration of the monarchy” took place (*OED*), and later, to the Glorious Revolution, again not in the sense of a complete change, but of “a restoration of ancient liberties threatened by the tyrannical actions of James.” (Prickett, 1989, 2) Though 1789 is the time we associate with the new meaning of “revolution” to be “change, upheaval” (*OED*), Thomas Paine, the key proponent of the Revolution, still uses the word in its original sense, thus calling the American and the French Revolutions “counter-revolutions” (qtd. Arendt, 1963, 45). Burke, the most powerful spokesman in England against the events in France, uses the word in the same sense as his opponent when he refers to 1789 as “Revolution”. According to Prickett, “the word ‘revolution’ is applied to the events in France only by what he (Burke) sees as a monstrous mistake, and it carries throughout the force of the word in ironical quotation marks” (Prickett, 1989, 5).

Many images Wordsworth invokes in characterizing the various stages of the Revolution convey a sense of cyclical movement or return. In Book VI, the narrator recalls his celebration with the French hosts of the Fête de la Fédération in his first visit to France in 1790: “We ... formed a ring / And hand in hand danced round and round the board” (VI:406-7). The circular shape of “ring” is reinforced by the circular movement in the dancing, further highlighted a few lines later when the narrator repeats, “and round and round the board they danced again” (VI:413). The encircling ring that symbolizes the universal power of the Revolution and the repeated word “round” both draw out a circle, reminding one

of the original meaning of revolution as cyclical movement. In Book IX, when the narrator recalls his second visit in 1791, "round and round" returns. He follows his comparison of "the revolutionary power" to "a ship" "rocked by storms" (IX:48-9) by describing how "The Arcades I traversed in the Palace huge / Of Orleans, coasted round and round the line / Of tavern, brothel, gaming-house, and shop" (IX:50-2). The narrated self, as the observer of the Revolution, makes a circular movement on the periphery around the centre of the Revolution, looking on it from a distance. But when the Revolution proceeded to a more violent stage, the sense of cyclical movement takes on a further meaning of return or regress. In Book X, in his second visit to the capital before his return to England, "divided" "by a little month" (X:65) from the September Massacre, the narrated self contemplates violence as being cyclical, bound to return:

"The horse is taught his manage, and the wind
Of heaven wheels round and treads in his own steps;
Year follows year, the tide returns again,
Day follows day, all things have second birth;
The earthquake is not satisfied at once" – (X:70-4)

Recounting the Reign of Terror, the narrator compares its executors to a child

Having a toy, a windmill, though the air
Do of itself blow fresh and makes the vane
Spin in his eyesight, he is not content,
But with the plaything at arm's length he sets
His front against the blast, and runs amain
To make it whirl the faster. (X:340-5)

The guillotine is a rotating windmill, but its spinning is accelerated into ever faster whirling to symbolize the inevitably exacerbated violence brought forth by the Revolution. When the narrator describes the enthronement of Napoleon, the "catastrophe" (X:930) of the revolutionary drama is compared to "The dog / Returning to his vomit" (X:934-5) and "the sun" "turned into a gewgaw, a machine," that "Sets like an opera phantom" (X:935, 939-40). The Revolution starts out in a celebratory circle, goes on with further dizzying circular movement that gives birth to a violence that continually repeats and exacerbates itself, and finally returns to the despotic point where it began. All these references seem to evoke the original meaning of the word "revolution" and by so doing, reveal both the poet's initial celebration of the Revolution as regenerating human ideals and his later disillusionment with the Revolution as betraying these early ideals.

Prickett notes that by 1795 "the word 'revolution' had acquired its new meaning of a clean break with the immediate political past" (Prickett, 1989, 2). Arendt on the other hand, traces the newly acquired meaning to the eve of 14 July, 1789 when the messenger Liancourt, in reply to Louis XVI's question whether it was a revolt, answered, "Sire, it is not a revolt, it is a revolution" (*OED*). Here, Arendt argues, "for the first time perhaps, the emphasis has entirely shifted from the lawfulness of a rotating, cyclical movement to its irresistibility. The motion is still seen in the image of the movements of the stars, but what is stressed now is that it is beyond human power to arrest it, and hence it is a law unto itself" (Arendt, 1963, 47-8). Similarly, in *The Prelude*, the revolution has

been compared to “the devouring sea” (IX:4), “a ship” “rocked by storms” (IX:49), and to earthquakes (IX:182, X:74), all pointing to natural forces beyond human control.

