

The Age of
William
Wordsworth

CRITICAL ESSAYS ON THE
ROMANTIC TRADITION

E D I T E D B Y

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The Dawn of Universal Patriotism
*William Wordsworth among
 the British in Revolutionary France*

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Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
 But to be young was very heaven!

—Wordsworth, *Prelude*

“I went over to Paris,” said the poet Wordsworth to an interviewer late in his life, “at the time of the revolution in 1792 or 1793, and so was *pretty hot in it*; but I found Mr. J. Watt [Jr.] there before me, and quite as warm in the same cause. We thus both began life as ardent and thoughtless radicals; but we have both become, in the course of our lives, as all sensible men, I think, have done, good sober-minded Conservatives.” We note that in retrospect Wordsworth was vague about the year and that he felt his reaction had occurred gradually. His first full, poetical account, in *The Prelude*, was only gradually revised into conservative sobriety over the years (and never published during his lifetime), but it was cautiously vague about the identity of the “cause” and the degree of his own involvement, even in the earliest drafts. About both, however, a great deal of circumstantial evidence can now be assembled.¹

Fourteen years after the beginning of the American Revolution, the people of Paris, on 14 July 1789, stormed the prison-fortress of the Bastille,

and the exciting news of a French Revolution spread through the world. That “Robbert-Den” was soon reduced to a rubble of souvenir stones, and its key crossed the Atlantic to lie on George Washington’s hall table. By the time of the Revolution’s first anniversary, in July 1790, citizens of many nations joined in celebrations, at home or—the happy few who could travel—in the streets and halls and gardens of French cities and villages. Young William Wordsworth and his college classmate Robert Jones, ending their third year at Cambridge, managed by a beautiful coincidence to arrive in the harbor city of Calais exactly on the thirteenth (having passed their examinations in June). Joining the celebration, “In a mean city, and among a few,” they saw “How bright a face is worn when joy of one / Is joy of tens of millions” (*Prelude*, bk. 6, lines 358–360). As they went on they were welcomed in every village to join “Dances of Liberty” and regaled by travelers from Paris with tales of the “great Spousals newly solemnized” there. Indeed, so universal was the rejoicing and the welcome extended to all who bore the honored “name of Englishmen” that Jones and Wordsworth instead of following the crowd to Paris walked straight toward the highest natural and historical symbol of liberty, the Alps. There, indeed, Wordsworth’s “heart leaped up when first” he looked down like that freedom fighter William Tell on “a green recess, an aboriginal vale” in Switzerland (*Prelude* 6.396, 448).

A year later, having finished college, Wordsworth spent the summer with Jones, this time walking in Wales (where they *could* have met some of the Welsh correspondents of the Jacobin Clubs). Then, after some career discussions in Cambridge and London, Wordsworth sailed alone for France, with letters of introduction to several potential friends in Paris and to Helen Maria Williams in Orléans. His career explanation was (in his sister Dorothy’s words) that he intended to “pass the winter for the Purpose of learning the French Language which will qualify him for the office of travelling Companion to some young Gentleman.”² His slender present means were a portion of inheritance from the proceeds of their grandmother’s estate.

Reaching Paris, Wordsworth made a swift round of the attractions, which included both the Assembly and the Jacobin Club, where the debates and hectoring gave him the impression that the “revolutionary power” was tossing “like a ship at anchor, rocked by storms”—a storm that produced “hissing factionists with ardent eyes” and “Joy, anger, and vexation, in the midst of gaiety” (*Prelude* 9.5off.). He had clearly come predisposed to find a

revolution in progress and the joy and anger properly directed. He shortly left Paris and went on down the Loire valley to Orléans—where he found neither Helen Williams nor, as he had half expected, his friend Jones.

He soon introduced himself to an English family who had built a cotton mill in Orléans, and he assured his lawyer-brother Richard (who was handling the inheritance) that he would now have entrée to “the best society”; but he had to add, “I find almost all the people of any opulence are aristocrates and all the others democrates.” He had imagined “there were some people of wealth . . . favorers of the revolution,” but there was “not one to be found.” He moved on to Blois, probably disappointed about the millowner and perhaps advised by the “2 or 3 officers of the Cavalry” whom he had met in his Orléans boardinghouse. For in Blois he found, among more military men, a true revolutionary, Michel Beaupuy, who gave him a sophisticated indoctrination in the purposes and dynamics of the Revolution.

