Wordsworth and His Adversaries:
A Study in the Hermeneutics of Disparagement

Alan Grob
Rice University
Abbreviations

Citations

Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Wordsworth’s poems, apart from The Prelude, are from William Wordsworth. Poetical Works. ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 5 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940-49. Citations from poems are initially identified by title and line number, and after that by line number. Manuscript variants and editorial commentary are identified as PW, followed by volume and page number. Quotations from The Prelude are from William Wordsworth, The Prelude or Growth of a Poet’s Mind. ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd ed., rev. Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959). All quotations from The Prelude are from the 1805 text, unless otherwise indicated. Citations from The Prelude are identified in the text as Prelude and by book and line number.

Quotations from the prose writings of Wordsworth are from The Prose Works of William Wordsworth. ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, (3 vols). (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). Quotations from The Prose Works are identified in the text by the abbreviation Pr.W followed by volume and page number.

Introduction

Of the convulsive changes that have worked their way through the field of Romantic--and especially Wordsworthian--studies during the postmodernity of the past thirty years, none seems more truly ominous than the most recent, the widespread adoption in the past two decades by critics of those adversarial presuppositions that now seem to shape and govern so many undertakings of real influence in the field. While the term "adversarial" has become a critical commonplace, its meaning self-evident, its pertinence for my purposes derives from a casual remark by Marjorie Levinson in her plainly seminal *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, her observation that adoption by the new historicism of feminism's "adversarial tactics" served as a major point of affinity between the two movements, movements that, I should add, were understood to be essentially disparate when Levinson used the term in 1986, but which now have increasingly coalesced.¹ So great has been the impact of these movements on current critical practice that John Williams, discussing the new historicism in his fine 2002 conspectus of modern Wordsworth scholarship asserts no less a claim for new historicism than that “no critical “school” or “movement,” apart from
the Cornell project, has done more since the biographical and textual work of the early twentieth century to breath new life into Wordsworth studies in England,” crediting “the progenitors of the new historicism”—Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, David Simpson, and Alan Liu are those he names—with having managed (along with the Cornell editors) to redefine the parameters of what it means to study Wordsworth and his “Romantic” context.”

Even more recently Kenneth Johnston in his chapter on the new historicism in the Oxford Guide to Romanticism of 2004 expands on Williams’s judgment describing this “method of literary interpretation” as, “at the present moment, the dominant procedure for studying British Romantic literature in the Anglo-American academy.”

And moving in tandem with these dominant new historicist procedures, and often subsumed by them, is a vastly expanded body of feminist criticism, engaged not just in the recovery of neglected and often intrinsically interesting texts by women writers of the period, but, more germane to our purpose, almost as deeply engaged, more often than not with hostile intent, in scrutinizing the attitudes toward women of the canonical poets, with (as I hope to show in subsequent pages) no poet more sharply and more hostilely scrutinized than Wordsworth. As a consequence of the undeniable ascendancy
of these critical schools, what has seemingly emerged in so much of Romantic studies, almost by consensus, is an interpretive community adversarially self-defined whose quarrel, astonishingly enough for those of us who came before, is not over but with the subject of its criticism.