If we look back at the above quoted passage where Wordsworth uses the word “revolution” to describe the violent change undergone by himself (X:229-41), we find his usage highly ambiguous, which indicates his own ambiguous attitude to the overall revolutionary experience. Explicitly, he seems to follow the newly acquired meaning, when the revolution is described as not just “change” but “subversion,” or “a stride” “into another region,” in contrast to “the self-same path,” literally an unprecedented displacement.

But he also seems to allude to its original meaning of return at the same time. When this revolution is described as contrary to “all else” which is “progress,” the indication then is that it is not only a subversion, but a “regress” leading back to its starting point. More importantly, Wordsworth’s “revolution” takes on yet another level of meaning for it turns from the external political realm to the internal private one. It comes closer to the third meaning of the word defined in the *OED*: “The action or an act of turning over in the mind or in discussion; consideration, reflection.” In fact, Wordsworth also uses the verbal form “revolve” in the same sense. In Book X, he recalls, at the time of Robespierre’s ascendancy, “Inly I revolved / how much the destiny of man had still / Hung upon single persons” (X:136-8). In Book IX, he recalls that Beaupuy “revolved / Complacently the progress of a cause / Whereof he was a part” (IX:324-5).

Though Wordsworth is redefining the word by shifting the subversion from the public to the private realm, he also insists that this is not his personal experience alone, but something “in the minds of all ingenuous youth.” Evidently he is speaking for his generation at the same time, making his personal remembrance simultaneously a commemoration. The autobiographical poem should be more than the recording of his own life; as Coleridge had advised Wordsworth, before he started the poem, in a letter dated around 10 September 1799 relating to *The Recluse*:

I wish you would write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those, who in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophes*. It would do great good... (Coleridge, 1973, 37-8)

No wonder then when *The Prelude* was finally published in 1850, the eminent Victorian Macaulay passed his famous verdict on the poem as being “to the last degree Jacobinical, indeed Socialist. I understand perfectly why Wordsworth did not choose to publish it in his life-time” (Macaulay, 1979, 560). As Bromwich observes, “*The Prelude*, meant as a history of the growth of his mind ... would in the end be swallowed up by the narrative ... of a birth of individual conscience in an age of revolution” (Bromwich, 1998, 11).

Wordsworth’s rhetorical use of the word “revolution,” admitting the new meaning while retaining a veiled sense of the old one, illustrates his complex self-transformation in recollecting the revolutionary experience. Immediately following the books dealing with his French experiences, Books XI and XII, the conclusion of the entire *Prelude*, are entitled “Imagination, How Impaired and

Restored." Indeed, restoration, which can only take place after the impairment by his French experiences, is the culmination of *The Prelude*. As Heffernan states, "this return to a pre-Revolutionary moment at the end of his poem prompts us to ask whether Wordsworth simply aimed to cut the Revolution out of his memory, or parenthesize it within the main line of his autobiographical argument" (Heffernan, 1992, 44).

The Prelude is itself a gigantic revolution in the restorative sense of the word, making a cyclical journey and going back to its starting point. This revolution is completed in the psychological sense but, analogous to the verbal "return" to the pre-1789 meaning of "revolution," it also reveals a return to the pre-Revolutionary self in the political sense.⁴ Within the revolutionary books themselves, though recording the clean break in the public realm and the violent change undergone by the self, the recollection nevertheless follows what Heffernan calls "the structure of recursive narration" (Heffernan, 1992, 57),⁵ seeking for a restoration despite the terrible shock brought by the complete change. Just as the meaning of the word "revolution" can be ambivalent, Wordsworth's recollection itself is an ambivalent project. It indicates an urge to return to the Revolution to restore its ideals, and paradoxically reveals an urge to turn away from it to restore the earlier self before it experienced the trauma of the Revolution. It is simultaneously a "revolution" in both the pre- and post-1789 senses.