Feeling like young Dion of Syracuse, who had been instructed by Plato in “philosophic war,” Wordsworth clearly wished to transform himself into a true “democrate.” This was not Blake’s “mental war” but an application of science (“philosophy”) to strategy and tactics. Plutarch tells how the tyrant of Syracuse was indoctrinated (not very successfully, it must be noted) by a combination of lessons in geometry—and a commando raid upon his kingdom. An application would be to consider whether the British monarchy might be democratized by legislation or might require a military invasion. Before the end of this year, 1792, most of the British in Paris would become involved in—or flee from—preparations for a French descent upon London, or Dublin.

These were not matters to be mentioned in letters to England, nor the fact that there was an active Jacobin Club in Blois, which subscribed to two revolutionary periodicals, the *Annales patriotiques* and the *Courrier* edited by Antoine-Joseph Gorsas, with whom Wordsworth became acquainted. But Wordsworth kept in touch with his college friends William Mathews and Jones, and in May he reported grim news of an insurrection in the revolutionary army. The revolutionary general Theobald Dillon had been attacked by his own troops when they were routed by the Austrians: “An ignominious flight, the massacre of their general, a dance performed with savage joy round his burning body, the murder of six prisoners, are events which would have arrested the attention . . . of the most barbarous sav-

ages" (*Letters: Early Years* 77). Clearly, wiser generals were needed, "commanding geniuses," to use a term Coleridge applied both to poets and to warriors. That Wordsworth's sympathies continued on the radical side for many years is evident from his implying, in his 1802 sonnet *I grieved for Buonaparte*, that Napoleon *might have been* a savior of the Revolution.

In 1792 Wordsworth must have known, from conversations with the officers he lived among, that many Belgians, Liègeois, Germans, Dutch, and Savoyards were forming legions in France—and must have been impressed by the fact that several British and American sympathizers were volunteering to join the French army against the counterrevolutionary forces which had begun to invade the nation. When he saw his countrymen stepping forward in this emergency, was there not in Wordsworth's character a strong urge to step into an active post of command? After all, what had he most wanted to make his career when he left Cambridge? Consider how he answered that question when interviewed by note-taking neighbors in his seventy-fifth year:

He said that after he had finished his college course, he was in great doubt as to what his future employment should be. [What he did, of course, was to go to revolutionary France, where the action was.] He did not feel himself good enough for the Church . . . the struggle between his conscience and his impulses would have made life a torture. He also shrank from the law, although . . . told . . . that he was well fitted for the higher parts of the profession. [On the other hand] he had studied military history with great interest, and the strategy of war; and he always fancied that he had talents for command; and he at one time thought of a military life, but then he was without [the necessary political] connections. He mentioned this to show how difficult it often was to judge of what was passing in a young man's mind.

In 1803 he had offered to join the Grasmere Volunteers—but dropped out when not asked to take command.

Since he ended up a poet, it is difficult to entertain the image of Wordsworth as a philosophical warrior. It was a rather different sort of "connec-

tions" that led him to room with military men in Orléans and Blois and turn to the French officer Michel Beaupuy for Platonic insight. His interest in the Grasmere Volunteers; his grieving for Bonaparte (until that hero had himself crowned emperor by a pope, revealing that he lacked the domestic roots of moral virtue which could have made him the savior instead of destroyer of the Revolution); his celebration of the *Character of the Happy Warrior* as one whose "moral being" is his prime care and who, "if he be called upon" to face great issues of "good or bad for human kind," will be strong enough even in the "heat of conflict" to keep "the law in calmness made";³ even his ardent pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra, accusing the British cabinet of betrayal of the Spanish people fighting on a battlefield that consisted of "the floors upon which their children have played"—all these pointers, because they have been overlooked or perceived as mere figures of speech, have not quite established—as they should have done—the poet Wordsworth as a would-be man of action.⁴