In an earlier time, one gained entry to one's interpretive community by taking sides on some time-honored and well-worn point at issue: Milton's vexed conundrum of the two-handed engine, for example, to cite a fairly minor but familiar example, or, to bring matters closer to Wordsworthian concerns, the question of whether William Wordsworth is a poet of nature or a poet of consciousness, a transcendentalist or an empiricist, a continuator of the Miltonic tradition or its oedipally agonistic foe. Moreover, in that long-ago time one presumably chose one's community for the ostensible purpose of clarifying meaning, getting it right (even if the practitioners of these older traditions were not always as disinterestedly objective in their search for truth as they believed themselves to be). And one sought to clarify meaning, to get it right, because in most cases the authors written about deserved no less—or so it was assumed—or how else could one justify the expenditure of attention and effort? Toward such authors the critic voiced and presumably felt respect, indeed
admiration, an admiration and respect no doubt aesthetically grounded but often conveying something more, and these respectful and admiring presuppositions the critic knew to be the unstated givens not only of the interpretive community to which the critic belonged but also of those rival interpretive communities with whom the critic quarreled. But obviously no such unstated givens of tacit respect--and certainly not tacit admiration--figure in the presuppositions of those who would claim membership in an interpretive community adversarially conceived, whether operating under the banner of new historicism or of an increasingly historicized feminism. In either case the principal requisite for membership in one's chosen community would seem to be the new historicist or feminist critic's virtually a priori presumption of his adversarially chosen subject's political and ethical shortcomings, the adoption of a hermeneutics of disparagement designed to find fault and assign blame, to seek out and be assured of finding evidences of bad faith, reactionary currying of establishment favor, class, and sex bias of the most egregious kind on the part of the author in question, or so doctrine and practice teach us in Wordsworth studies.
To be sure, in that celebrated early text, Levinson herself disavowed any intention “to depreciate Wordsworth’s transcendence or to trivialize profoundly moving works,” but she claimed rather that she hoped to “renew our sense of their power by exposing the conditions of their success.”⁴ (Levinson 3). It is a goal seemingly respectful of the writer in question, but, I must sadly add, that avowed respectfulness is seldom realized in new historicist or feminist practice, which rarely leads to enhanced respect for the writer under discussion. Indeed, the spirit in which even the earliest of these critics wrote comes closer to what we read in Roger Sale, one of the most viscerally adversarial of Wordsworth’s critics whose summary judgment upon Wordsworth is a dismissively derogatory condemnation of “Wordsworthian nonsense.”⁵ Nor do these critics make any allowance for possible changes in Wordsworth’s political attitudes or even in the radically altered political circumstances within which he wrote during the “golden decade.” After all, when McGann first threw the ideological gauntlet down in The Romantic Ideology of 1983, he made clear that no significant distinctions were to be made between early and late, that “Peele Castle,” a poem of 1805 that Wordsworth himself subtitled a “palinode,” that is, a recantation of earlier
beliefs, and "Tintern Abbey," the great poem of 1798 that critics understood to profess the faith that "Peele Castle" recanted, "are only separated from each other, ideologically and stylistically, by a difference in emphasis."\(^6\)

In this regard the adversarially minded new historicism and the feminist criticism with which it bears affinities can be looked upon as representing a fundamental paradigm shift in literary criticism, differing radically from both an older historical criticism (even when practiced by such seeming political unassailables as E. P. Thompson and David Erdman) and a deconstructionist postmodernism that new historicism and feminism would still in essential respects claim as their theoretizing forerunner. For Thompson, after all, the aim of his classic essay of 1969 was to show that Wordsworth and Coleridge at the time of \textit{Lyrical Ballads} had kept the faith and retained their Jacobin loyalties, that while perhaps disenchanted they had not yet defaulted as their critics had often charged.\(^7\) And for Erdman, of course, William Blake was the very epitome of the politically committed poet, committed in the right way and to the right cause. Moreover, even Yale criticism in its deconstructionist mode had gone to the Romantics for what its critics believed the
Romantics offered, their strengths and insights—even if occasionally these were the insights of blindness—rather than for what could be exposed to an audience of ideologically like-minded readers—the errors and failings of these heretofore misguidedly respected and admired poets. Thus, the writers who interested Paul De Man most and those whom he clearly most respected and admired were often credited with a rhetorical self-awareness by which they had knowingly made available their work to the very deconstructive practices that De Man himself pursued and in which he would have us engage.

To be sure, in its initial emergence, new historicism often saw itself in somewhat less radical terms, not as proposing a paradigm shift but rather as building on foundations laid down by a preceding generation's turn to theory. Though Levinson told us in 1986 that "the trend in Wordsworth criticism today—and I do mean today—is crystallized by the phrase, 'historical imagination,'" (11), a term she would apply to a practice she designated "deconstructive materialism" (Levinson 10), she was still careful to add in that seeming heyday of deconstruction the qualifying stipulation that "one cannot unknow Derrida" (11). And the new historicism did and does deal almost unrelentingly with the absent or displaced, a seemingly
sure indicator of its fidelity to the spirit of deconstruction. Still the interpretive privileging of that signified to which the absent signifier points—a privileging Levinson herself engages in her immensely controversial essay on "Tintern Abbey," where the absent abbey is made the primary pointer to meaning—would itself clearly seem to be an unknowing of Jacques Derrida and deconstruction and its governing premise of semantic indeterminacy, all of which over time have clearly become less and less relevant to the current generation's historicizing pursuits.

