

Imagining a Non-Regicidal Revolution:

Strategies for Poetic Originality in the Revolutionary Books of

The Prelude

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Despite the recent years' fruitful literary scholarship on Wordsworth's commitment to the French Revolution,¹ the so-called revolutionary books of *The Prelude*, Books 6, 9, and 10 in the 1805 version, still resist our desire for complete interpretation with several psychological idiosyncrasies. What strikes us as odd is the almost total absence of reference to the political figure the revolution was originally initiated against, King Louis XVI, throughout the description of the political upheaval, and the dominant atmosphere of chivalrous pastoral in the land where more subversive millenarian passion is expected to be found. As if paralleled to the reader's bafflement in making sense of these difficulties, the lyric narrator seems obsessed with the act of reading and in some crucial moments he seems to place excessive emphasis on the fact that he was not able to figure out the political situation he was thrown into. These puzzling features appear rather trivial at first glance, but when we recall that quite unremarkable features often carry meanings of great moment in Wordsworth, it turns out to be too great a risk to ignore what might be lurking behind those peculiarities. We need a perspective that enables us to reach a more convincing interpretation of the French books and to place them more neatly in the whole scheme of the autobiographical poem.

In this paper I propose that Wordsworth's poetic strategies to secure himself literary originality are implicitly working behind the descriptions of

Revolutionary France, thus what seems to be attributable to actual political predicaments, his enigmatic psychology reflected in the external descriptions, is disguised manifestation of the struggle to win his own unique poetic identity. By following this line of argument, it will be possible to show that those political books in the poem on the growth of the poet's mind form an essential link to the conclusive episode on Mt. Snowdon in Book 13, where he finally reaches definitions of the working of his poetic imagination and gains confidence as a modern poet. My theoretical basis is on Thomas Weiskel's theory of the Romantic sublime. This approach is justifiable at least as far as Romantic or Wordsworthian studies in general are concerned since the sublime occupies the central place in the poetics of British Romanticism, and it is obvious that Wordsworth, too, is deeply involved in this aesthetic concept.² After identifying indications of sublime psychology in Wordsworth, I will start the discussion by explicating the bearing the sublime has on the consciousness of literary originality in the Romantic period and then move on to the mostly unconscious but dominant role it plays in determining the nature of Wordsworth's characterization of the French Revolution.

While reviewing his years in the revolution in Book 10, Wordsworth tells that he "felt a kind of sympathy with power" (416) in "the awe/of unintelligible chastisement" (414-15) that the political event has brought about. The notion that terror stirs up a sense of power in the observer's mind reminds us of the second category of the sublime feeling he elaborates in an essay titled "The Sublime and the Beautiful": "Power awakens the sublime . . . by producing a humiliation or prostration of the mind before some external agency which it presumes not to make an effort to participate, but is absorbed in the contemplation of the might in the external power, & as far as it has any consciousness of itself, its grandeur subsists in the naked fact of being conscious of external Power at once awful & immeasurable"

(354). Although Wordsworth here discusses feelings coming from contemplation of landscape, the process that the mind gains power commensurable to the one originally outside itself, by being once overwhelmed by that external power, is common to those verse and prose passages. This process is further extendible to claim affinity with Immanuel Kant's definition of the dynamical sublime. We read in *The Critique of Judgement* that when we see something menacing and as far as our position is exempt from its direct threat, "the irresistibility of the might of nature forces upon us the recognition of our physical helplessness as beings of nature, but at the same time reveals a faculty of estimating ourselves as independent of nature" (111). As Eve Walsh Stoddard interprets, the dynamical sublime means the mind's ability to resist the bodily fears that seem to threaten the physical safety of the subject. Because we can rise even above our strongest bodily fears, we realize our ability to transcend natural law. Wordsworth's prose fragment can be seen as corresponding with an essential part of Kantian aesthetics in that the mind feels its equality or, in the case of Kant, even superiority to what our sensible nature fears (Stoddard 34). Now that we have reached a working hypothesis: Wordsworth's revolutionary experience as is represented in *The Prelude* can be read in terms of the Romantic poetics of the sublime, the next step is to go on exploring more precisely this aesthetic concept.

In *The Romantic Sublime* Thomas Weiskel subdivides the sublime into two categories, the negative and the positive or egotistical sublime,³ as roughly characteristic of Kant and Wordsworth respectively.⁴ The Kantian negative sublime, which subsumes the dynamical sublime as one of its subcategories, starts its process with the observing mind being overwhelmed by an object physically immense or extremely terrible. The sublime object gives rise to a sense of unattainability or incomprehensibility defeating the imagination's effort to grasp that object through sense perception.