Too strongly influenced by Wordsworth's own conservative protestations—and by a continuing strain of conservative patriotism among British historians—his youthful radicalism has come to be seen, by whole generations of scholars and common readers, as a matter of attitudes and sympathies without active involvement. In some not altogether cryptic passages in *The Prelude*, nevertheless, the poet does seem to be depicting himself in a critical stage of the French Revolution as "inly" contemplating (if only he had sufficient command of the French language) the idea of offering himself as a philosophical Napoleon. Realizing from his study of history that "tyrannic power is weak," he never gave up the notion (he says) that history can be drastically changed by a Brutus or such liberators as the Athenian Harmodius and Aristogiton, assassins of tyrants (*Prelude* 10.198–200). He thought "How much the destiny of man had still / Hung upon single persons: that there was . . . / One nature . . . / That, with desires heroic and firm sense, / A spirit thoroughly faithful to itself" could be "as an instinct among men"—and "at this time" (when he was in France) he would "willingly" have taken up service in a "cause so great, however dangerous" (*Prelude* 10.155–169; 152–154).⁵

Writing this account of his 1792 ruminations ten years later, Wordsworth frames them in the political context of the September massacres which followed the Parisian overthrow of the monarchy in the uprising of

10 August, but he conflates this “moment” with the Robespierre crisis a year later, and we are all too ready to leap to the conclusion (as many writers would subsequently do) that the September bloodiness shook Wordsworth out of his youthful bliss about the Revolution.

But in the wider context we must realize that Wordsworth’s sequential response to the immediately famous “days” of August and September 1792 could not have been much different from the responses of the other British in Paris that autumn. And it should be helpful to turn for a moment for documentation to the responses of Wordsworth’s friend James Watt, who was equally “hot” and who seems, as the war fears and the violence increased, not to have cooled at all.

When Watt arrived in Paris early in the year, he and his companion, with letters of introduction from Joseph Priestley, were very civilly received by “Mr de la Rochefoucauld”—an aristocrat who had already dropped his title—who introduced them to Mr. Lavoisier, at whose house they met several “first rate Chemists.” But “not a word of Chemistry was there spoken, they are all mad with politics: we have not met anywhere with such a set of enragés.” In July, Tom Wedgwood, another Anglo-Franc writing from Paris to his father, reported: “I lodge here in the same house with young Watt—he is a furious [enragé] democrat . . . Watt says that a new revolution must inevitably take place, and that it will in all probability be fatal to the King, Fayette, and some hundred others. The 14th of this month will probably be eventful.” And then this: “He means to join the French Army in case of any civil rupture.” Here was another “philosophical” warrior.

The “second revolution” did take place, on 10 August, without fatality to the King or Fayette, but with blood shed when the “600 men from Marseilles who know how to die” marched upon the Tuileries to liberate the King (defended by Swiss mercenaries). This was a planned and visibly “necessary” affair; if the “people” were to rule, the King could not remain sealed off from them. This action troubled only the few committed “enemies of the people.” But less than a month later came (unplanned, unless invisibly: one could subsequently condemn any enemy as having plotted it) the September massacres. For James Watt’s reaction, we have his letter to his father of 5 September, the fourth day of the massacres: “I am filled with involuntary horror at the scenes which pass before me and wish they could have been avoided, but at the same time I allow the absolute necessity of them. In some instances the vengeance of the people has been savage & inhuman.” He

gives the instance of a princess dragged naked through the streets and her head “stuck upon a Pike . . . and shown to the King & Queen.”

The apparently inevitable sequel, seeming to come as a surprise to all, was the discovery that France had become a Republic! On 21 September, Wordsworth, still in Orléans, is believed to have attended a celebration in honor of the shining new Republic of France. In Paris that afternoon, the members of the National Assembly, suddenly looking around, saw that the quorum present had the authority to constitute themselves the new Convention, “an assembly of philosophers occupied with preparing the happiness of the world,” as one speaker declared. The fall of the Bastille had been a glorious day, but this was a transformation. Rejoicing at the new Republic was joined by celebrations of the success of the revolutionary armies at Valmy, on 20 September, which halted the congregated might of French royalists and Prussians led by the Duke of Brunswick’s “starry hosts” (as Blake called them).

Wordsworth defines this as “the time in which enflamed with hope, / To Paris I returned” (*Prelude* 10.38–39). And there he found a new swarm of British visitors, already beginning to talk of a renewal of the English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh revolutions that might bring all free nations into a harmonious “philosophical” commerce. Theoretically Wordsworth was on his way to London, to draw upon his bit of inheritance (because he and Annette Vallon, in Blois, were expecting the infant who arrived in December and was named Caroline). But he stayed for many weeks, inevitably caught up in the rejoicing of the gathering British, who by November could organize themselves as a philosophical vanguard for the liberation of the British Commonwealth, or whatever other goals they variously envisioned.