It is evidently through this recursive structure that Wordsworth makes a "return" within the recollection of his experience in the Revolution. In the middle of Book X (the beginning of the 1850 Book XI), after the narration of his reception of the news of Robespierre's death and before proceeding to record his own mental crisis, he suddenly pauses and claims, "I must return / To my own history" (X:657-8). Then curiously, in the next hundred lines or so (X:657-790), he goes back to the time he has already narrated, when he first arrived in France in 1791, and re-narrates the experience up to the point when Britain joined the coalition forces and his internal "revolution" took place. This re-recollection makes the twice-remembered experience not a "spot" but almost an "expanse" of time.⁶ Whether or not it also "[retains] / A renovating virtue," it certainly has "distinct preeminence." (XI:258-9). If, in making the recollection of the Revolution a circle back to the pre-revolutionary self, the poet betrays an effort to seek restoration in both the psychological and ideological senses, in drawing a full circle within this recollection, he seems to do just the opposite. Going back to the initial stage of the Revolution which inspired infinite hope and enthusiasm,

⁴Chandler discusses many Burkean echoes in these France books, calling attention to the double perspective of the narrating and narrated self in the political sense. See Chapter 3 of his *Wordsworth's Second Nature*.

⁵Herbert Lindenberger "[proposes] ... to look at the poem as saying essentially the same thing again and again.... There is no real progression in *The Prelude*, but only restatements of the poet's effort to transcend the confines of the temporal order" (Lindenberger, 1963, 188).

⁶Both Lindenberger and Jonathan Bishop point out that there are two "spots of time" in the France books: the night in Paris and the death of Robespierre (Bishop, 1972, 134-53). Lindenberger also notes spots of time are "of no avail in his picture of the Revolution" (Lindenberger, 1963, 253). The re-recollection, however, nevertheless has a close affinity with other "spots of time" in its reappearance though it is on a vaster scale.

Wordsworth seems at first to attempt to uphold the revolutionary ideals, but contrasting the two recollections only ironically highlights how these ideals have been betrayed. While the first recollection focuses more on the chronicling, the re-recollection tends to be more meditative and reflective. In this recurrence, the two consciousnesses are brought together to reveal how memory works when faced with a violent political experience.

The self-reflexive nature of memory is seen right at the start of the re-recollection: “It hath been told / that I was led to take an eager part / In arguments of civil polity / Abruptly, and indeed before my time.” (X:658-61) The abruptness has been mentioned already, in Book IX, when he recounts:

I was unprepared
With needful knowledge, had abruptly passed
Into a theatre of which the stage
Was busy with an action far advanced. (IX:92-5)

The sense of abruptness is again conveyed, but the later recounting makes an evident change in describing the self as being passively “led”: rather than actively, though unwittingly, “[passing] into” the theatre of Revolution. “[I]ndeed before my time” is another knowing piece of hindsight by the later self. If the first recollection attempts to recapture the past self more closely, then the second distances the two consciousnesses more manifestly.

The re-recollection continues with this pattern of recurrence through revision:

I had approached, like other youth, the shield
Of human nature from the golden side,
And would have fought even to the death to attest
The quality of the metal which I saw. (X:662-5)

In this medieval fable Wordsworth alludes to, the shield is two-sided, one side gold and the other silver, so knights approaching it from different directions are misled to fight “to death to attest” its quality. The fable indicates the deceptive duplicity of the Revolution, and also suggests that any viewer of the Revolution must have a biased perspective. By such a comparison, the narrated self becomes a chivalric figure too, reminiscent of the key “mentor” figure in converting Wordsworth to the revolutionary cause, Beaupuy, who is also described as a knight “wandering” “as through a book, an old romance, or tale / Of Fairy” (IX:307-8). At the same time, the “golden” colour calls to mind the famous lines in Book VI, “France standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again” (VI:353-4). In the second recollection then, the earlier recollection is significantly revised. The “golden hours” are only illusory, or at best perspectivized, and so the earlier recollection in retrospect acquires a tone of irony, for human nature after all only “[seemed] born again.” The irony also applies to the middle of Book X itself where, when recounting Robespierre’s fall, the narrator recalls himself saying, “Come now, ye golden times” (X:541), and adds with conviction, “The mighty renovation would proceed” (X:556).

The second recollection is saturated with this sense of disillusionment. The poet continues, immediately after the famous lines “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!” (X:692-3):

O times,
 In which the meager, stale, forbidding ways
 Of custom, law, and statute took at once
 The attraction of a country in romance –
 When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights
 When most intent on making of herself
 A prime enchanter to assist the work
 Which then was going forwards in her name.
 Not favored spots alone, but the whole earth,
 The beauty wore of promise... (X:693-702)

The passage, albeit recalling the early enthusiasm, has a subtle undertone of the later, retrospective disillusionment. The land of Revolution is “a country in romance,” enchanting but something other than reality. Recapitulating the indication of the chivalric fable, it reinforces the irony already revealed in the knights’ fable. Reason only “seemed” to assert its rights, while actually being “a prime enchanter,” reminiscent of Spenser’s evil magician Archimago and carrying with it negative connotations, while all else is using its “name.” The universal promising light, too, is only an apparel “worn” by the earth rather than something inherent.

