

## Liberty in Wordsworth's Sonnets

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### Abstract

Wordsworth once declared that for an hour thought given to poetry, he had given twelve to the state of society. However true this declaration might be, it helps to remind us that some of Wordsworth's noblest verse and prose was inspired by political passion.

The most prominent fact about Wordsworth's politics is that he was a trueborn Englishman, and his roots struck deep into English soil. He was country-born and country-bred. Besides, he belonged by birth to the middle class. Thanks to this middle class, upbringing. A sense of moderation governed his course in life and kept him away from committing himself to any definite party throughout his life.

Wordsworth reached maturity without meeting anyone who claimed priority on the account of rank. It is because of this moderate temper coupled with impatience of restrictions that Wordsworth's mind seemed to be a productive soil for the revolutionary notions of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. His interest in public affairs was motivated by the consequence of the American War as well as by the French Revolution. He had been too young, thoughtfully to consider the American War while it was going on. Therefore, when it ended, disbanded men began to return to the lakes. There he met some of these men and heard about others; and from what he saw and heard, he could conceive a horrible sense of war with all the suffering and evils it inflicts on the poor.

On the other hand, in summer 1790, Wordsworth, accompanied by his friend Jones, set off for a walking tour in France and Switzerland – a tour that had significant consequences. Wordsworth landed at Calais on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1790 – the eve of the day on which the king was to swear fidelity to the new constitution, and over-whelm people by a great tide of joy. In November 1791, Wordsworth went off again to France where he visited Paris, Orleans, and Blois in the main. In Blois, he made friendship with Michel Beaupey, a Republican officer in a mess of Royalists. The misery Beaupey witnessed among the extremely poor peasantry converted him not only to a

Revolutionary citizen, but also to a patriot of the world. His heart was very much devoted to the cause of the common people and the poor. No other man, says Coleridge, had as great an influence upon Wordsworth as this benevolent and magnanimous patriot did.

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When the poet wrote “The character of the Happy Warrior”, he had Beaupey in his mind. With his more systematic philosophy, Beaupey came to Wordsworth’s support and turned his unclear idealism into solid faith. Beaupey, a student of Jean Jacques Rousseau, showed much concern in social interests as well as in awakening Wordsworth's consciousness in as far as these interests are concerned. He presented to him the history of humankind in the form of an organism. In October 1792, Wordsworth came back to Paris not deciding whether he should join the Girondins. He says, however, that in his second stay in Paris, he was introduced to a member of the Girondins, the sentimentalists among the revolutionaries. The Girondins lived largely in a world of dangerous idealism, which was soon to bring them to utter destruction after they had fled their country to war. Wordsworth also visited the Jacobins whose going to extremes horrified and disillusioned him. He also witnessed in Paris the scene of horrible massacres but fortunately, he was recalled to England due to lack of funds.

The year he spent in France, therefore, was probably the most exciting in the period of the revolution. It was marked by the defeat of the monarchy, the declaration of the republic, and the September massacres.

While he was in London in 1793, Wordsworth got in touch with Radicals who were followers of William Godwin. Godwin was regarded as the one he might now call a philosophical anarchist. “His ideal was a loose federation of states each so tiny that everyone in it should know everyone else, since argument would be the sole instrument of government, all men being naturally free, rational, perfectible, and (in essentials) equal”, says J.C. Smith (70). Besides, he was a determinist and a believer in experience as the source of all knowledge. Justice, he asserts, is the whole duty of man, and reason is that it is the only organ by which men can discover what is just. Morality is a matter of knowledge, and “utility, as it regards percipient beings, is the only basis of moral and political truth,” says George McLean Harper (255). It is obvious that a society maintaining such views rejects most of the essentials of government. Harper believes that Godwin insists on the fact that “the government is evil, usurpation upon the private judgment and individual conscience of mankind” (256). To many practical political leaders, as well as to Rousseau and Godwin, it seemed that unique function

of government was to secure liberty of action to the individual. Wordsworth was prepared for this conviction of Godwin by his earlier acceptance of Rousseau's doctrine that every individual is by nature independent. Through Wordsworth, this idea was handed on to the American Federalists and to J.S. Mill in particular.

While falling under the spell of Godwin and his followers, Wordsworth wrote his first essay in political thought in the form of a letter to the Bishop of Liandaff. In this essay, Wordsworth defends the cause of the French Revolution and the execution of the King. Turning to Britain, he points out the evils that monarchy and aristocracy bring on. These years were in reality crucial in Wordsworth's life. He was torn between his natural love for his mother country and his newborn passion for the cause of France. He considered the rulers of his country as sinners, as they joined the enemies of the young Republic. Soon his ideal of France was distorted and shaken by the terror, and in 1798, it was completely shattered by the invasion of Switzerland. He came to the conviction that reform must start with the individual.

With the death of Robespierre in 1794, Wordsworth's hopes for France were born anew; his mind resorted to a teacher whose influence upon him had been strong, especially when he wrote his "Descriptive Sketches". This teacher was Rousseau. Rousseau wrote the most powerful work ever penned upon the supreme duty of political obligation: "The Social Contract". This work, as John Herman Randall suggests, "takes as its fundamental problem the attainment of liberty which the middle class so much desired through political government by temperament and his irresponsible life; Rousseau was not prepared to define liberty" (352), with Montesquieu and his followers as obedience to perfect law. He insisted that the actual desires of men must also be taken into consideration. Consequently, he defined "liberty as obedience to law, but to law that the individual freely accepts for himself" (352). In the state of nature, man is free; there is no law, no conditions for social welfare.

Rousseau taught Wordsworth that the corruption of the society is an outcome of man's abuse of his free will, that nature despite this corruption preserved the goodness she had been given by her Creator, and that the way to find happiness was through return to nature. Though some scholars such as Emile Legouis and Mclean Harper declare that Wordsworth was a son of Rousseau, this declaration falls short of making us believe that Rousseau's influence on Wordsworth was lasting and eternal. Wordsworth, nevertheless, preserved the "Rousseau-tic conviction of the need to 'draw out' human nature, the equality of human rights, and the common brotherhood of man", says Melvin Rader (57). Rousseau, concerning his preference of the rustic

and the innocent, as opposed to the sophisticated and the urban, might also have affected Wordsworth.