On 29 September the Convention established a committee to write a constitution for the new Republic; its members would include Tom Paine, who had come over from England just in time, recommending as he left that the British people summon a Convention of their own. Paine apparently had the impression that the British people were also ready for a great leap. And indeed many shared that impression. The French Revolution had been from the beginning what Gwynn Williams, in his *Artisans and Sans-culottes*,⁶ calls “an energising myth,” though “it stood at some distance from the British popular movement.” Then suddenly “that distance abruptly disappeared,” and in late September new members began to “pour into the divisions” of the London Corresponding Society—and of

every society which was unmistakably "popular," precisely at that moment when "respectable" sympathisers were falling away in droves. . . . For the British popular movement, the French Revolution which counted was that of 10 August 1792 followed by a French Convention and a Republic based on manhood suffrage, with a sans-culotte as its most vivid image.

To the head of the movement . . . swept the London Corresponding Society, Burke's "Mother of all Mischief." Its constitution was almost *Rousseau-ist* in its direct democracy and unlimited numbers, its penny weekly subscription, local division, its members' right to recall delegates and to ratify committee decisions. Members took it seriously. (67-71)

Wordsworth's British associates in Paris must have felt right in the midst of this upsurge, for an increase in the numbers and the commitment of British visitors was a part of the same breakthrough. A few had come over at each stage of the Revolution, to watch the excitement or share in it. But Paine and the British radicals who accompanied him this September were the crest of a large wave. By November 1792 there were in Paris enough English republicans—a suitable term for the common spirit among them—to organize themselves formally as "The Friends of the Rights of Man associated at Paris," informally the "British Club," with a Directory in which John Oswald, a Scottish member of the Jacobin Club and, by now, commander of a volunteer battalion, served at times as secretary. (Wordsworth, who used Oswald's name and some particulars of his career in his *Excursion* and *Borderers*, could conceivably have done so without ever meeting him or even seeing him in action, since his legendary career was widely known in both London and Paris; yet a Paris meeting is most likely.) Paine was both helping write a republican constitution and cooperating with the war office to obtain French assistance for an uprising of armed volunteers in Dublin. Oswald was now officially drilling volunteers in Paris and probably instructing other drillmasters. He probably also found time to introduce Dr. William Maxwell, a delegate from the London Corresponding Society and Horne Tooke's older Society for Constitutional Information, to Minister of War Servan, in late August.

Maxwell offered to equip a company of sharpshooters with rifle-bored guns—as he later explained in a letter to Servan's successor, Pache. Max-

well returned to England "to negotiate in Birmingham for the supply of pikes, guns and daggers,"⁷ payment for which he had agreed should be deferred till the end of the war. Among the sympathetic British who had to stay home but expressed their sympathy concretely was Robert Burns, who sent cannon which, as an exciseman, he had taken from a smuggling vessel he had helped to capture. (He had sent these to Paris in February, actually, considerably in advance of the main wave.)⁸

The increasingly serious group of British in Paris in this period left very little record of their political discussions, and even the British spy reports of their doings survive mainly in meager summary. Conversations in the well-known salons of Helen Maria Williams and her lover, John Hurford Stone, and of such whiggish Parisians as Lavoisier and Manon Roland are seldom more than sketchily reported; knowing that Watt and Oswald visited them—and conjecturing that Wordsworth did too—tells us little of what they talked about. But the British Club members left a fair amount of evidence of their views—though rather little of their intentions. Oswald's public declaration in February 1793—in a Jacobin Club meeting the record of which has only recently surfaced—to the effect that a group of French Jacobins had been planning an invasion of England in October implied that there had been British among them.

Most of what we know of the organization and composition of the British Club comes from spy reports and the researches a century ago of John G. Alger.⁹ Having met with increasing seriousness after November, the club gave formal notice in the *Moniteur* of 5 January of its formation and its intention to meet twice a week, as apparently it had been doing for some time. The British spy, Captain George Monro, reported on 17 December that "Mr. Frost has left his house [White's Hotel, meeting place of the club] and seldom makes his appearance. He is, however, one of the society"; also that the "party of conspirators" have definitely "formed themselves into a society." The poet Robert Merry had presided over a meeting the day before, and a Dr. George Edwards had arrived to join Maxwell.¹⁰