But the subject can feel elation by the fact that in the moment of the perceptual crisis it can receive an idea of totality or infinitude from supersensible reason and thus come to recognize its ultimate destiny in the internal *a priori* realm, because that way it finds “the absolutely great only in the proper estate of the Subject” (Kant 121) not in external nature which causes the subject fear of engulfment by its relative immensity at the outset. This category of the sublime is rightly called negative in that it attains the transcendental dialectically through its opposite, the sensible natural order; yet it is apocalyptic in the strictest sense that it reveals the supersensible totality, the final thing.

The Kantian sublime can be rendered into two different sets of academic terminology. First, it should be noticed that an implicit semiotic process is involved in the Kantian notion. Facing the incomprehensible in nature means experiencing an excess on the plane of signifiers, which cannot find their corresponding signifieds in the subject. And this negative relation of incomprehensibility between external nature and sensible imagination, a relation without signifieds, in turn becomes the signifier referring to imagination’s relation to supersensible reason. Consequently, the mind’s inability to grasp the object wholly becomes a symbol or sign of its relation to the transcendental order. Whatever may be revealed in this symbolic signification, it should always be accompanied by a sense of nature’s death inasmuch as the revelation of the transcendental is always destined to be at the expense of perceivable reality, or to presuppose failure on sensible imagination’s part.

The other relevant frame of reference is psychoanalysis. Explicating the intertextual dynamics behind Edmund Burke’s *Enquiry*, Weiskel brings to light the unconsciously repressed patricidal desire and resulting guilt in the Burkean concept of terror. . . . When we feel threatened in the sublime moment, what we are exposed to and then released from is the danger of an

unconscious fantasy of patricide. This process involves castration anxiety as well because terror, or the fear of injury or pain as Burke defines it, is genetically and synecdochically related to castration anxiety. If the ego wants to deal with this Oedipal crisis successfully, it has to adopt a strategy equivalent to the semiotic revelation we have seen in the previous paragraph, that is, a strategy to introject the power of the superego from which castration anxiety derives as its own by identifying with that father figure.

The psychoanalytic point of view evinces an important aspect of the sublime. Harold Bloom theorizes that modern poets suffer from “anxiety of influence” from their awareness that something of great importance has been already achieved by great precursor poets, so, as belated poets alienated from the absolutely original principle, they cannot by rights claim originality. He propounds rhetorical strategies those poets adopt to cope with this quasi-Oedipal predicament. As Weiskel finds in a passage from Burke, the sublime, too, shows a desire for originality through a kind of supererogatory identification with an immense external object or a passage from a great literary figure. Supererogatory, because both the transcendental realm revealed by a semiotic revelation and the superego precipitated in the subject’s unconscious are greater in strength than the external entities on which they are modeled, so the power derived ultimately from those internal agencies should necessarily be greater than the ones residing in the external objects. If the subject can go through the sublime process successfully, it can attain the absolutely original from within itself. What should be further noted in this perspective is that the other dichotomic pair in the concept of the sublime, the rhetorical and natural sublime, can be treated as the same thing; for what causes poets anxiety in both cases is ultimately the absolute authority of the Word, the Deity evoked by nature’s grander aspect in one,⁵ and a greater precursor who has already been possessed of the authority of the Word in another.

The second category of the sublime we should consider is Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime. It can be named positive, too, since it has nothing to do with the dialectical structure we have found in its negative counterpart. Instead of the noumenal reason, the phenomenal or sensible ego is aggrandized until it subsumes all otherness, all possibility of negation. Semiotically, this process commences with an excess of the signified inside the subject. In this structure the ego refuses to recognize injunctions of prohibition from the superego or even the existence of that father figure so that it can enjoy a narcissistic world where there are only Mother Nature and the ego being harmonious with and aggrandizing each other. In contrast to the fact that the Kantian scheme is a three-term structure of the ego, the father or the superego, and the object of desire or Mother Nature, this positive version is defined as a purely duplex order consisting only of the ego and the mother. Hence it is characterized as a fictional stage which will not proceed to the Oedipal phase by refusing intrusion of the father or symbolic law. This is surely fiction or a fantasy because we cannot ignore the Oedipal situation if we claim ourselves to be speaking subjects in the symbolic order; yet as a defense to anxiety of influence it proves to be the only tactic which reflects the poet's most genuine desire to be purely original, as it can provide him a fictional but ideal version of originality by never coercing him into surrender to the superior presence. Free from castration fear, the only anxiety in the egotistical sublime is that of deprivation, the loss of what is already possessed. The ego, as a reaction formation, further tries to augment itself in time and either directs its way for an ideal ego posited somewhere in the future, or takes the opposite path and strives retrospectively to recover the original innocent condition supposed to be present in the past. These two quite diverse directions, desire and memory, mean the same as both are acts to compensate for the loss in the present moment and to crystallize the continuous identity over time.