Among the number of persons who had their marked influence on Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge may be mentioned. In 1797, and at Alfoxden in Somerset, Wordsworth's acquaintance with Coleridge ripened into a warm friendship – a friendship that left its impression on the works of the two poets. Both sympathized with the political moments of the time in favor of a large liberty for Man and against unjust and tyrannical class privileges and distinctions; both showed a common sympathy with the essential tenets that underlay the French Revolution. In brief, they, more or less, imbued each other with the Republican spirit in their political views, reflective thought, and comprehensive vision of life.

Furthermore, John Locke may still be regarded as another influence that affected, to some extent, the political thought of William Wordsworth. Locke stands as the prophet of human nature and the heir of the great Seventeenth century struggles for constitutional liberties, rights, and toleration. He was a convinced Newtonian, for he believed in the methods of scientific rationalism and in the world machine that was their outcome. To him, religion was not an activity of the human soul, but essentially a science like physics. Its value and purpose are solely to provide a divine sanction for a satisfactory human morality, an advantageous and effective motive for the achievement of good. For Locke, the purpose of government is purely secular, to enforce men's rights; it is by no means related to the saving of man's soul.

A church is only a liberal and voluntary society. In other words, Locke's purpose was to defend free action of the rich middle class against absolute monarchy. Locke's natural rights justified constitutional restrictions on government while Rousseau's popular sovereignty supported an actual revolution in what would establish the rule of the majority. Wordsworth's appeal to many of Locke's ideas is well shown in Basil Willey's comprehensive saying that "Locke's doctrine which derived all our knowledge from sensation was capable of serving Wordsworth". Rader believes Wordsworth was working in the spirit and tradition of Locke. Rader says that "Wordsworth rejected Gandy and Inane phraseology and devoted his power to the task of making verse deal boldly with substantial things!... Above all, there was required the conviction that the Inane mate cold worlds of the mechanical philosophy was not the whole reality, that there was a closer bond between the mind and nature than the old dualism could conceive ... and that truth was constituted by the whole soul of man ..." (48-49).

Another significant step in Wordsworth's political career was taken when he went to Germany in the winter of 1798 – 1799. There, his passion for France was utterly dead, and his love for England was extremely intense. However, the England that he loved was that which his eyes had seen, the dear native England of his earliest verse, and not that of history. Moreover, his visit to France in 1802 made his disillusionment with it, which comes with a full circle. The liberator had turned tyrant. Napoleonic France was the enemy and England was, despite all of its faults, the last hope of freedom. Thus, the sonnet became in Wordsworth's hands, as earlier in Milton's, a trumpet to awaken England from her deep sleep and give her strength for the struggle against the tyrant.

Wordsworth wrote about liberty in the form of the sonnet, which, owing to its definite length and rhythm, is regarded as a restrictive form. This restriction, however, coincides with the poet's intrinsic nature to be enclosed with a kind of womb that keeps him living among little farmers, farmers who have their own local government and village community. It is because of this that Wordsworth liked to spend the major part of his life in the Lake District, for it cut him off from the rest of England. Yet in the mountains of the Lake District, in particular, and in all mountains, in general, Wordsworth found a great deal of liberty. His passionate love for nature, especially that manifested in the Lake District, made him stand firmly against all that tried to spoil its purity, beauty, and liberty. Thus, he wrote poems against railways coming to the Lake District.

Wordsworth's success in expressing the theme of liberty in the sonnet form, a theme big enough to be touched on even long dissertations and theses, has much to do with his own belief that sonnets should deal with a variety of subjects. For this reason, in sonnet I of Part II of his "Miscellaneous Sonnets", Wordsworth asks critics not to scorn the sonnet. He believes that it is a key with which Shakespeare could express his personal feelings; a lute in the hands of Petrarch, a pipe in those of Tasso, a cheerful myrtle leaf in the brow of Dante, and means of consolation in the view of Camoens and Milton.

Wordsworth's desire to express the theme of liberty in the limited form of the sonnet springs from his own conviction that too much liberty makes him feel uneasy and agoraphobic. Hence, he asks people whose souls are over-loaded with liberty to find their relief and consolation in the sonnet - the narrow area where the poet in various moods can enjoy himself and lessen his grief, if there were any grief. In Sonnet I of part I of "Miscellaneous sonnets", Wordsworth says:

In Sundry woods, 't was pastime to be bound  
Within the sonnet's scanty plot of ground  
Please if some soul (for such these needs must be)

Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
Should find brief Solace there, as I have found.

In his sonnets, especially those “Dedicated to National Independence and liberty”, Wordsworth expresses his fears of the power of Napoleon as well as his anxiety about the threatened liberties of the people, especially the individual. These political sonnets, which he started to write in 1802, evoke the heroic spirit of a man whose hopes rested, through a period of public danger and disaster, on a firm faith in human goodwill, and on the principle of liberty for both nations and individuals. In these sonnets, Wordsworth deplors the un-natural richness and prosperity generated by the war, which weakened the force of the moral and spiritual life of the upper classes and made them blind to the great values of life. These sonnets reflect the poet's disillusionment with France.

With the change in his feeling about France, there grew a feeling of fear about political and social questions at home. The Wordsworth of 1793 had been an enthusiastic and serious minded republican, a convert to the principles of Beaupey and French political philosophers. The rise of Napoleon, coupled with the dictatorship of Robespierre, modified, but did not destroy, severe judgment of his own country. The sonnets are not republican; and after 1794, the voice of republicanism is no more heard in Wordsworth's writings. Yet he was looking for a new approach in politics. This approach happened to be Miltonic in its severity and hopefulness, patriotic individualistic and human in its field of discourse.