Dr. Edwards, an admirer of Franklin's theories of medicine, would present his works and an outline for a constitution to the Convention in 1793. Joining Maxwell may have meant joining him in the French army, or perhaps simply joining his English faction in the society (i.e., those focusing on England). On 27 December (on the other hand) Monro reported that "many of the party had become friends of royalty"—wanting to keep a role

for a king in the British Constitution if not the French? Or simply opposing the guillotining of King Louis (their more probable position)? Doubtless there were some, on days when they could believe that a liberal reform of the British Constitution was a likely prospect, who had come to believe, as they fraternized with the French people, in the approach of a Federation of the Free Nations of Britain, the United States of America, and a Republic of France. (The very idea terrified Edmund Burke.) But there were still many "who would stand at nothing to ruin their country," that is, who still hoped for a British revolution. On the last day of the year Monro described the remnant of the club as "beneath the notice of any one, struggling for consequence among themselves."

Alger, summarizing further, reports thus: With few exceptions they were "heartily tired of politics and addresses. Tom Paine's fate [he was tried in London in absentia 18 December and declared an outlaw] and the unanimity of the English [against France—no London sansculottes were showing their faces] has staggered the boldest of them, and they are now dwindling into nothing." On 11 January 1793 another address was advocated by Paine but was so warmly opposed that "the dispute nearly ended in blows. I cannot tell how it ended, as things are kept very secret" (Alger, *Paris*, 330–331).

Henry Redhead Yorke tells us the particulars. The address invited the Convention to liberate enslaved England. He opposed it, and "we carried it"—that is to say, the address was rejected—"by a majority of one." It was, however, again brought forward, whereupon Yorke and Johnson (a young surgeon from Derby, who had accompanied Yorke to Paris) drew up a remonstrance and seceded. This second address was presented to the Convention on 22 January (the day after Louis's execution), but I have not found it in the National Archives.

Alger proceeds to make a tally of the club membership at this time:

Thomas Muir, the Scotch advocate afterwards transported to Botany Bay [for his part in organizing a "National Convention" in Scotland in December], arrived in Paris on the 20th January 1793, and no doubt joined the club. . . . Sampson Perry, militia surgeon and journalist, who, to avoid a press prosecution, fled to Paris in December 1792, must also have belonged to the club. Paine, invited to the Hotel de Ville to dine with Petion, Dumouriez, Santerre, Condorcet, Brissot,

Danton, Vergniaud, Sieyes, and others took Perry with him. Perry also made acquaintance, at the receptions of Madame Lavit, with Cloots, Couthon, Herault, David, and Laignelot, a Paris deputy. This last ultimately procured his release. Perry, at the instance of Herault, sent a female relative and her friend to England, with letters to Sheridan and other Opposition leaders, in the view of initiating an agitation for peace.

(Alger, *Paris*, 361–362)

(Actually, the British Club did not collapse until the spring of 1793, and then not simply because the members could not agree on a course of action, but because war between Britain and France was swiftly rendering the options for any concerted action problematic; members fled home, or joined the French army, or remained in Paris in increasing isolation. When the “year of the French” finally came, militarily, in 1797, the thrust was invasion—of Ireland, with only a brief feint toward England—and not much insurrection anywhere.)

Perhaps the focus of the spies for the British government, some of whose reports for 1792 survive, was strategically the wisest one. Though toward the end of 1792 there was alarming news that the American poet Joel Barlow had offered the services of British shoemakers to keep French armies shod, the British spies seem to have been more concerned about the menace of revolutionary propaganda than about military assistance. A letter summarizing spy reports for Lord Auckland, British ambassador to Holland, reports Paine’s appointment to the “executive government” (i.e., the Constitution Committee) and describes Dr. Priestley as “the great adviser to the present ministers, being consulted by them on all occasions” (Priestley did not even go over to France). But most alarming is the spy’s discovery that

there are also 8 or 10 other English and Scotch who work with the Jacobins and in great measure conduct their present manoeuvres [Frenchmen, presumably, could not have been clever enough]. I understand these gentlemen at present are employed in writing a justification of democracy [!] and an invective against monarchy which is to be printed at Paris, and dispersed through England and Ireland. The names of some of them are Watts and Wilson, of Manchester; Os-

wald, a Scotsman; Stone, an Englishman, and Mackintosh who wrote against Burke.¹¹

What were these British advisors to the Jacobins preparing to publish? I can see two possibilities. A manifesto which justified the Revolution had been drafted by Oswald for the Jacobin Club in September, and its propagation doubtless occupied several such gentlemen. But the still-impressive and in those days alarming work that was being printed in English and advertised in the *Chronique du mois* (a monthly of which Oswald and Paine were among the editors) was a "revised" edition of John Oswald's *Review of the Constitution of Great Britain*, "printed at the English press by Gillet" (an associate of J. H. Stone, who would later use the "English Press" rubric for a shop of his own).