Weiskel concludes his book by analyzing the two categories of the sublime placed one behind the other in the sixth book of *The Prelude* contradicting each other and defying all possibility of compatibility. The “Simplon Pass” passage is a typical instance of the negative sublime. The ruling principles of the scene are “the great apocalypse” (570) and “eternity” (571), concepts intimating the imminent epiphany of God. The whole landscape, therefore, is being forced to converge into unity or oneness which is an attribute of the absolute Deity. But this dynamic relationship is not based on anything intrinsic in the natural imagery on the scene; rather the landscape and the idea of unity are tied only by the artificial copula, “like” (568), which implies that the process requires a symbolic or semiotic interpretation.

What is conspicuous in these lines is a total absence of the Wordsworthian egotism. “The Simplon Pass” may be a perfect achievement of the negative sublime, but somewhere in the process the necessary surrender to the father figure obliges the egotistical poet to annihilate his strong self completely. If Wordsworth’s imagination is “consciousness of self raised to apocalyptic pitch” as Geoffrey Hartman defines (17), here the poet is encountering the most terrible crisis in his poetic career, complete loss of the self. To cope with this predicament, the poet has to reconfirm his strong self-consciousness before he proceeds into the pass. The paragraph depicting the sudden uprise of autonomous imagination placed just before the Simplon Pass passage is a defense formation against the terrible experience in the defile. With the lines of the negative sublime as the context, we can understand the reason underlying the exigency for this “unfathered” (527) imagination. It is only by rejecting the Oedipal order momentarily by this tour de force that Wordsworth can protect his fictional but absolute originality as a poet intact.

This confrontation of the two antithetic versions of the sublime makes

the two fundamental analytical keys we have found in Weiskel's theory graphically clear. First, in the negative sublime, semiotic interpretation presides over the sublime moment, whereas the egotistical version never reaches to the symbolic revelation by remaining in the realm of sense perception or imagery, as suggested by the fact that the mind's "greatness" (536) brought to light in imagination's uprising does not reside in "the invisible world" (536) but in "the strength/Of usurpation" (532-33), that is, on this side of the phenomenal-supersensible boundary. Second, egotistical sublimity with its rejection of the Oedipal order necessarily wills to regress into the two-term fictional space of Mother Nature and the ego, refusing the father's intrusion. With these analytical clues I can now go on to examine *The Prelude's* French Revolution to demonstrate that the dynamics found in that part of the poem between the Oedipal structure's revelation and repressive impulses against that revelation is an instance of conflict between the two originality-seeking strategies we have just examined.

Revolutionary France in Book 6 is characterized by narcissism and the literary archetype of the *locus amoenus*.⁶ Although we witness "France standing on the top of golden hours, /And human nature seeming born again" (353-54), this does not necessarily mean that the poet is thinking of a genuine millenarian enterprise which, as defined by Jean Servier, can be implemented only by subverting the patriarchal authority (Servier 347-59). Rather the whole situation is regressively oriented towards enclosed paradisiacal topography characteristic of the "sequestered villages" (367) the traveler Wordsworth chose his way through. In the Arcadian setting of spring the surrounding scenes are furnished with necessary ingredients of the archetypal pleasant place: a veiled indication of flowers in "fragrance" (369), elm trees and their umbrage, a breeze suggested by "rustled" (373) elms, and the River "Soane" (385). It is a place of bliss and harmony where "joy of one/Is joy of tens of millions" (359-60). The dance scenes where

greatness of itself if it wants to go on completing the unfinished process of the negative sublime.