Sonnets I , II , X and XVI of part I of the collection of poems: "Dedicated to National Independence and liberty" are the best representative of Wordsworth's patriotic cry of freedom to fill the ears of his country-men with national consciousness, an echo of its glorified past and hope for a better future. In sonnet I, Wordsworth manifests a natural return of the mind to one's own country, the country whose white cliffs by day and lighthouses at night reminded him that she was still unconquered. Wordsworth feels a newborn pride in his country, a pride that urges him to call his country “Fair star of evening, splendor of the west.” There is no doubt that the “fair star of evening” is just the same one of the morning. Thus, it symbolizes in its dual appearance the perpetual glory of England; for if it sinks a little bit at one time, it will inevitably go up at another. The poet adds that this star is the bearer of light to the whole continent because England is the land of liberty. The sonnet ends with Wordsworth's expression of his strong attachment to England, the country that the French do not love. This expression shows that the rule that France had so long held in his heart was broken. France no longer seemed to him as the champion of liberty. England, in comparison, was a land of freedom. Consequently, he founded his affections upon his own country.

For my dear country, many heart-felt sighs,  
Among men who do not love her, linger here.

[Sonnet I, lines

13-14]

Sonnet III, “composed Near Calais, on the Road leading to Ardves,” contrasts the high hopes, the songs, the garlands mirth, banners, and happy faces of the time “when faith was pledged to new born liberty” with the disheartened state of the French. Wordsworth clearly declares that he himself has not surrendered. In despair, he sings:

Touches me not, though pensive as a bird  
Whose vernal coverts winter hath laid bare.

[Lines 13 – 14]

The theme of his poem is that the hope or faith for national liberty has been destroyed. This destruction has much to do with the reign of Terror at the hands of Robespierre.

Sonnet X, “composed in the valley near Dover, on the day of landing, Aug.30, 1802,” is full of patriotic feelings. Seeing some of the boys in his country engaged in a Cricket-Match, and reflecting upon the waves that break “on the chalky shore”, Wordsworth feels extremely happy. This great happiness satisfies him a great deal, for never before has he felt such happiness while looking “round with joy in Kent’s green vales”. The freshness of the scene Wordsworth appreciates and experiences most joyfully is better understood in the light of the following lines of the sestet:

Europe is yet in bonds; but let that pass,  
Thought for another moment, thou art free,  
My country! And ‘t is joy enough and pride  
For one hour’s perfect bliss, to thread the grass  
Of England once again...

[Lines 9 – 13]

Thus, the scene the poet sees and the sound of waves he hears evoke in his vision of the image of a captivated continent as opposed to that of a free country, namely England.

Wordsworth breathes a stronger faith and hope in sonnet XVI, beginning with “It is not to be thought of that the flood”. Wordsworth declares that it is unthinkable that British liberty should perish in “bogs and sands”. In the sestet of the poem, he enthusiastically affirms that the British people, who speaks the language of Shakespeare and hold the faith and morals of Milton, should choose between freedom and death.

We must be free or die, who speak the tongue.  
That Shakespeare spoke; the faith and morals hold  
Which Milton held.

[Lines 11 – 13]

This change in mood on the part of the poet as regards his support of the British cause is subject to the sensitive soul of Wordsworth, the soul that is full of a strong love for liberty. In other words, Wordsworth means to say that from the very earliest times of English history, there has been a very great river of freedom in England. Yet as soon as this river transcends its ordinary boundaries, it becomes dangerous and ineffective. Wordsworth, however, prefers evil liberty to no liberty at all.

The sestet of the sonnet is a clear example of jingoism – an extreme chauvinism or nationalism. Wordsworth says that the English must live up to their ancestors, to their great heritage and ideals. This is because they are the best people in the world, and they have the finest blood.

..... In everything we are sprung  
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold

[Lines 13 – 14]

Sonnets XI and XII that open with “Inland, within a hollow vale, I stood” and “Two voices are there” may be classified among the group of sonnets described as universally human, in one sense, and nationally patriotic in another. In the former, while sitting upon the Dover cliffs and looking upon France with tender thoughts and sad feelings, the poet and his sister could see the shores as if they were an English lake or a bright river. Having described the sea with its calm water, clear air and power, Wordsworth concludes that though winds blow and waters roll and power exists, one edict remains to give laws to them: it is that by means of the soul only, all nations can be free and noble.

..... Winds blow, and waters roll,  
Strength to the brave, and power, and Deity;  
Yet in themselves are nothing! One decree  
Spake laws to them, and said that by the soul  
Only, the Nations shall be great and free.

[Lines 10 - 14]

Thus, the tone of a new type of freedom is heard in this sonnet, namely spiritual freedom. This type, however, will be better shown in other sonnets, especially those related to the last period of Wordsworth's life.

In sonnet XII, entitled “Though of a Briton on the subjugation of Switzerland”, Wordsworth shows that liberty has two voices: one of the sea and another of the mountain. Liberty has rejoiced in both of these voices through the ages. Napoleon, who by 1802 has conquered practically the whole continent, continued to be a source of trouble to Wordsworth. In this sonnet, Wordsworth draws the attention to the great country of mountains, namely Switzerland, and he seems to be hinting at the barren efforts of the Swiss in their struggle against the invader. Though liberty has been deprived of the powerful voice of the mountain, she is invited by the poet to stick to



the remaining powerful voice of the sea, the voice that is evocative of the great country of the sea-Britain. Thus, the image of liberty represented in the sonnet is based upon a kind of dichotomy, for the image of the sea and that of the mountain symbolize two different kinds of liberty.

As regards the individual type of liberty dealt within the collection of sonnets devoted to national independence and liberty, Wordsworth's Sonnets IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, and XIII was the first to engage our attention in this respect. Sonnet IV, which is a self-questioning sonnet, revolves round the axis of power and wisdom of a good governor. In it, Wordsworth suggests that Napoleon is a kind of mystery; he could not understand him. He asks what kind of good Napoleon did possess. Was he from childhood filled with ambition for power? What knowledge and culture could he gain? Then Wordsworth says that it is not in the battle that a wise governor is trained; a true governor must have not only masculine temper, but also feminine feelings and thoughts. In other words, the poet throughout this sonnet seems to be emphasizing the point that true wisdom is not divorced from affection or family life with its simple human passions and emotion.