This part of the re-recollection is permeated with the duality of the two consciousnesses. The coexisting “naked recollection” and the “after-meditation” at once chronicle the self experiencing the external and the internal Revolution, and reflect upon that experiencing self from the point of view of the post-Revolution self, which knows that the Revolution has already regressed to its starting point. Tyranny has been restored. Putting it side by side with the earlier recount, we find that the recurrence only heightens irony.

Irony is also evident in the poet’s recurrent portrayal of the universal influence of the Revolution. The Edenic promise of the Revolution, Wordsworth recalls in the second recollection, had a pervasive influence on everybody: “What temper at the prospect did not wake / To happiness unthought of? The inert / Were roused, and lively natures rapt away” (X:706-8). The universality of the Revolution reached different categories of people, the narrator continues, be it “They who had fed their childhood upon dreams” (X:709), or “they... of gentle mood” (X:716). The world was enveloped in the promising light of the revolutionary ideal, and the poet claims, with a tone of enthusiasm still retained in retrospect, that it was “the very world which is the world / Of all of us, the place in which, in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all” (X:725-7). The emphasis on the pervading influence of the Revolution recalls various stages of the Revolution recorded in the earlier recounting. In Book VI, on his first arrival at Calais “on the very eve / Of that great federal day” (VI:356-7), 13 July 1790, the narrator recalls, “How bright a face is worn when joy of one / Is joy of tens of millions” (VI:359-60). The earliest impression of the Revolution is the overall joy and festivity shared by “one” and “tens of millions,” very much like Lenin’s glorification of revolutions as “the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited”⁷. Compared with the celebration of this universal joy presented in Book VI, the

⁷<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/tactics/ch13.htm>

second recounting in Book X seems to have a different focus. The universality is indicated to lie in its overall power to transport different tempers, so that the inert are “roused,” and the lively “rapt away,” literally transported. What the Revolution has brought in is a violent disruption of normal order. And if uniformity of the many is the focus of the earlier recollection, then the diversity of the many is the emphasis in the re-recounting. If the irresistible revolutionary power could transport the many into one in celebration, the narrator’s retrospection reminds us that it could also lead to further transport equally irresistible, and the diversity of the many involved in the Revolution could also make the uniformity a precarious one.

The precarious nature of this uniformity is already suggested in Wordsworth’s first recollection of his longer visit to France in 1791. When the narrated self visited Paris on his arrival, he saw on the streets of Paris a distortion of the overall festivity he records in Book VI. It is a “great rendezvous of worst and best,” of people who “had a purpose, or had not,” including both “builders” and “subverters,” on whose faces he reads both “hope” and “apprehension,” “joy, anger, vexation, in the midst / Of gaiety and dissolute idleness” (IX:53-62). The universality of the Revolution here reveals an ominous, perilous force in its massive scale. The varied crowd is much like a mob in its formation.

The universal power of the Revolution is then a double-edged sword. While the early enthusiasm had almost an omnipresent impact upon everybody, its later tendency to chaos and violence is also a terrible sway that nobody could escape. A little later in his first recollection of his visit to Paris, the narrator describes how “the mildest” are turned into the “agitated,” and what was “peaceful” becomes “unquiet”. The universality is manifested not in joy, but in a state of “ferment,” “commotion,” and “strife,” all indicating the dangerous power being unleashed by the Revolution (IX:165-8). This general agitation foretells the later universal madness sparing no one during the Reign of Terror: “The goaded land waxed mad; the crimes of few / Spread into madness of the many,” “And all the accidents of life, were pressed / Into one service, busy with one work” (X:312-3, 325-6). The “one” service, and the “one” work reveal the single-mindedness of the revolutionary cause, which reduces the complex diversity of humanity. The universal power of the Revolution has spread joy and agitation over all, but is finally unleashed into violence, when the overall madness develops into universal bloodshed: “all perished, all – / Friends, enemies, of all parties, ages, ranks, / Head after head, and never heads enough / For those who bade them fall” (X:333-36). The revolution has indeed revolved, turning back to its antithesis. In Wordsworth’s second recollection, he is not remembering a single moment in the past, but drawing out a trajectory of the Revolution from the early overall celebration to its later stage of universal terror and bloodshed.