Wordsworth's interest in the act of interpretation around this time is apparent even from the purpose of his visit to France: "To speak the language [French] more familiarly" (9. 37). What is conspicuous throughout his stay in France, however, is failure in reading the situations he is in. On our theoretical ground, this can be construed as a psychological defense since it can keep him from advancing into the Oedipal order, or at least make him unaware of what he is really anxious about. Since his arrival in France, he "stared and listened with a strangers ears" (9. 55) showing eagerness to figure out the political situation. Yet, as he "was unprepared/With needful knowledge" (9. 92-93) and "never chanced/To see a regular chronicle" (9. 100-1), everything around him seems "loose and disjointed" (9. 107) and never turns into a transparent sign or symbol.

His strategy is to turn his Cambridge days reminiscently into an ideal community marked by equality and fraternity and then to project this alma mater together with memories of his benign native country onto the landscape of a nascent French Republic. Consequently the revolution, seeming "nothing out of nature's certain course" (9. 253), can, if only provisionally, be concluded to remain inside the narcissistic framework of the mother and the ego alone. In this respect, even his friendship with a republican soldier, Michel Beaupuy, shares similar idealization. Given his association with "an old romance, or tale/Of Fairy" (9. 307-8) which is probably due to his noble lineage, it is no wonder that conversations with this French officer evoke a feeling of "chivalrous delight" (9. 503), which furthers Wordsworth's fixation in narcissism by helping "mitigate the force/Of civic prejudice, the bigotry . . . of a youthful patriot's mind" (9. 499-501) and attenuating his enmity toward the *ancien régime*.⁷

However, as long as a revolution means the people's rebellion against

monarchy, it cannot help leading to recognition of the three-term Oedipal order including the king, or the symbolic father. Thus the duplex world so far retained by interpretive failures and by superimposition of the idealized past begins to collapse unexpectedly with the appearance of a pseudo chivalrous romance titled "Vaudracour and Julia." This family romance presents a doomed love affair between an aristocratic youth and a middle-class girl, his father's order forbidding their relationship, Vaudracour's rebellion against his father, and his final surrender to his father accompanied by the abandonment of the loved one. The story is the first occasion in the French books to introduce the father figure as the third term in the poet's world. By defining Vaudracour's love affair as an act of turning "aside/From law and custom" (9. 602-3) and entrusting "himself/To Nature" (9. 603-4), the tale makes it explicit that the law symbolized by the father is not subsumable in nature, but, quite to the contrary, a principle completely antithetical to the natural order. The father's injunction, equivalent to that of the political authority, intensifies the Oedipal tension:

The father threw out threats that by a mandate
 Bearing the private signet of the state
 He [Vaudracour] should be baffled of his mad intent. (9. 666-68)

It is exactly according to the Kantian scheme that "from this time the youth/Conceived a terror" (9. 669-70).

We can understand that Wordsworth as the poem's lyric narrator undergoes the same kind of sublime process when in the eleventh book he encounters the first "spot of time," if we read this episode following Weiskel's ingenious interpretation. Having lost sight of his guide and his way at the same time, the boy Wordsworth unexpectedly comes across a site where formerly a murderer was executed, the evidence of which is

shown by the murderer's name, "the monumental writing" (11. 294), still not defaced on the turf. It is a place in nature, but is characterized by death, the law of death for death sacrifice, and signifiers such as "writing," "name" (293), and "characters" (300). These peculiar features of the site mean that it is a place where the order of nature and the order of law are unusually contiguous. Wordsworth, until this moment only Nature's child, is facing the law or the father principle. He is stepping outside of the egotistical realm into the Oedipal world and receiving an intimation of death from the imminent revelation triggered by signifiers inscribed in the natural landscape. At this crucial moment his egotistical sublime is leading to the advent of the negative sublime. The product of the breakthrough is of course "the visionary dreariness" (11. 310), that ineffable but powerful emotional charge which falls on the landscape around the poet. The trajectory of his ego is from the order of nature to that of law, then finally back again to nature. The process is, nevertheless, mostly unconscious to him since what he experiences is only the fact that a revelation occurs in the recognition of the signifier and what is actually revealed is not known to him. "The visionary dreariness" remains devoid of "colours and words" (11. 309) with which Wordsworth should represent it. Yet this commitment to the negative sublime eventually gives him "the spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam" (11. 321) and "the power" (11. 324) by which his mind is "nourished and invisibly repaired" (11. 264) and "pleasure is enhanced" (11. 265). In this complex but ultimately auspicious episode of a liminal crossing, Wordsworth can be possessed of the power from the symbolic father and secure himself his own poetic identity or original creativity. An instance of successful sublimation is dramatized in the episode, as it were (Weiskel 167-85).