Besides, a good ruler must also resort to books, leisure, and not limit his experience to the soldier's barracks.

On the occasion of Napoleon's birthday on August 15<sup>th</sup>, Wordsworth composed sonnet V that begins with "Festivals have I seen that were not names". In this sonnet, a comparison was drawn between the poet's absence of sympathy and his indifference to the occasion, on the one hand, with the noble, though senseless, joy he had witnessed in a prouder time, on the other hand.

My youth here witnessed, in a prouder time;  
The senselessness of joy was then sublime!  
Happy is he, who caring not for Pope,  
Consul, or King, can sound himself to know  
The destiny of man, and live in Hope'

[Lines 10 - 14]

In sonnets VI, VII, and VIII, Wordsworth's revolt against Napoleon's tyranny reaches a higher stage. In sonnet VI, entitled "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic", Liberty is related to its "eldest child", namely Venice. Yet, through the individual character of this great city, human feelings and various connotations of liberty may be perceived. After telling us something about the glorious history of Venice such as its independence of the greatness of sea power and its being "the safe guard of the west", the poet concludes that he and his countrymen must have sympathetic hearts and human feelings toward Venice, the city which was for long a city state and not a mere city. In sonnet VII, "The King of Sweden" is addressed and glorified. "The crowned youth" is King Gustavus IV who had tremendous

hatred for Napoleon and great respect and support for England. Similarly, in sonnet VIII, an individual figure is the sphere of all talk - Toussaint L’ouverture, the governor of St. Domingo and head of the African slaves enfranchised by the edict of the French convention (1794). Here, Wordsworth hints at the story of his leader who, as result of his opposition to Napoleon’s decree concerning the reestablishment of slavery in St. Domingo, was arrested and sent to Paris in 1802. At the beginning of the sonnet, the poet suggests that the ploughman who tends his plough within the hearing of L’ouverture while in prison makes him feel the bitterness of his captivity. The theme of this sonnet, however, is related to the freedom of slaves to mystical participation between human liberty magnified in the image of an individual, and the liberty of elements such as air, wind, and earth.

Having thus considered sonnets VI, VII and VIII through the double perspective of individual and human liberty simultaneously, we may however bring into play some sonnets that are confined in their spirit to the former type of liberty. At the top come sonnets XIII and XIV. Wordsworth’s fear of the power of Napoleon and his anxiety about the threatened liberties of people reaches its climax when he sees that social conditions in England are deteriorating. In sonnet XIII that opens with “O Friend! I know not which way I must look”, Wordsworth shows how the accumulation of wealth has become the sole measure of superiority. He also shows how individual liberty has been enslaved by a commercializing and materializing tendency. People no more find any magnificence or delight in nature or books; they have become worshippers of greediness, plunder, and expense. Simplicity in living has been replaced by complexity, and noble thought by a mean one. In brief, the fortune of England is lamented, and a feeling of sorrow is prevalent on the part of the poet, for the march of wealth, which generates mischief, and is the characteristic note of the sonnet.

In sonnet XIV, entitled “London, 1802”, the famous one on Milton, Wordsworth is also seen in a desperate mood, desperate over the things at home. In 1802, he was discouraged by the “vanity and parade” of England as contrasted with the desolation caused by the French Revolution in France. He saw a vision of what seemed to him a worthier England, whose heroes were the leaders of the puritan revolution and their Whig successors. Far above all the revolutionaries towered the figure of John Milton.

Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt a part  
[Line 1]

Compared with that heroic part of simple living and noble thinking, England has now become a bag of stagnant waters. This is because its people have been selfish. Wordsworth is calling on Milton to come back to earth. For in him, the poet sees a Christ like figure, a savior from the stagnant state

in which England has been shrouded. The soul of Milton was pure, and his voice Majestic and free. So, Wordsworth wants Milton to come back to England to teach her people how to be virtuous, free of complexities of living, and be spiritually happy.

In sonnet XXXIII of part I of Miscellaneous sonnets titled “The world is too much with us,” the same wish for a spiritual power, to come and redeem England from the evils of materialism, is also expressed. In this sonnet, Wordsworth shows the inability of people to respond to nature, the inability that has been an outcome of man’s loss of spiritual freedom. People no more feel any intimacy with nature amidst the business and activity of the modern world; they have lost their connection and sympathy with nature because all of their efforts have been dedicated to materialism. The sea and the winds are like sleeping flowers, and people are in need of faith in a spiritual power to give nature its proper status. Wordsworth wish for worshipping any god is well-shown in the sestet, where he suggests that it’s better to believe in gods that are unreal than not to believe in the true God at all. Thus, he prefers standing on an open grassy area, seeing the mythological Greek sea gods, Proteus and Triton, than remaining away from nature and belonging to no creed at all.

Taking into consideration the second part of Wordsworth’s poems “Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty”, we noticed that they fall into three main categories: spiritual, patriotic, and individualistic. As far as the first category is concerned, sonnets V and VII may be regarded as a good case in point. In sonnet V that starts with “Clouds, lingering yet, extend in solid bars” that was composed in 1807 by the side of Grasmere Lake, Wordsworth touches on the theme of spiritual liberty by seeking a kind of spiritual holiday for himself. The time is evening and the atmosphere is full of tranquility, tranquility that is associated with the calm water of Grasmere Lake. In this atmosphere, the stars are seen at happy distance and free from incessant wars, for they are away from the foolishness of the earth. Wordsworth is dedicating himself totally to the freedom of the stars, and the whole sonnet seems to echo the note prevalent in the poet’s sonnet “The World is too much with us”.