But it is in differentiating itself from an earlier historical criticism that almost always insisted we judge the past in its own terms that the new historicism most clearly struck its own note; for what is to govern new historicist practice, its way of dealing with those historical subjects and authors who have been put forward as the adversarially conceived objects of study of the new historicism (and often a historicized feminism as well), is an undisguisedly presentist set of standards and values. A criticism that would simply explain "the 'texts' we read in terms of the past historical context," Jerome McGann insists in Romantic Ideology, "must remain as fruitless and arid as any type of formal and structural or thematic
criticism so long as it does not make equally explicit,  
first, the dialectical relation of the analyzed 'texts' to  
present interests and concerns; and, second, the immediate  
and projected ideological involvements of the criticism,  
critical theory, and reading we practice, study, and  
promote." (McGann 160). The new historicism would go back  
to the past so that it might help take us to the future, to  
paraphrase the title (while remaining faithful to the  
spirit) of another important work by Levinson, "The New  
Historicism: Back to the Future."\textsuperscript{10} Thus unsurprisingly, in  
its presentist orientation, our adversarial criticism sees  
itself in solidarity with the disempowered, preoccupied  
with questions of race, class, and gender, committed to  
analyzing and evaluating the texts under consideration by  
how much they have advanced or retarded the interests of  
those for whom the critic purports to speak, the advancing  
or retarding of those interests to be measured by the  
yardstick not of the historical then but the presentist  
now. We find in the contemporary adversarial critic, the  
postmodernist engagé, nothing like the deconstructionist's  
bemused pleasure or, at most, Nietzschean \textit{jouissance} in the  
freplay of interpretive undecidables and nothing like the  
old historicist's contextualizing leniency, in which  
knowing all--that is, understanding as best we can the
circumstances in which the writer under consideration lived--if not quite requiring that we forgive all, still encouraged and enabled us to forgive a great deal. The adversarial critic instead demands answers, takes a stand, passes unsparing judgment on the writer in question, his or her fundamental aim in most instances being to seek out and identify that politically self-betraying meaning that is to be interpretively privileged as the ultimate signified or at least the only signified of any interest in the adversarial schemata.

In addition to the apparent abandonment of deconstruction's assumption of semantic indeterminacy, Levinson's critic of the trend today--and I do mean today--would seem to have departed sharply from his or her immediate postmodernist forerunners in one other not unrelated way, the conception of the authorial subject. Preoccupied with blame, the adversarial critic with his or her finger on the trigger clearly requires as a target an author with a substantial identity, a real person possessed of determinate attributes, inclinations, and especially biases that render him more unequivocally deserving of targeting than, let us say, Michel Foucault's spectrally elusive author who is nothing more than "the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning."\(^{11}\) Out of their
adversarial needs, their rush to prosecutorial judgment, our contemporary adversarial critics have seemingly abandoned the old postmodernist indeterminacies like the death of the author and instead constructed a far more reductively rigid and dogmatically fixed identity for the writers with whom they would quarrel than even a pre-postmodern criticism could have imagined itself doing. But if our adversarially designated author has been reborn, he has been reborn in unfamiliar and often dismayingly disfiguring ways, made unrecognizable to those of us familiar with him from earlier and, most of the time, more benignly engendered incarnations. In general, the Wordsworth whose shortcomings our adversarial critics would identify is simply assumed to be the product of a certain historical causation, to be understood in terms of his class and vocation and gender as these were directed and determined by the socially constructing forces of his place and time, and for these critics this causation specifies those meanings that should concern us, separates out the semantically significant—for us—from that proliferation of less consequential meanings that might otherwise prove distracting.