Vaudracour, in contrast, obviously defeated by the castrating threats from the father, exemplifies an instance of unsuccessful sublimation. After

accidentally killing one of his father's men, Vaudracour voluntarily abandons Julia because of his guilty feeling. As is implied in his confession to Julia, "A murderer, Julia, cannot love/An innocent woman" (9. 709-10), he feels internal necessity to leave her as well as external legal injunctions. I read this continence of his as a sign of his castration fear threatened by his father. The resultant emasculated ego's total subjection to the father is apparent in his checking Julia from indicting his father and in his description that "thought/Unfilial, or unkind, had never once/Found harbour in his breast" (9. 715-17). Toward the ending of the tale he loses his illicitly begot baby and his speech at once: "he never uttered word/To any living" (9. 912-13). This suggests that it is not off the mark to assert that the romance can be read as a metapoetic parable standing for the poet's struggle with his precursor, his defeat, and the loss of his voice following the defeat; in other words, the tale allegorizes the modern poet's attempt to internalize his precursor poet's literary originality, its failure, and the resultant plight in which the poet loses his literary identity by being deprived of his own poetic voice. Therefore it is not ironic even if at the very end of the story "the voice of freedom, which through France/Soon afterwards resounded" (9. 931-32) cannot rouse Vaudracour from his imbecile state. This reference to the French Revolution, together with the whole "Vaudracour and Julia" story, is instrumental to inscribe the millenarian subversive nature of the political incident in *The Prelude's* discourse and suggests that as long as Wordsworth sees himself as a sympathizer with the revolution, his destiny is to recognize his position as the rebellious son in the Oedipal order in which the father is the indispensable third term. In this sense, "Vaudracour and Julia" prefigures the traumatic scene of recognition recorded in the next tenth book.

Book 10 begins with mentioning Louis XVI taken in custody. The appearance of the king in this stage of the book announces that the revolu-

tion as a historical event and as the poet's internal experience is entering a new crucial phase;⁸ for his absence so far in Wordsworth's narrative of the revolution is probably due to the successful repressive effort on the poet's part so as to retain himself in the pre-Oedipal narcissistic phase. We see the pattern of an interpretive attempt and its failure again in his act of looking upon the recent battle field, "the square of Carousel" (10. 47), "as doth a man/Upon a volume whose contents he knows/Are memorable but from him locked up, /Being written in a tongue he cannot read" (10. 49-52); but this time the repression is followed by nightly feelings of terror which almost reaches the intensity of revelation:

But that night

When on my bed I lay, I was most moved
And felt most deeply in what world I was.

.....

The fear gone by

Pressed on me almost like a fear to come.
I thought of those September massacres,
Divided from me by a little month,
And felt and touched them, a substantial dread. (10. 54-66)

The meaning of the political incident that has not emerged on consciousness by dint of interpretive repression returns to Wordsworth in the form of terror, threatening him to realize the subversive aspect of the revolution. The exclamatory line, "Sleep no more" placed immediately after this nightmarish vision is a quotation from the second scene of the second act in *Macbeth*, where Macbeth himself is tortured by the same hallucinatory cry after his regicide. It is no doubt that Wordsworth is distressed by a similar guilt to that of the Shakespearean character with this intertextual reference in our consideration (Roe 74-75). Yet, it does not necessarily mean the

defense mechanism ceases working here. Still at this stage the poet does not consciously recognize the regicidal nature of the revolution. Together with this, when we think of those facts that the arrival of the terror is not perfectly immediate but slightly delayed and that the key phrase indicating potential revelation of the collective patricide is only a quotation and makes signification of the expected revelation of the Oedipal order only be indirect, we should conclude that genuine symbolic interpretation is still repressed.

It has become obvious that Wordsworth is drawing near to the point where he is obliged to be consciously aware of his position as the son in the three-term structure. But it is not until England went to full-scale war against France that he reached this shocking discovery.⁹ As we read in Paulson, this was the very first incident that conferred to him the explicit identity of a revolutionary (Paulson 270):

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. (10. 233-37)

As long as he insists himself to be a republican sympathizer, he has to assume the role of the rebellious son toward his fatherland, England, which is now in open war against France. In the church scene where among English people praying the nation's victory to "their great Father" (10. 269) the poet alone wishes its defeat, we should sense the image of England in "Father" as its secondary reference. This political juncture is coincided with the Terror in France, which is figured in a monstrous child playing with a guillotine (Paulson 269-70). Whether it is to his willingness or not,

Wordsworth shares something essential with Jacobin France, that is “ever thirsty, as a child” (10. 337) because of his position in the Oedipal order. Now his narcissistic world portrayed cheerfully in Book 6 is facing disintegration with the foundation for its existence being undermined. Hence it is not a mere accident that around this time he “scarcely had one night of quiet sleep” (10. 373). The line of my argument rightfully demands the corollary that this has something to do with the Macbethian insomnia of patricidal guilt the poet suffered in Paris.