In the latter sonnet, Wordsworth calls for the Greek mythological gods of changeability, Proteus and Triton, to provide his spirit with some spiritual relief and insight. In the former sonnet, he listens to the whispering of Pan, the Greek god of forests, pastures, flocks, and shepherds. Wordsworth seems to be eager to go back to live in the Classical Age, the age that had no machinery and sophistication. He wants to retire a little bit, forgetting all about independence, liberty, enslavement of nations, and the troubles of the whole world at large. Thus, sonnet V is considered a piece of

escapist literature through which the poet tries to seek a kind of spiritual holiday for himself.

Sonnet VII was written in 1808 after Napoleon's victory in Germany, the Low Countries and Italy, the victory that had been achieved against governments. His plans in the Iberian Peninsula were firmly opposed by the Spanish and Portuguese people. Hence, Napoleon was now clearly depicted as the enemy of liberty. England sent an army under Sir Arthur Wellesley, later the Duke of Wellington who in August 1808 defeated the French under Junot at Vimiero. After this Battle, the convention of Cintra was signed.

According to this convention, the French, though defeated, were allowed to come back to France with their arms and booty. These favorable conditions, granted to the French Army, aroused great fury and indignation in England. The sonnet (sonnet VII), therefore, considers the fate of Spain in the light of Napoleon's ambitions. Wordsworth weighs "The hopes and fears of suffering Spain" not in the middle of a slavish, selfish, human world, but in the sublime school of Nature. The sonnet is but antithesis between the world on the one hand, and Nature on the other hand. Wordsworth suggests that whatever defeat of liberty may be in the world, the world that he despises, he can nevertheless triumph. This he can do through exploring ways in the human heart, in nature, and away from the troubles of the world, the world that spoils the purity of a freeborn soul.

Not' mid the World's vain objects that enslave  
The free born-soul.....

.....

Here, mighty Nature! In this school sublime  
I weigh the hopes and fears of suffering Spain;

.....

And through the human heart explore my way;  
And look and listen. Gathering, whence I may,  
Triumph, and thoughts no bondage can restrain!

Wordsworth's sonnets on national independence and liberty, especially those composed in 1809, are but a reflection of his beliefs in his Cintra pamphlet. The pamphlet on the convention of Cintra was inspired by two passions: hatred for foreign tyranny and love for national independence and freedom. It stands for the second uprising Wordsworth's heart had against the action of his own country. The first had been in 1793, when his country went to war with the French Republic. Throughout the Cintra pamphlet, Wordsworth seems to be an honest defender of patriotism and humanity. The Spanish war in the eyes of Wordsworth was not only a

political and national war, but also one that involved the destiny of all nations or rather of humanity itself.

In addition to its being an invocation to the nations of Europe and particularly a celebration of Spanish patriotism, the Cintra pamphlet is a lament for England. The voice of lamentation heard in this pamphlet is the same one heard in Wordsworth's sonnet on Milton. In the pamphlet, Wordsworth says:

“O sorrow! O misery for England, the land of liberty and courage and peace;  
the land trustworthy and long approved; the home of lofty example and benign precept....  
O sorrow and shame for our country;  
for the grass which is upon her fields, and the dust which is in her graves; - for her good men who now look upon the day,  
and her long train of deliverers and defenders, her Alfred, her Sidney, and her Milton;  
whose voice yet speaketh for our reproach; and whose actions survive in memory to confound us, or to redeem!”

In 1809, Wordsworth wrote fourteen sonnets from IX – XXII, which belongs to the class “Dedicated to National Independence and liberty”. They show how intensely interested he was in the political conditions of the time, and how restlessly his heart and mind were related to the freedom of those who were the scapegoats of Napoleon's campaign of subjugation. Six of these sonnets are a celebration of the Tyrolese resistance against the French. The first of them is dedicated to Hofer, the main leader of the Tyrolese, and commemorates the leadership of the “Godlike warrior,” and the courage of his fearless men. The second, starting “Advance-come forth from thy Tyrolem ground,” is a lively address to liberty to move forward through the long chain of the Alps. The third, “Feeling of the Tyrolese,” makes the most of the firm belief of these courageous people that is their duty, “with weapons grasped in fearless hands,” to emphasize their noble character and “to vindicate mankind”. The fourth, starting “Alas! What boots the long laborious quest,” questions the advantage of knowledge “to elevate the will,” and make the passion subject to reason, in view of the fact that wise Germany, despite all her great schools of learning, must lie depressed under the barbarian and savage the sword of Napoleon. In contrasting her action with that of the Tyrolese, he says:

A few strong instincts and a few plain rules  
Among the herds men of the Alps, have wrought  
More for mankind at this unhappy day  
Than all the pride of intellect and thought

[Sonnet XII, Lines 11 – 14]

The fifth sonnet, “On the final submission of the Tyrolese,” is a fine tribute to the moral end that instilled life in those bold shepherds in their struggle against the invader. In the Sixth sonnet, “The martial courage of a day is vain,” the poet reproves Austria for her action in giving up the Tyrol to France.

The remaining sonnets, belonging to the year 1809, all treat the political issues of the time. Most of them glorify heroes who would not surrender to Napoleon; heroes such as Palafox and his group who are the great defenders of Saragossa; Schill, the bold Prussian who tried his utmost best to liberate Germany from the threatening danger of the French; and Gustavo’s IV, The Swede, who “never did to Fortune bend the knee.” The latter noble behavior in this respect is contrasted with Napoleon’s in another sonnet, beginning with “Look now on that adventurer who hath paid.” The last of these sonnets, beginning “Is there a power that can sustain and cheer”, is concerned with the theme of individual liberty as viewed in isolation of relationships. This sonnet probably refers to a political active leader, Palafox, who has famed for his stubborn defense of Saragossa. He was taken prisoner and sent to Vicennes where he was imprisoned for about five years; yet this sonnet deplors his imprisonment. It is a sonnet of relationships. Palafox cannot have liberty without relationships – relationships with his friends, acquaintances, and country issues and activities. Solitary confinement is viewed as the worst kind of imprisonment; it may lead people to madness. Palafox prefers being at the stage in keeping away from it, where he can do nothing. In other words, Wordsworth means to say that one of the worst features of deprivation of liberty is when man is cut off from his natural function.