Similarly, when Wordsworth continues with this re-recollection by focusing on himself, he is also creating a multi-layered recount full of tension:

Why should I not confess that earth was then
To me what an inheritance new-fallen
Seems when the first time visited, to one
Who thither comes to find in it his home? (X:728-31)

The tone of reluctant questioning with which the passage starts, with the modalized negative question "why should I not confess," reveals a sense of guilt that can only belong to the experienced, retrospective narrator. What is recalled here, rather than the isolated self, is the self as related to the "earth," which is compared to "an inheritance new-fallen," a simile rich in oppositions: the earth is like something new, but also something inherited, a part of a tradition; it indicates regeneration, but the sense of fallenness is evoked in the compound "new-fallen." The "I" is at once a "visitor" or "guest" of this earth for "the first time," and a resident or a host, who "thither comes to find in it his home."

The metaphor of visitor/resident or guest/host suggests a psychological rather than geographical identification with the country of Revolution, but of course it is also literal in Wordsworth's case. The double identity indicates not so much a contradiction as a transformation, from the sense of strangeness to the sense of belonging in relation to the "earth." This transformed identity recalls the earlier recollection, not just at one point but through the whole course of the transformation whereby the self receives different identities, thus relating the poet to "the country in Romance."

In the earlier recollection of the 1790 visit, the narrator already puts much emphasis on his sense of identity in relation to the country of Revolution. He calls himself and Robert Jones "A lonely pair / Of Englishmen" (VI:391-2), conveying the sense of strangeness and isolation in a foreign land. But at the same time, "the name of Englishmen" is also "a name / Honoured in France," "As their forerunners in a glorious course." (VI:409, 410, 412) The harmony between the national identity and the "revolutionary identity" at this point of the Revolution prepares for the irony of the later fierce clash of these two identities, but it binds these alien visitors to their hosts at this moment of universal joy in the Revolution. Though the poet emphasizes that they are "guests" (VI:403), he also makes clear that they are "welcome almost as the angels were / to Abraham of old" (VI:403-4). They are also amidst "a merry crowd / Of those emancipated" (VI:393-4) which forms a "blithe company" (VI:401), the sense of harmony dissipating the sense of strangeness. If in the first visit the national identity is in line with the revolutionary cause, then in his second visit, it is this same, English, foreign identity that gains him acceptance from those who are against the Revolution. The narrator stresses that if it were not for his alien identity as "An Englishman" (IX:191) and "A stranger" (IX:194), he would be "Shunned and not tolerated" (IX:197) by the royalists he associates with. His national identity as an Englishman then acquires an aspect of fickleness in face of the revolutionary cause, indicating the inherent contradictions within the Revolution itself. At the same time, both periods convey a keen awareness of himself as an outsider in the nation of Revolution.

But the outsider is soon to be swayed by the universal power of the Revolution, as recounted in markedly different manners in the two recollections. The first recollection is ambiguously worded: "I gradually withdrew / Into a noisier world, and thus did soon / Become a patriot –" (IX:122-4). Remarkably, the conversion from an outsider to a participant is described as an oxymoronic withdrawal into a noisier world instead of some place of retirement, and into a community rather than from a community. The deliberate contradiction may indicate the mistaken perception of the narrated self realized by the narrating self,

and “withdraw” also has a military undertone of removing oneself from a more favourable position, indicating the loss inherent to this withdrawal.

As he does with the word “revolution,” the poet also uses the word “patriot” in an ambiguous way and thereby indicates the “identity crisis” he would have to go through in the Revolution. “Patriot” here fits in with its extended sense of “a lover, devotee, or supporter of a particular place, cause, ideal, etc.” defined in the *OED*. He uses the word in the same sense when slightly later he describes Beaupuy as “A patriot” (IX:295) as well. But the word “patriot” in its usual, modern meaning can be both commendatory and derogatory. According to the *OED*, a “good patriot” is “A person who loves his or her country, *esp.* one who is ready to support its freedoms and rights and to defend it against enemies or detractors” (*OED*). This meaning “is *rare* before 1680. At that time often applied to a person who supported the rights of the country against the King and court” (*OED*). The word, however, “fell into particular discredit in the earlier half of the 18th cent., being used, according to Dr. Johnson, ‘ironically for a factious disturber of the government’” (*OED*). The “patriot” Wordsworth claims to have become evokes the association of the word with radicalism and would indeed make him “a factious disturber” of the British government later. On the other hand, the word also reminds one that “the Revolution’s most permanent big legacy has been the apotheosis of the nation-state” (Best, 1988, 9). With the ambivalent suggestions of the word “patriot,” the poet seems to forecast the later fierce opposition between his revolutionary “patriotism” and his national “patriotism.” At this moment, the poet recalls, “my heart was all / given to the people, and my love was theirs” (IX: 123-4). His allegiance turns from the geographical native place to the ideological revolutionary cause which takes place in the foreign country. The national identity gives way to the revolutionary one.