Of course, the historical interpretation of literary subjects has always been selectively limited by the
interests and inclinations of the critic who sorts through, construes, and applies the evidence, but I would submit that a historical interpretation guided by adversarial presuppositions, that is, the historical interpretation practiced so often in the last two decades, not only often leads to the meanest of judgments but is especially prone to errors, distortions, and misrepresentations of the most astonishing and sometimes inexplicable kind, at least if the critical practice that has been prevalent in Wordsworth studies is any indication. Too often the historical record seized upon by the adversarial critic is meagerly anecdotal, possessing uncertain explanatory value, especially when set in the context of some larger and more plausibly applicable body of historical data. Or the practicing historian who is occasionally adverted to is often regrettably guided by similar adversarial presuppositions and is therefore similarly prone to the same kinds of errors, distortions, and misrepresentations, thereby exacerbating the likelihood of misconception by the historicizing critic. And even when the historicizing critic seems to make ample and even judicious use of historical evidence (in Wordsworth studies the work of Liu comes most readily to mind), the historical context put forward is rendered much too uncomplicated by the
principles of historical interpretation invoked, a rigid social and economic determinism that overrides all other explanatory possibilities. So, that most complex and conflicted of historical moments, the 1790s, is often needlessly flattened, the options available unreasonably narrowed at what would seem a rare moment of human choice for young intellectuals who could really, for the first time in any meaningful sense, decide to be republicans or monarchists, supporters of Paine or supporters of Burke. Thus the Wordsworth who might reasonably qualify as one of the first of our deracinated radical intellectuals--"in part / An outlaw, and a Borderer of his age" is how he describes himself in 1800--is instead reduced in the most constricting way by the adversarial critic to being little more than the product of his class origins with all of its biases, while virtually no attention is given to Wordsworth's own stated expressions of political affiliation in a period of the most tumultuous political debate and disputation. The middle-class Wordsworth had, after all, in 1794 declared himself one of "that odious race of men called democrats" (EY, 119), using language that he surely knew would and did identify him as a traitor to class and country.
Perhaps the purest example I can think of for explaining how the will to disparage informs the attitudes, premises, and conclusions of adversarial practice in defiance of the evidence or even of good sense is Marlon Ross’s discussion of “The Highland Girl” in his influential 1984 article “Naturalizing Gender: Woman’s Place in Wordsworth’s Ideological Landscape.” In the first place, underlying all else is the “gotcha” mentality that pervades this criticism, a deeply ingrained prosecutorial zeal that would turn every act of interpretation into exposé in order to bring to light some tellingly concealed but always anticipated act of political malfeasance (especially in considerations of race, class, and gender) by the white male, canonical poet. Then, too, there is a clutching at straws, a seizing on any evidence, however flimsy, that could conceivably abet such an exposé, especially in texts that, on the face of it, seemingly take a very different tack from that which the adversarial critic would like them to take. Another tactic routinely employed in the hermeneutics of disparagement, perhaps its single most significant legacy from deconstruction, is the privileging of the absent signifier, the preference for the unsaid or unseen, over what is actually stated or depicted, a tactic that gives the adversarial critic virtually unlimited
leeway in determining what can count as evidence when he or she clutches at straws to make the adversarial case against the writer and work in question. Finally, there is the tendency to set the bar ever higher, indeed, to make it virtually insurmountable, if the writer under adversarial surveillance should somehow unexpectedly utter or imply some sentiment that the progressively inclined reader might be expected to find politically acceptable.

Wordsworth wrote “The Highland Girl” in 1803 to memorialize a chance encounter with a strikingly lovely “highland girl” at Loch Lomond during his walking tour of Scotland in the summer of that year along with his sister, Dorothy, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Taken in its manifest sense, the poem plainly seems just another voicing of the familiar Wordsworthian claim that rustic life “remote from men” (29) is morally superior to a more sophisticated urban life, the highland girl showing in her countenance “[b]enignity and home-bred sense / Ripening in perfect innocence” (26-27). Being without affectation or artifice, she need never find it necessary to display that “embarrassed look of shy distress, / And maidenly shamefacedness” (30-31) that girls who lack “[t]he freedom of a Mountaineer” (33) are required to wear in more highly cultivated surroundings. So taken is Wordsworth with the
highland girl that much of the poem’s unfolding is a
description of an imagined life lived in her company.
Initially he envisions the two of them as “Shepherd” and
“Shepherdess” (50), but pastoral fantasy quickly gives way
(perhaps from the same dislike of pastoral artificiality
Wordsworth elaborates upon a year later in book 8 of The
Prelude) to the “wish” that they might live together in
some way that is “[m]ore like a grave reality” (54): “Thy
elder Brother I would be, / Thy Father—anything to thee!”
(60-61). An even graver reality, however, soon intrudes:
the momentarily halted traveler realizes that he must
continue on his journey, leaving the highland girl behind.
For such loss he is confident, though, that there will be
“recompense”(65) (an echo perhaps of “Tintern Abbey”),
since “Memory” (67) will forever after reproduce the
hauntingly lovely image of this place and the girl who
lives there.