In the light of this study of Wordsworth’s sonnets composed in 1809, one may perceive the gradual change in Wordsworth’s attitude towards life and humanity at large. It was mainly through the French Revolution that he became especially interested in Man. Thus, the revolution was not only a local movement, it had meaning also for humanity. It was a movement in the interest of a greater liberty for the race, which would prove a tremendous advantage to human progress. It carried with it larger rights for the masses, and less authority for the classes. The essential rights of man were to be gained and maintained.

Wordsworth was born along by his enthusiasm and hopes yet he was steeped in republicanism, “despite his natural conservatism and the form of government under which he was born and reared” (56), claims E Hershey Sneath. However, Sneath adds that after the collapse of his ideals that relate to the cause of the Revolution, and after the state of stagnation that he witnessed in his own country, Wordsworth came to the conclusion that “morality is the fact of supreme worth for human nature; it, above all things,

unifies, dignifies, and exalts the human soul” (61). On the contrary, the early Wordsworth was more sensational, less rational, and moralistic. Bernard Blackstone describes the Wordsworth's responds without judgment, "with a choice less awareness; 'he feels, and nothing else'; he dwells in depths among the existential roots of things" (201). At this period, Wordsworth would have agreed with Blake, as Blackstone explains, “the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul (or soul distinct from his body) is to be expunged; many passages in the pre- 1809 verse suggest a naïve pleasure in pure sensation” (201).

In sonnet XXXIII composed in 1811 and beginning “here pause: the poet claims at least this praise,” Wordsworth sums up all the sonnets he has considered. This sonnet is a kind of apologia. At its beginning, the poet declares that the liberty, which he is now concerned with is virtuous. His song is pure, and the flame of the hope of life is still sustained. In reality, Wordsworth is congratulating himself, for he refuses to give way to despair. Hope, which is one of the three evangelical virtues – faith, hope and charity – is viewed by Wordsworth as a ‘paramount duty’. The poet is asking man to keep in mind the truth that loss of hope makes him less human. He also asked weak people not to be impressed by the success of tyrants, but to keep up their sense of liberty because it is on the weakness of the common person that the power of the tyrant is raised.

Since infancy, flowing water had been for Wordsworth the most beloved of all natural objects. It is because of this that in his poetry, it is constantly used as the image and symbol of the noblest things, especially liberty. “The River Duddon” flows through a series of thirty three sonnets, ending with the beautiful piece, “I thought of thee, my partner and my guide.” The series is a description of a rambling walk down through the Duddon, from its obscure origin on Wrynose fell, on the confines of west more land, Cumberland, and Lancashire, until it glides splendidly, silently, and freely into the open Irish Sea. In these sonnets, we discover the true spirit of Wordsworth’s capacity to animate nature. The source of their beauty derives from the attributes of humankind that the reader may discern in herbs, plants and flowers, and even in stones. It is no wonder then that Wordsworth follows the stream from its mountain source down to its mixing with the sea, recording in his memory the image of all incidents that strike his attention. Each incident has the completeness and unity essential to a sonnet – to a bead– while the stream is the linking bond or rather the rosary string that unites and harmonizes the whole.

In sonnet I of part I, Wordsworth declares that the theme of his “River Duddon” series of sonnets is “Duddon, long-loved Duddon”. In his sonnet, Wordsworth’s jingoism was clearly shown. He suggests that of all springs all over the world, he is primarily attached to only one spring,

namely the Duddon. The river, in the main, is the symbol of time; it carries people on the surface of its eternity. This symbol evokes two aspects: the state of being in the river and the state of being on the bank of the river. In the former, time may be viewed as a river taking everything away from us as we are standing on the shore; everything seems to be going into the past. In the latter, time may be viewed as a river carrying us to eternity, to the future – with all that this future connotes and hopes and ideals. Thus, the river may be regarded as a symbol of freedom as well as of purity, vigor, and brightness.

In sonnet II, River Duddon is called “child of the cloud”, and in sonnet IV “Nursling of the mountain”. Hence, the Duddon sonnets may be considered a kind of sustained reflection on human life. In sonnet V, Wordsworth shows how following the course of the river is symbolic of the course of human life. Nature is solitary, and so is he. This insertion of the human elements into his poetry is better shown in sonnet VIII, where we find the historical Wordsworth. The savage or ancient man is the sphere of talk in this sonnet. Wordsworth refers to the nasty [and] religious rites of the Druid religion – the old religion of Britain; he asks how we can associate the calm beautiful river with these hideous practices. The thought of “hideous usages and rites” in which the primitive man had probably been brought up brings him back to the peaceful stream whose

..... Function was to heal and to restore,  
To soothe and cleanse, not madden and pollute.

[Lines 13 – 14]

In other words, the poet contrasts the wicked man, with the restrictions and rites that governed the course of his life, with the purity and freedom of nature that are an integral part of the river. Thus, Wordsworth ends the sonnet with the suggestion that whatever wicked deeds were done on the banks of the river, the river was to heal them.

In sonnet X, the river, after having passed through mountains, valleys and fields, is coming now into a wilderness. The Duddon has to leave pleasant scenes to go into a wilderness. It is again seen as a symbol of human life. In sonnet XX, the river has gotten into the plain, and in sonnet XXXIII, it is shown moving silently into the sea just as human life flows at the end into eternity. Though the Duddon is a small river, its end is inevitably similar to that of the Thames and all other great and mighty rivers all over the world and they all have to flow into the sea.