This shift, however, is almost omitted in the second recollection, where the narrator cuts off the “gradual withdrawal” in the first recollection, but comes directly to the conversion: the visitor “thither comes and finds in it his home.” The editing of the memory in the re-recollection highlights the drastic change brought by the Revolution. At the same time, the omission of the transformation undergone by the self also betrays the trauma the very change involves that the narrator may be reluctant to confront again in the re-recollection. In the first recollection however, the gradual shift of self-identity from outsider to patriot is carefully traced. In Book IX, the narrator recalls that in his second visit to France, when arriving at Paris, he was much like a sight-seeing tourist, who “visited / In haste each spot of old and recent fame” (IX:41-2), and listened to the “hubbub wild” “with a stranger’s ears” (IX:54,55). The self starts as a visitor and stranger to the foreign land both literally and psychologically. Different from the self of the first visit who, as a guest, had been welcomed and accepted by the host, here the self seems confused and estranged by what is going on around him. Sitting at the ruins of the Bastille, he puts on “the guise / Of an enthusiast” (IX:66-7), “Affecting more emotion than [he] felt” (IX:70-1). The sense of distance is strongly emphasized, with the self as almost an indifferent spectator of the revolutionary drama, so much so that it has to act as seemingly more enthusiastic than it is, thus participating unwittingly in the grand drama at the same time. A little later, we remember, the sense that the revolution is a drama, a spectacle to observe, recurs when he recalls himself as “abruptly [passing] / Into a theatre of

which the stage / Was busy with an action far advanced" (IX:94-5). Again, the self is an outsider, to whom the dramatic action of the Revolution does not make full sense.

Only when the recollection further continues, do we see what Nicholas Roe calls "a first moment of emotional commitment to their cause" (Roe, 1988, 54). Paradoxically, this is also the moment when the "two consciousnesses" of the narrating and narrated self clash fiercely. When the war started and the streets "were crowded with the bravest youth of France" (IX:269), the narrator recalls with an entirely different tone as a spectator of the scene:

Yet at this very moment do tears start
 Into mine eyes – I do not say I weep,
 I wept not then, but tears have dimmed my sight –
 In memory of the farewells of that time,
 Domestic severings, female fortitude
 At dearest separation, patriot love
 And self-devotion, and terrestrial hope
 Encouraged with a martyr's confidence.
 Even files of strangers merely, seen but once
 And for a moment, men from far, with sound
 Of music, martial tunes, and banners spread,
 Entering the city, here and there a face
 Or person singled out among the rest
 Yet still a stranger, and beloved as such –
 Even by these passing spectacles my heart
 Was oftentimes uplifted, and they seemed
 Like arguments from Heaven that 'twas a cause
 Good, and which no one could stand up against
 Who was not lost, abandoned, selfish, proud,
 Mean, miserable, willfully depraved,
 Hater perverse of equity and truth. (IX:273-93)

The repetition of "stranger" calls our attention to this key moment when the self turns from being a stranger himself to one who empathizes with other strangers. The identity is no longer an identity assigned to the self, but to the other: the soldiers on the streets are "files of strangers," among whom a face or person singled out is "yet still a stranger," but "beloved as such." Consequently, the scene, though still referred to as "passing spectacles," is no longer a drama that "I," as a spectator, could not make sense of. Instead, they "uplifted" his heart, and he no longer needs to feign the guise of an "enthusiast." The passage is a rare moment in the recollection of the Revolution, formal, other-oriented, almost banner-waving, and seemingly designed for commemoration. It starts a little oddly however by making an almost trivial distinction between "tears starting" and "weeping." Only in the recollection, "in memory of the farewells," does the full emotion well up.⁸ On the other hand, the ominous "seem" appears again: they only "seemed" heaven-sent arguments that this is a good cause, pointing out the theatrical nature of the cause again, however touching it might be. The retrospective narrator seems to remind us that the good cause that the spectacle of

⁸Roe also rightly points out that these "farewells" are also "a memorial of Wordsworth's own parting from Annette" (Roe, 1988, 54).

the Revolution “seemed” to be would however be turned upside down; this bitter hindsight emerges glaringly side by side with the strong emotional involvement the narrating self still feels in retrospect.