Indeed Oswald's book seems the only likely project these gentlemen were concerned in printing for dispersal "through England and Ireland," the zones of potential revolution, during this autumn. It may be that some of the summarized spy reports did specify both the title and the author's name, thus lighting the fuse that fired Burke's outcry in Parliament the following March against the dissemination by John Oswald of the dangerous doctrine of "democracy" and the hideous concept of liberation from "the yoke of property."

For the rest of 1792, the inspiring formation of the French Republic continued to restrain animosities among spokesmen of the Voice of the People (i.e., politicians), for the single Enemy to be slain was Louis XVI, whose "trial" took the center of attention, while the military situation remained auspicious. And on 6 November the French won a victory that seemed to promise a future of peace, if not relaxation. Here Thomas Carlyle succeeds, in language culled from the contemporary record, in being extremely faithful to what we now call the "perception" of what was happening and to the enthusiasm that inspired the British in Paris to call for a celebration:

The Sixth of November 1792 was a great day for the Republic; outwardly, over the Frontiers; inwardly, in the *Salle de Manège* [meeting hall of the Convention].

Outwardly: for Dumouriez, overrunning the Netherlands, did, on that day, come in contact with Saxe-Teschen and the Austrians; and Dumouriez wide-winged, they wide-winged; at and around the village

of Jemappes, near Mons. And fire-hail is whistling far and wide there, the greant guns playing, and the small; so many green Heights getting fringed and maned with red Fire. And Dumouriez is swept back on this wing, and swept back on that, and is like to be swept back utterly; when he rushes up in person, the prompt Polymetis; speaks a prompt word or two; and then, with clear tenor-pipe, “uplifts the Hymn of the Marseillaise, *entonna la Marseillaise*,” ten-thousand tenor or bass pipes joining; or say, some Forty-thousand in all; for every heart leaps at the sound; and so with rhythmic march-melody, waxing ever quicker, to double and to treble quick, they rally, they advance, they rush, death-defying, man-devouring; carry batteries, redoutes, whatsoever is to be carried; and, like the fire-whirlwind, sweep all manner of Austrians from the scene of action. Thus, through the hands of Dumouriez, may Rouget de Lille [composer of the hymn] . . . be said to have gained . . . a Victory of Jemappes; and conquered the Low Countries.

(Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, 538–539)

When the news of victory reached the Hall of the National Convention, a committee was reporting on “the Crimes of Louis.” When the news reached the British living in Paris, they issued a call for a celebration on Sunday the eighteenth at White’s Hotel. There they sang, danced, drank toasts—and signed a manifesto of solidarity to be read to the Convention. This British manifesto apparently originated as a response by the fraternal nations appealed to in the Oswaldian Jacobin manifesto of 3 October. But by a coincidence of timing, when it was made public on 28 November, it appeared to be an immediate answer, by those assembled at White’s, to a decree issued to the world by the Convention on Monday, 19 November, offering brotherhood and assistance to all peoples seeking freedom.

The toasts drunk at White’s (as officially announced by the club) were not fourteen (the French magic number) but thirteen (the American), though they were *meant* to be fourteen. I number them for convenience:

[1] The French Republic, founded on the rights of man,

[2] The French armies, and the destruction of tyrants and tyranny,

[3] The National Convention,

[4] The Coming Convention of England and Ireland [N.B.],

[5] The Union of France, Great Britain, and Belgium, and may neighbouring nations join in the same sentiments,

[6] The Republic of Men, accompanied by an English song to the air of the "Marseillaise," composed by an English lady—probably the woman who sang it, Helen Maria Williams, Wordsworth's "contact",

[7] The dissolution of the Germanic Circle and may their inhabitants be free,

[8] Abolition of hereditary titles throughout the world (proposed by Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Sir R. Smyth),

[9] Lord E. Fitzgerald and Sir R. Smyth,

[10] Thomas Paine, and the new way of making good books known by royal proclamations and by prosecuting the authors in the King's Bench,