Ending the course of the river with its entire vicissitudes, in human terms, the reader of the River Duddon sonnets may easily perceive the political connotations that these sonnets evoke. By and large, all that hinders the free course of the river – whether it be growing thorns, herbs or shrubs on the banks of the river or blocks and wilderness inside it – may well coincide



with the restrictions and traditions of human life that threaten its liberty as revealed in the Duddon sonnets which manifests itself in several ways. In sonnet XXVI, for example, it is shown in the evil force of sex.

In this sonnet, Wordsworth suggests that he was able to remain happy on his own. He can climb up to the source of the river because there is no love in his life that excels that of nature. Had the object of his love been a girl, he would not have been able to go up the hills and mountains. Wordsworth owes two different rewards to these mountain streams. The first is that at the age of puberty, the boys' minds are still vague. So instead of having their minds obsessed by sex and its joys, they can avoid falling into such an evil obsession by resorting to nature. Nature keeps boys away from this evil obsession through making them lovers of mountains, rivers, and streams. The second is liberty, which the poet gets because of his mature imagination. From the impetuous, revolutionary thoughts were not endured in earlier times.

In sonnet XXXIII, the river becomes more identified with human life; it is not proud for it follows its course humbly and smoothly. In the ninth line, the poet turns to himself to declare that the functions of the river as it enters the sea are similar to those of Man as he dies and all are free. Death means freedom in the sense that it makes people free from the troubles of life. The tumultuous working of the human spirit is no more heard, nor is the sweets of earth. All sink into peace and mingle with eternity. As Wordsworth is about to reach the end of his journey, watching the river Duddon as it comes out from its narrow defiles, he tries to identify himself with infinite liberty.

And may the poet, cloud-born stream! Be free  
The sweets of earth contentedly resigned,  
And each tumultuous working left behind  
At seemly distance – to advance like thee;  
Prepared; in peace of heart, in calm of mind  
And soul, to mingle with eternity!

[Lines 9 - 14]

It is because of this identification between man and the river that Wordsworth's Duddon sonnets are said to be devoted to the theme of liberty. Mary Moorman explains that their beauty springs not only from being a tapestry into which are woven pictures of ever changing landscape, but also from their being. This is "an indication of Wordsworth's own consciousness of the historic and prehistoric past of man; and of his private affections, memories, and hopes as they were called forth by this progress down the vale. The constant presence of the river unifies and blesses all" (376).

Sonnet XXXIV, the last in the Duddon series, may be regarded as a transitional sonnet in the sense that it links this series to that of ecclesiastical

sonnets. In this sonnet, spiritual ideas are tackled. Wordsworth thinks of the river “as being passed away”, yet he still sees the ever sliding stream. Though men have thoughts and souls, they die, but the river does not. Even with the thought of death, there remains to be a room for hope and reconciliation:

And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,  
Through love, through hope, and faith’s transcendent dower  
We feel that we are greater than we know.

[Lines 12-14]

In this sonnet, Wordsworth seems to be a devoted Christian; he speaks about faith in the after-life. He suggests that, in man, there is something greater than that he ever knows with reason.

Enough, if something from our hands have power  
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;

[Lines 10-11]

“The Ecclesiastical sketches” are composed of a series of sonnets on the main incidents and most significant vicissitudes of fortune, “which have befallen the Church of England and form the grove of the druids down to the late act of Parliament, for the building of new places of public worship”, Elsie Smith suggests (349). In this respect, Wordsworth himself says, “My purpose in writing this series was, as much as possible, to confine my view to the introduction, progress and operation of the Church of England; both previous and subsequent to the reformation” (Moorman 391).

Smith admits that rarely does Wordsworth leave “one subject of magnitude in the ecclesiastical history of England, on which we didn’t find a thought that breathes or a word that burns” (346). It is obvious, therefore, that so important a subject as liberty will occupy a large space within the range of this group of religious sonnets. In this group, the poet once more resorts to the image of the river – the image that holds together in his thought all the great sonnet series, which he had written in a period of twenty years, starting with the “Poems dedicated to National Independence and Liberty.” For him, there was no chasm or incompatibility but rather a natural unity between the primal love for nature, his love for liberty, and his more recently perfected love for the Church. This Unity, Moorman thinks, seen in poetic imagery as a River, was set forth in stately sentences in the introductory sonnet to the “Ecclesiastical sketches” (390).

I, who accompanied with faithful pace  
Cerulean Duddon...

[Lines 1 – 2]

I, who essayed the nobler stream to trace  
Of Liberty

[Lines 5 - 6]

Now seek the heights of Time the source  
Of a Holy River, on whose banks are found  
Sweet Pastoral flowers and laurels that have crowned  
[Lines 9 – 11]

Thus, in sonnet I of part 1 of “Ecclesiastical Sketches”, Wordsworth speaks of three different streams: the real River Duddon, the stream of liberty, which is nobler than Duddon, and the Holy River of Religion. He also deals with the negative theme of liberty. On the banks of the river, one can find not only “sweet pastoral flowers,” but also Laurels that contain poisonous seeds. In other words, religion is double faced: on the one hand, there is the innocent and pure face of religion while, on the other, there is the evil face of religion – the face that has very often given its stamp of approval to ambitious men and wicked conquerors. Religion, there upon, has supported evil men as well as good ones.

In sonnet VI, entitled “Persecution”, Wordsworth deals with a different aspect of the theme of liberty and faith. The sonnet is concerned with those who sacrifice their lives for the sake of their religious principles and freedom.

Diocletian’s (245 – 313), the Roman Emperor, wanted to impose his religion on Christians, who, because of their adherence to faith and opposition to despotic rulers, showed their sacrifice in different ways:

... Some are smitten in the field –  
Some pierced to the heart through the ineffectual shield  
Of sacred home; with pomp are others gored

[Lines 6 – 8]

As regards the theme of liberty, in part II of “Ecclesiastical sonnets”, Sonnet XIII is the best representative. In his sonnet, the flow of liberty is connected with that of the river. Just as rivers find their own ways by themselves, so does liberty. To Wordsworth, mountains an example of which the Alps are mentioned, are an abode of freedom. This theme of liberty, that is the characteristic of some of the “Ecclesiastical sonnets,” were mainly derived from Milton’s theme of liberty. Piety is like a bird that has been disturbed, yet it can now fly in the cavern and move its wings.