Ironically, this very shift of the self’s identity from stranger to patriot would entail a terrible ordeal when Wordsworth’s home country became the enemy of the country of Revolution that he had pledged allegiance to, thereby making this part of the memory particularly traumatic. This is when the revolution takes place inside him, when he is torn apart by the conflict between his national identity and his revolutionary identity. Being a revolutionary patriot makes it impossible for him to be, in the modern sense of the term, an English patriot. As he recounts in the first recollection, he “rejoiced” (X:258), “When Englishmen by thousands were o’erthrown” (X:261). Once a welcomed “guest” in the foreign country, he now becomes “an uninvited guest” in his own land, and the “only” one among the “all” “in the congregation” whose prayers are dedicated to the country’s foe (X:268-72). What the recollection has traced is a revolution in the self’s identity, a complete overturning of its relationship to its native land and the foreign republic, where as an alien it has found itself at home. Now the native finds the home country foreign, and himself a stranger, almost a traitor. Worse still, the narrator reminds us that “the day of vengeance [is] yet to come” (X:274), when the self-defensive war of the republic would turn into the imperialistic war of conquest and when he would have to face yet more painful disillusionment and crisis. The violent revolution of the self’s identity is bound up with the drastic turn of events in the external Revolution.

Significantly, in the second recollection, the identity “patriot,” which confuses the revolutionary identity with the national one, is changed into “partisan,” the negative connotation of which highlights the constant remaking of the past in the process of recollection:

An active partisan, I thus convoked
 From every object pleasant circumstance
 To suit my ends. I moved among mankind
 With genial feelings still predominant,
 When erring, erring on the better side,
 And in the kinder spirit – placable,
 Indulgent oftentimes to the worst desires,
 As, on one side, not uninformed that men
 See as it hath been taught them, and that time
 Gives rights to error; on the other hand
 That throwing off oppression must be work
 As well of license as of liberty;
 And above all (for this was more than all),
 Not caring if the wind did now and then
 Blow keen upon an eminence that gave
 Prospect so large into futurity – (X:736-51)

This long discursive passage clearly reveals the entangling perspective of the narrating and the narrated self. On the one hand, the narrated self is labelled as “an active partisan,” someone who has lost disinterestedness, become blind and fanatic in the cause. The subjectivity of the narrated self, to “suit my ends,” is recognized and pointed out by the narrating self. On the other hand, the narrated self is recalled by the narrating self as “[moving] among mankind with genial

feelings," as a member of the human race, still the patriot in its extended sense, though he is also the one who has erred. The narrating self is clearly distant from the narrated, thus the sense of self-introspection; but the narrating self also identifies with the narrated, thus the tone of self-justification. The narrating self passes judgment on the narrated as "erring," but this is followed with "erring on the better side." Similarly, "indulgent to worst desires" is balanced with the quality of being "placable." The syntax from here onward becomes notably tortuous. Though signals like "on one side," "on the other hand," and "above all", together with the parenthetical "this was more than all", should serve to outline a clear, logical thinking process, this is nevertheless complicated by frequent additions, qualifications, and modifications, suggesting the narrating self's struggle to "get it right," to make the recollection of the narrated self as precise as possible, which can only be achieved by reliving the past as the narrated self. On the other hand, the tortuousness also puts the recollecting process in the foreground, and the narrating self becomes a stronger presence than ever.

The label of "partisan" on the other hand also gives us new insight into the earlier recollection, where the radical, revolutionary self is indicated. In Book X, immediately after relating the ascendancy of Robespierre, the narrator recalls: "An insignificant stranger and obscure, / Mean as [he] was," is still ready to serve the cause "so great, / However dangerous" (X:130-1, 135-6). The repeated identity of "stranger" reinforces the drastic change of the self from being a stranger to the revolutionary ferment, to being one empathizing with other strangers' brave deeds to defend the republic, and now to one pledging to serve the revolutionary cause. The contrast between the dangerous, great cause and the "insignificant" self highlights the devotion and determination of the narrated self who is later recognized by the narrating self as "an active partisan." Similarly, in the first recount of the time after his return to England, the narrator recalls: though he "was and must be of small worth / No better than an alien in the land," "[he] doubtless should have made a common cause / With some who perished, haply perished too –" (X:191-5). The contrast between the self of "small worth" and the great cause again highlights the danger that service to that cause entails. The word "perish" reinforces the danger by reminding one of the "all" who "perished" in the Reign of Terror. Putting these moments in the first recollection side by side with the re-recollection of the self as "an active partisan," we see that the involvement with danger and death of the revolutionary cause reveals the narrated self's tendency to violence and terrorism⁹, only recognized by the later, reflective self.