The next strategy to cope with the predicament is to indict sacrificially the most typical rebellious son in place of the poet himself in order to purge vicariously his own guilt feeling:

. . . when a traveller
 Chancing to pass, I carelessly inquired
 If any news were stirring, he replied
 In the familiar language of the day
 That, *Robespierre was dead*. Nor was a doubt,
 On further question, left within my mind
 But that the tidings were substantial truth —
 That he and his supporters all were fallen.

(10. 531-38, original emphasis)

In the instances we have seen, semiotic or symbolic readings are always frustrated, which I have interpreted as evincing the ego’s resistance to receiving a symbolic revelation to prevent itself from proceeding to the symbolic order. In the quotation above, contrarily, the semiotic signification in the form of a casual conversation on Robespierre’s death is accepted without the slightest hint of psychological resistance. It cannot be anything other than the scene’s only difference from the other episodes, the death of the rebellious son, that makes this interpretive act unusually

unproblematic.¹⁰ In terms of the sublime, by getting rid of his more violent French counterpart, Wordsworth can now successfully come to terms with the negative sublime; for Robespierre's vicarious death helps realize a situation resembling that in the Simplon Pass lines without threatening Wordsworth's own ego.

In the following paragraph we read his exulting invocations to "golden times." This as well as the re-emergence of a scene in Book 2 including literal quotations in lines 558 to 566 of the paragraph illustrates that *The Prelude* is beginning to rediscover the Arcadian orientation leading to narcissism. Historically and probably poetically, too, France discontinues its being a violent patricidal child after this crucial incident and puts on "a milder face" (10. 568). The poetic tour de force of the vicarious death seems to allow the poet's revolution to return to that fictional duplex world. However, the notion of the simple regressive turn does not exhaust the possibility of reading. We need to call into mind that Wordsworth himself confesses that he has experienced the Kantian psychology: "amid the awe/Of unintelligible chastisement/I felt a kind of sympathy with power" (10. 414-16). On a superficial level his vicarious murder strategy enables an indulgent retreat into a psychologically more immature stage, but with that Kantian feature in the quotation in mind, we have to conclude that the poet has taken the steps of the negative sublime no matter how deceptive a way he has chosen is. Under the surface of the egotistical sublime there lurks momentous breakthroughs to the truly primary power of the genuinely supreme, for the poet rephrases the sympathetic "power" as "Motions raised up within me, nevertheless, /Which had relationship to highest things (10. 417-18).

Thus far I have followed the two mutually excluding strategies for poetic originality working in the revolution scenes in Books 6, 9, and 10. I have observed that the positive version of the sublime, which is itself a

defense formation in Book 6, becomes almost untenable but finally is secured its place by an ingenious defense tactic. Now I go on to examine the Snowdon episode, the very "Conclusion" part in which the poet reaches the definition of his imaginative faculty, with the same analytical tools I have used in the previous books. This will clarify the relevance the revolutionary experience has to this most crucial episode in the poem and help unravel the function of the originality-seeking strategies in relation to the poem's ultimate cause, poetic imagination.

In that mountain revelation episode at the beginning of Book 13, Wordsworth's midnight climbing on Mt. Snowdon to see the sun rise eventually leads to the intuition of "the perfect image of a mighty mind" (69), or "the imagination of the whole" (65). To put it another way, it is a quest for the external natural origin which is finally turned into one for the poetic origin or literary originality. It is not difficult to see that the episode as a whole is set in a framework of the negative sublime because its fundamental structure that an immense landscape evokes a similar immensity inside the observing subject is the Kantian dialectic and the climber, "as if in opposition set/Against an enemy" (29-30), is no doubt confronting a kind of opponent, an antithetical existence. The absolute authority which occupies the third term in the Oedipal framework is nearly reaching its epiphany in the divine attribute of unity in "one voice" (59) and in the direct appellations of Godhead: "the sense of God" (72) intuited beneath the mighty mind, and "the Deity" (106) as the home for "higher minds" (90). A possible allusion to Milton: "A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved/All over this still ocean" (45-46), indirectly illuminates the fact that behind the mountain landscape absolute monotheic God sits as its ultimate origin, and convinces the reader that if creativity is to be gained for the poet in this site it should be via the negative sublime, or by facing, surrendering to, and identifying with the superior father figure.