[11] The Women of Great Britain, particularly those who have distinguished themselves by their writings in favour of the French revolution, Mrs. [Charlotte] Smith and Miss H. M. Williams,

[12] The Women of France, especially those who have had the courage to take up arms to defend the cause of liberty, *citoyennes* Fernig, Anselm, &c [this would have to include Théroigne de Mericourt and Etta Palm],

[13] Universal Peace, based on universal liberty.¹²

The most formal action of the banquet at White's Hotel was the signing of an Address to the National Convention by fifty British citizens resident in Paris, chosen by votes of the whole group (about a hundred persons in all). Among those present but not nominated we are certain of Tom Paine, not chosen since he was a member of the Convention being addressed; Helen Maria Williams, who sang; and Henry Redhead Yorke. Almost certainly Sampson Perry was there, and Thomas Christie of the London Corresponding Society; possibly Wordsworth, but not Mary Wollstonecraft (who arrived in Paris too late).

Some reports add that "Sir Robert Smith and Lord E. Fitzgerald renounced their titles, and a toast was proposed by the former . . . : The speedy abolition of all hereditary titles and feudal distinctions" and that "General Dillon proposed 'The people of Ireland; and may government profit by the example of France, and Reform prevent Revolution.'" (This "reform" proposal was dropped from the official list, obviously to keep the focus on revolution.)

A report to London by the British spy Monro noted that Maxwell, one of

those present, was still negotiating with the war minister for the command of a company in the French service. Monro had not noticed that among the several French officers and deputies at the banquet was the Irish general Arthur Dillon, of the French war office. We know that Dillon was in contact with Stone and Paine and, probably, Oswald. In January 1793 Oswald would advocate—in confidence to the French war office—an invasion of London, Oswald and Dillon agreeing on the figure of sixty thousand troops to be subsidized by France.

The completely predictable event of 21 January, the execution of King Louis XVI (with Oswald's volunteers, men and women, dancing around the guillotine), led swiftly to declarations of war and the cessation of free travel across the Channel, which many of our activists had not foreseen as inevitable, having focused their expectations on a different goal. With historical hindsight it has been easy to conclude that those in France or England who congratulated each other on the close approach of a union of free nations were unrealistic—blind or stupid, or at least badly misinformed. Future historians may easily draw similar conclusions about the peace movements of the present—if any live to write history.

The air was, indeed, full of misinformation—and anxiety about it. In the White's Hotel address we find a paradoxical combination of confidence in majority British sentiment and a need to have a poll of that opinion. In subsequent meetings of the British Club—which continued, more or less secretly, for a month or two after the declarations of war against each other by the governments of France and Britain in early February—the guiding spirits of the club again and again decided (a) that a British revolution was now inevitable and (b) that one or two of them should hurry back to London, or Dublin, to find out the state of the political atmosphere. This sending of delegates had begun early in the winter; it is plausible to conjecture, though no evidence can be found, that Wordsworth's sudden acting upon his oft-delayed decision to go back to London in December to raise cash, even while the birth of his child was approaching, was understood by Oswald and others of the club to be coincident, at least, with the wish for a fresh poll.

As François Furet observes, in *Interpreting the French Revolution*, the

outbreak of the war between the French Revolution and the rest of Europe is probably one of the most important and telling *problems*

[emphasis added] in the history of the Revolution. The war . . . was *accepted* rather than desired by the European monarchies, despite pressure from the emigres and the French royal family. By contrast, it was desired in France by the court and the social forces that hankered after the Ancien Regime; but in the winter of 1791–2 those forces were far too weak. . . . In reality [by the winter of 1792–1793] it was the Revolution that, over Robespierre's objections, wanted to go to war against the kings. The Revolution, yes. But . . . which one?¹³

Jacques-Pierre Brissot was one of the revolutionaries who saw everything to gain in war with Britain and who often overpowered the counterarguments of Robespierre. And while the legend that Wordsworth while in Paris was a Brissotin rests on shaky evidence—he lived to contradict an assertion that he had lived in the same building as Brissot—it does seem likely that in this winter Wordsworth's interest in philosophical war would align his thinking with the military philosophizing of the staunchest members of the British Club, who continued on into the spring their increasingly quarrelsome dispute as to whether to begin the British Revolution in London or in Dublin—and whether to join it by invitation or start it by an invasion.