After this long discursive passage on the self as partisan, the re-recollection reaches the moment of the war between France and England, which is the point where the re-recollection is heading to its end: "In the main outline, such it might be said / Was my condition, till with open war / Britain opposed the liberties of France" (X:757-9). The internal "revolution" he recalls in the first recollection is recounted at the end of this re-recollection: the "change and subversion" experienced are all the way "upwards to the source," signifying its thoroughness, and, different from "hitherto," are now a complete break from the past, not in

⁹Roe calls our attention to "Wordsworth's awareness of his active revolutionary self and, more significantly, of that self as potentially violent and extreme as Robespierre" (Roe, 1988, 39).

degree, “a swallowing up of lesser things in great,” but in kind, “change of them into their opposites” (X:761-4). As in the former recollection, the new meaning of the word “revolution” is also implied here. The retrospective narrator also adds that this “blow, which in maturer age / Would but have touched the judgement, struck more deep / Into sensations near the heart” (X:771-3). The hindsight reveals that it is someone in “maturer age” who is making this observation, distancing himself from the younger self. On the other hand, however, in the re-recollection, he also gives a closer account of his emotional intensity than in the first recollection: “What had been a pride / Was now a shame, my likings and my loves / Ran in new channels, leaving old ones dry,” suggesting the narrating self is reliving the revolution experienced by the narrated self (X:768-70). This double stance of the narrating self as both empathetic with and introspective into the narrated self defines the perspective of this re-recollection throughout, conveying both “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” of the experiencing self and the “emotion recollected in tranquility” by the experienced self.

At this point, the re-recollection reaches its end, coming back full circle when reaching the most violent internal “revolution,” in the post-1789 sense, and accomplishing a “revolution” in memory in the restorative sense of the word as well. With this detour only, it seems, can he proceed to the next stage of events, when Frenchmen would “become oppressors in their turn” (X:791), reversing all the ideals of the cause.

In this part of the re-recollection, the narrator goes back to this period of terrible emotional and political turbulence, underlining the obligatory nature of memory as well as the psychological need to reprocess the memory. In re-recollecting the Revolution from the beginning to the point before its betrayal, the narrator seems to attempt to preserve the revolutionary ideals by making this part an “expanse” of time. On the other hand, by reprocessing the memory, the narrator also shows in the light of hindsight the self who has gone through the whole course of the Revolution, and thus relentlessly unveils the illusory nature of the early ideals. The complex interplay between the two consciousnesses shows clearly how the poet struggles to foreground the subtle working of human memory in “the fluxes and refluxes” of the human mind. After all, it is the self who had gone through the memory of the Revolution that finally grew into the poet. As Roe remarks at the end of his book, “More than the aspiration he felt with his generation, ... it was failure (of the Revolution) that made Wordsworth a poet” (Roe, 1988, 275). In this poet that he came to be, he prefigures the preoccupation with memory prominent not only in the early 20th-century modernist literature, but also in the late 20th-century “memory boom” (Rossington and Whitehead, 2007, 5) along with the rise of interest in the Holocaust studies and the release of new archives after the Cold War. Many recollective works on the 1989 Democracy Movement in China published on and after its 20th anniversary can be seen as a part of this “memory boom”.

In 1818, Keats writes in one of his letters that human life can be compared to “a large Mansion of Many Apartments,” and when passing from Innocence to Experience, “This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken’d and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open – but all dark – all leading to dark passages To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote ‘Tintern Abbey’ and it seems to me that his Genius is

explorative of those dark Passages" (Keats, 1958, I:280-1). Unknown to Keats, even more than in "Tintern Abbey," it is in *The Prelude*, particularly these revolutionary books, that Wordsworth is "explorative," not only of dark passages in human life, but dark passages in human memory as well. And it is in the re-made, revolved recollection that one sees his "explorative genius" working most strenuously.

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