However, the regressive drive toward the egotistical sublime is superimposed upon the Snowdon landscape so that the psychological dynamics here are made dualistically fluctuating. The revelation comes in the fortieth line as the moon light “fell like a flash.” But as we usually expect a revelation to do, it does not disclose anything symbolical beyond the logic of the landscape imagery. That possible Miltonic allusion in “a hundred hills” is not transformed into a transparent sign, either. It is true that the mighty mind, the image of which Wordsworth intuits in the scene, is related to the beyond since it “feeds upon infinity” (71), but while holding relation with the symbolic it is obviously not willing to abandon this phenomenal-visual side of the boundary as we read in the later version it is “intent to hear/Its [the dark abyss’s] voices issuing forth to silent light/In one continuous stream” (1850. 14. 72-74). In sum, the strong egotistical pull away from the symbolic realm makes Wordsworth’s “landscapes hover on the edge of revelation without revealing anything” (Weiskel 174).

Thus characterized, the scene is moving toward the fictional but pure form of originality, autogenesis. As illustrated in the transformation of the “One voice” (59) into “the homeless voice” (63), the poet cuts off the path to the transcendental order and implicitly declares himself to be the begetter of his own poetry with no superior principle needed; he is claiming “unfathered” (6. 527) imagination.¹¹ And to further exclude the third term, the partner for imagination in the egotistical sublime, Nature, assumes the principal role to create the Snowdon scene. In spite of “the sense of God” (72) vaguely intuited, it is Nature that works out the whole sublime scene as an “express/Resemblance” (86-87) of the workings of a “function of such [higher] mind” (74), or creative imagination. The Kantian poles of sensible nature and apocalyptic revelation are fused to be subsumed under the working of “the imagination of the whole” (Weiskel 50). Consequently, a typical egotistical world appears where the ego and natural imagery are

indefinitely aggrandizing each other:

. . . the highest bliss
 . . . the consciousness
 Of whom they [higher minds] are, habitually infused
 Through every image, and through every thought,
 And all impressions. (107-11)

And when Wordsworth names this state by those two terms highly charged with political values, “freedom” (121) and “genuine liberty” (122), he again intends to comprehend the cause of the French Revolution within the framework of his egotistical sublimity. With all subconscious breakthroughs into or threats from the Oedipal order, he has succeeded in keeping their recognition submerged in the unconscious and thus protecting his official strategy for originality.

Now we can find in Geoffrey Hartman’s definition of Wordsworthian imagination, “consciousness of self raised to apocalyptic pitch,” a parity far more incompatible than seems for casual reading: the order of the sensible ego that refuses symbolic revelation and apocalyptic intensity that demands the death of sensible nature. If the enigmatic power behind Wordsworth’s great lines derives from invisible breakthroughs from one term to the other in that formulation, it should be no wonder that the exceptionally political books of *The Prelude* give an appropriate clue to shed light to his poetry. It is because that French version of millenarian pursuit hurled threats violent enough to break into the enclosed garden of the poet’s ego. As a historical narrative, the French Revolution is an instance of otherness which *The Prelude* should affirm but eventually deny in order to secure its unique lyric identity (Liu 361). The age is arriving for Wordsworth’s generation when history becomes, however paradoxically, “the structuring matter of their

private lives" (Paulson 252).

Notes

- 1 Nicholas Roe's book-length study gives us the most thorough biographical data and sound surmises on the poet's political attitude and actual activities in the revolutionary days. Based on typical New Historicist methodology, Alan Liu reinterprets Wordsworth's major works as marked by attempts to repress and displace the most conspicuous political figure of the age, Napoleon Bonaparte. My argument takes its methodological position between these two extreme poles of historicism, and has affinity with Paulson and Spivak. Other historicist interpretations I find useful include Chandler, Hopkins, Johnston, and Jonathan Wordsworth.
- 2 The sublime in literature has already been much discussed and substantially documented. In addition to Weiskel's epochmaking book, I am indebted to Monk, Boulton, and Paulson in developing the argument on the sublime in this paper. It is obvious that Wordsworth was deeply interested in this concept since he himself wrote an essay on the topic. See William Wordsworth, "Sublime."
- 3 The phrase, the egotistical sublime, was originally used by John Keats to refer derogatorily to the self-centered personality of Wordsworth. See Keats 387.
- 4 The following theoretical elaboration on the negative and positive sublime is based on Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7 in Weiskel. References to other sources are individually specified.
- 5 Intuiting the sense of God in relative immensity of earthly nature had become possible by the development of "the aesthetics of the infinite" throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Nicolson and Tuveson.
- 6 This literary *topos* is defined together with its essential ingredients in Curtius 183–202.
- 7 As for chivalrous ambience surrounding Beaupuy, see Paulson 267. Paulson sees Wordsworth's repressed relationship with Annette Vallon behind the