Ironically it was a maneuver of the British government that filled the London and Paris journals in December 1792 with misinformation easily mistaken for evidence that insurrections were sweeping England and Scotland. London papers reported that (while nobody else seems to have been looking) attempts had been made to storm the Bank and the Tower of London, à la the storming of the Bastille and, say, the Tuileries. And armed battalions were reported as supporting an elected Convention of Catholics in Ireland. The purpose of these reports was to justify summoning the militia in all counties, a necessary prerequisite for the calling of an emergency session of Parliament to vote funds for war with France (the same stratagem had been used preceding the American war, in December 1774).¹⁴

Thus, just as Wordsworth was moving from Paris to London, in early December or possibly late November 1792, the British who had rejoiced at the destruction of the Bastille were now regaled with tales of a similar threat to the Tower, a similar emblem of tyranny. Some members of the British Club even managed to get a placard pasted up on dead walls in *London*, dated "Paris, December 4." To me this poster smacks of Oswaldian philosophy—perhaps temporarily Wordsworthian. I like to surmise, not quite

seriously, that the poet who in a few months would be writing a pamphlet justifying the execution of Louis (which he decided not to publish, having discovered the less-than-insurrectionary mood prevailing in London after all)—I like to imagine that his mission for the club was to arrange for the printing and posting of these placards as soon as he got to London. They must have been torn down by “loyal” British and their spies soon after posting, but one copy has survived, worth quoting in full:

FRIENDS OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN ASSOCIATED AT PARIS,
DECEMBER 4, FIRST YEAR OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

We whose names are subscribed to this declaration, for the greater part natives of Great Britain and Ireland, and now resident in Paris, sensible of the duties we owe to our countrymen, as well as to the general cause of liberty and happiness through the world, have formed ourselves into a society for the express purpose of collecting political information and extending it to the people at large in the several nations to which we belong.

We are happy that our temporary residence in this enlightened and regenerated capital enables us to become the organ of communicating knowledge on the most interesting subjects, of administering to the moral improvement and social happiness of a considerable portion of our fellow-men, and of undeceiving the minds of our countrymen, abused by the wretched calumnies of a wicked Administration who, in order to perpetuate the slavery of the English, have made it their business to stigmatise the glorious exertions of the French.

We begin with an open and unequivocal declaration of the principles which animate our conduct, and precise definition of the object we mean to pursue, that no individual in any country may mistake our motives or be ignorant in what manner to address us. We declare that an equal Government, unmixed with any kind of exclusive privileges, conducted by the whole body of the people or by their agents, chosen at frequent periods and subject to their recall, is the only Government proper for man; that the British and Irish nations do not enjoy such a Government; that they cannot obtain it until a National Convention be chosen and assembled to lay its foundations on the basis of the Rights of Man; that to effect this great and indispensable object we

will use all the means which reason, argument, and the communication of information can supply; that we will endeavour to remove all national prejudices which it has been the interest of tyrants to excite in order to separate and enslave the great family of Man; that we invite individuals and societies of every name and description in the above nations and elsewhere to a manly and unreserved correspondence with our society; and we pledge ourselves to them and to the universe that no composition or sacrifice extorted from the fears of expiring Oppression shall seduce or deter us from persevering with firmness and constancy in the discharge of the important duty we have undertaken.

Here follow the signatures.

No signed copy survives, but the signers must have included Paine, Barlow, . . . and Wordsworth? The language is impersonal, but all must have agreed to the sober emphasis on enlightenment. The alternative between a government conducted by the people or by their representatives indicates the gap in theory that divided the British and Irish in Paris, the gap in strategy being imposed by the fact, one would suppose, that the Irish already had their insurrectionary battalion, in arms, in Dublin, while it would require invading battalions from France to liberate London.

The intellectual battle was still on when Wordsworth returned to London in December, and he would have found the universal patriots there as positive as those he had left behind in Paris. And even the official British response to the guillotining of King Louis, even the public eruption of mutual war, failed to deprive the British in London of hope and moral righteousness. "In France," wrote one of these in a pamphlet justifying the execution of Louis, a tyrant and murderer, "royalty is no more; the person of the last anointed is no more also, and I flatter myself I am not alone, even in this *kingdom* [the author's italics], when I wish that it may please the almighty neither by the hands of his priests nor his nobles . . . to raise his posterity to the rank of his ancestors and reillumine the torch of extinguished David." The author of this "regicide" pamphlet (as Burke would have called it) was William Wordsworth.