Praised be the rivers, from their mountain springs.  
Shouting to Freedom, “Plant thy banners here!”  
To harassed piety, “Dismiss thy fear,  
And in our caverns smooth thy ruffled wings!”

[Lines 1 – 4]

Wordsworth goes as far as to say that even cities – low – built cities like Venice – can be symbols of liberty. However, the founders of Venice were physically imprisoned in the sense that they were surrounded by lagoons, they were, nevertheless, spiritually free. Hence, in this sonnet, we

may distinguish three different species of liberty: liberty of the mountain, liberty of the river, and that of the spirit.

In Sonnet X of Part III of Ecclesiastical sonnets, the sonnet entitled “Obligations of civil to Religious liberty”, Wordsworth exhorts the nation to cling to spiritual ideals and not to deviate from the divine message of Heaven. Besides, he brings his old heroes, Sidney and Russell, Martyrs for ‘Civil rights’, into line with his celebration of religious liberty. They would have died in vain,

Had not thy Holy Church her champions bred  
And claims from other worlds inspirited the  
Star of liberty to rise.

[Lines 6 - 8]

The Love for liberty, says Moorman, “with all that meant of toleration and justice for minority opinions conscientiously held, is the watch word of ‘Ecclesiastical Sketches’. Religious persecution is never excused, whether it is of early Christians in Roman Britain... of the victims of Henry VIII, Edward VI, represented as a reluctant persecutor, and many of ‘those un-conforming’ who were driven out of their parishes after the restoration of Charles II...” (398).

As regards the last part of Wordsworth’s life, the part that followed the year 1821, in which most of his Ecclesiastical sonnets were written, Wordsworth continued to be conservative. This is well shown based on the fact that he shows no major concern in writing sonnets on the themes of liberty.

To sum up, Wordsworth’s “Sonnets Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty”, as well as those related to the theme of liberty in “The River Duddon” series and “Ecclesiastical sonnets” show Wordsworth as the poet of Man at his best. His association with the republican office and patriot Beaupey, William Godwin and his followers, the radicals, his teacher Rousseau and John Locke owe his success. Wordsworth, in his early years, defended the equality of human rights and the common brotherhood of man. In later years, he was torn between the Love for his mother country and his newborn passion for the course of France.

Soon his ideal of France was distorted and shaken by the terror. In 1798, it was completely shattered by the invasion of Switzerland. He concluded that reform must start with individual. His visit to France in 1802 made his disillusionment, and with it comes a full circle. The liberator had turned tyrant, and Napoleonic France was the enemy. Consequently, England was the last hope of Freedom. Thus, the sonnet became in Wordsworth’s hands, as earlier in Milton’s, a trumpet to awaken England from her deep sleep and to provide her with power for struggle against the tyrant.

In his “Sonnets Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty”, Wordsworth expresses his fears of the power of Napoleon, as well as his anxiety about the threatened liberty of Man. These political sonnets evince the heroic spirit of a man whose hopes rested, through a period of public danger and disaster, on a firm faith in human goodwill and liberty both for nations and individuals. These sonnets reflect Wordsworth’s disillusionment with France and the feeling of fear that occupied his thought for long about political and social questions at home. The Wordsworth of 1793 has been a zealous republican, a convert to the principles of Beaupey and the French Encyclopedists. The rise of Napoleon in conjunction with the dictatorship of Robes Pierre modified, but did not annihilate Wordsworth’s severe judgment of his own country. After 1794, the voice of republicanism is no more heard in Wordsworth’s sonnets. This double and paradoxical attitude of the poet towards liberty is exemplified in various types of sonnets: patriotic, individualistic, spiritual, and human. Also, it is shown not only in “sonnets dedicated to National Independence and liberty” but also in “The River Duddon” sonnets-composed between 1806 and 1820 – and in “Ecclesiastical sonnets” – composed in 1821.

The first of these three types of sonnets, especially those composed in 1809, reflect Wordsworth’s hatred of foreign tyranny and love for national independence and liberty. In the view of these sonnets, Wordsworth’s attitude towards life and humanity becomes clearer to him. In addition, the revolution is no more a local movement; it has meaning for all humanity at large.

In the second and third types, namely “The River Duddon” sonnets and “Ecclesiastical sonnets”, the great river of freedom that existed in England from the earliest times of history is still traced, but this time with more moralistic and rational emphasis and less sensational approach. “In the River Duddon” sonnets (1806 – 1820), the poet traces the course of the River Duddon from its origin in the mountains to the sea. Along this course, he follows the life of the individual and that of the nation.

The conventions and restrictions that hinder the progress of a nation and limit its liberty are likened in these sonnets to thorns, herbs, shrubs, and stones that limit the liberal and spontaneous flow of the river.

In relation to “Ecclesiastical Sonnets”, Love for spiritual liberty seems to be their paramount landmark. In these sonnets, the flow of liberty is compared to that of the River Duddon and the holy river of religion simultaneously.

Though the archetype of “The River” seems to be the common denominator to all of these types of sonnets, humanity remains to be considered the higher keynote that shows Wordsworth at his best as the poet of Man.

There is sanity in his patriotic enthusiasm. An exuberant ethical spirit overwhelms his political sonnets, and moral ideas dominate his views and feelings. A deep love for the country is tempered by a noble sense of duty, which makes him bold enough to point out the weakness and defects of his own nation. Wordsworth raises his voice against evil, tyranny, and injustice wherever he finds them. His patriotism is not always provincial, but sometimes universal. Thus, in most of these sonnets, Wordsworth seems to be a citizen of the world, and all men are regarded as brothers.

We end up repeating Sneath's words: "Early he became a patriot of the world, and remained such despising injustice and tyranny wherever found, he was champion and defender of the rights of men regardless of nationality."

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