- description of Beaupuy. If we accept this argument, it may be contended that falling in love with this royalist woman causes ambivalent feeling toward the revolution and helps induce an aura of romance in Beaupuy's portrayal.
- 8 The beginning paragraphs in Book 10 describe the time around October or November of 1792, shortly after the deposition of the king on August 10, which is "in effect a second revolution" according to the annotation to the Norton edition of *The Prelude*. See William Wordsworth, *Prelude* 360.
- 9 Although the official chronology says that France made a declaration of war on England, actually it is England that had first shown open hostility against the new republic before the war began. See Erdman 38.
- 10 Hopkins' demonstration that the poet, at least in part, sympathetically identifies himself with the Jacobin leader can allow me to beg that discussion.
- 11 This reading is inspired by Leslie Brisman's notion of Romantic autogenesis and his interpretation of the Snowdon passage. See Brisman 337-41, 352.

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Synopsis

Imagining a Non-Regicidal Revolution: Strategies for Poetic Originality in the Revolutionary Books of *The Prelude*

By Ichiro Koguchi

This study is an attempt to explicate two conflicting strategies for poetic originality working behind the French Books of *The Prelude*, based on Thomas Weiskel's theory of the Romantic sublime. The Romantic notion of the sublime is subdivided into the Kantian negative sublime and the egotistical sublime. In the Kantian category, the subject is first overwhelmed by something immense outside itself, but then, recognizing its own internal greatness which is independent of the phenomenal world, receives power greater than the one that resides in the external object. As implied in its dialectical process, this version of the sublime assumes a semiotic or symbolic reading of the transcendental into external phenomena, and at the same time is involved in the Oedipal phase, or struggle for priority with the superior symbolic father, which the subject confronts in external otherness. In terms of literary originality, it can be seen as a way for the modern poet to win a genuinely primary originality surpassing that of his precursor poets'. In contrast, the egotistical sublime is simply an indefinite aggrandizement of the phenomenal ego, excluding the possibility of negation or dialectic; hence there is no

symbolic revelation as in the negative version. Psychoanalytically, the egotistical sublime is a rejection of the symbolic father so as to remain in narcissism. In this sense, it is an attempt to secure a fictional, pre-Oedipal originality.

When we look at the French Revolution in Books 6, 9, and 10 in light of the sublime, their strange features come to make sense as a disguised manifestation of the conflict between the two originality seeking strategies. As the revolution, a millenarian enterprise to subvert the patriarchal authority, compels Wordsworth to recognize his own patricidal wish as a revolutionary, he becomes divided between the drive toward the Oedipal stage and narcissistic regressive wish which his egotistical poetic nature intrinsically demands. This conflict becomes eventually dominated by the former. For, first by a family romance, "Vaudracour and Julia," and then by the commencement of a full-scale war between a nascent republic and the poet's fatherland, England, he is obliged to recognize his identity as a rebelling son. He finds his final tactic to turn away from this Oedipal direction in revealing Robespierre's death, that is, in vicariously killing the most typically rebellious son in the poem. Yet in spite of this seemingly successful but deceptive defense, we still sense in the text vestiges of unconscious breakthroughs into the negative sublime. And it is this paradoxical state that gives Wordsworth's poetry its unusual power.

The paper finds its conclusion in the Snowdon episode. Since this passage identifies poetic imagination in connection with the same kind of conflicts of the negative and egotistical sublime as in the French books, we can infer that those political books, apparently antithetic to the poem's lyric theme, make an essential link to that conclusive passage by intimating the paradoxical nature of poetic originality. History, as otherness to the poet's lyric identity, has threatened him strongly enough to shake his egotistical world and guaranteed his poetry's liminal power.