In short, “The Highland Girl” would seem a politically
enlightened tribute to a girl who, though little more than
a peasant, still “wear’st on thy forehead clear / The
freedom of a Mountaineer” (32-33), further corroboration,
as if any were needed, that Wordsworth’s “Muse,” as William
Hazlitt puts it, “was a leveling one.” 15 But in his
prosecutorial zeal to fault Wordsworth politically, Ross
does find his “gotcha,” a straw to grasp at, a telltale omission that allows the critic to set the bar higher, a gap in the utterances that provides unassailable proof that Wordsworth is guilty of the most egregious class and gender bias. To be sure, when Wordsworth says he would be “anything” to the highland girl, “anything” does not really mean “everything,” as Ross is quick to point out: left unarticulated are potential relationships that Wordsworth might have with her besides the specified ones of older brother or father, that failure to articulate being almost automatically ascribed by Ross to reasons that do the poet no credit. According to Ross, Wordsworth rejects the role of “Shepherd” to the girl’s “Shepherdess” not because of his deep-seated and reiterated aversion to pastoral convention but for reasons of class prejudice: “[H]e would have to forsake his class and she would have to miraculously transform the realities of her class into pastoral as he has already done for her.” Only a few sentences later, conjecture hardens into established fact, as Ross contemplates Wordsworth’s shift from pastoral fancy to that different set of relations he would consider entering into in the life that would be “[m]ore like a grave reality.” Thus, we are told, the alleged class prejudice Wordsworth “has just admitted” (403) not only
prevents him from playing shepherd to the highland girl’s shepherdess but now must also be seen to preclude him from entering into other more realistically meaningful egalitarian relationships with the highland girl, especially—and most damagingly for the would-be poet-democratizer—that of husband and wife:

Wordsworth is incapable of conceptualizing any kind of relationship to the girl except that which affirms his own priority. The anticlimactic expression “anything to thee” belies the character of the specific relationships he has just serialized because his transcendental characterization of her could not exist without these relationships. Would the speaker be willing to be anything to the girl? Of course not. He has just admitted that he cannot because of class distinction be her husband and for analogous reasons, he would not be her son or her younger brother. This would threaten his priority, his claim to self-determination; it would shatter his vision of her role in his experience of nature. (403-4)
Ross never really explains why the wish to be “Father” to this mountaineer daughter of the Scottish peasantry—or her brother, even if an “elder Brother”—could not in itself be construed as a violation of class distinction, especially since, even in 1803, fraternité remained an ostensibly class-denying and certainly centrally honorific term in the radical lexicon. Be that as it may, there is a still more fundamental issue to be raised. Ross seems to believe that, once Wordsworth told the highland girl he would be “anything” to her, he was obligated to consider every hypothetical family relationship into which they could possibly enter, and he would therefore be morally suspect if the adversarial critic could even remotely insinuate that some form of political or social bad faith in the abstract had motivated an omission. But if literary texts are inflected by history (to use current terminology), that is, if they significantly bear the imprint of real events, is it not more plausible to think of Wordsworth’s choices of imagined relationships as circumscribed by the actual circumstances in which he found himself? “The Highland Girl” is, after all, based on a real event, one recorded not only in Wordsworth’s poem but in Dorothy Wordsworth’s journal and Coleridge’s notebook. From all these sources we can reasonably conclude that the
poet, at thirty-three, was considerably older than the girl he encountered at Loch Lomond, since, according to lines in the poem that Ross himself quotes, “Twice seven consenting years have shed / Their utmost bounty on thy head” (3-4), or as Coleridge, upon meeting “two little Lasses,” more straightforwardly but no less hyperbolically says of the girl who became the highland girl in Wordsworth’s poem: “one of them, 14, with such native Elegance / O she was a divine Creature!”

Given this “grave” historical “reality,” we might reasonably conclude that Wordsworth imagined himself as “Father” or “elder Brother” to the highland girl rather than as “her son or her younger brother,” as Ross insists the poet should have done if he is not to come under new historicist strictures, because he could hardly do otherwise, because such a reversal of their real disparity in age would have been simply unthinkable, and not because imagining himself as younger than she “would threaten his priority, his claims to self-determination.” On the same grounds, Ross’s even more sharply worded accusation that the poet would not imagine himself as the highland girl’s husband “because of class distinction” might seem also to be called into question by “historical” realities. In the first place, although the Wordsworth who had actually
married only ten months earlier might have imagined himself brother or even father to several, or at least to one more than was actually the case, imagining himself as husband to more than one, even for the purposes of stilling doubts about his egalitarianism, would understandably have been regarded as awkward, even unseemly, especially by Mary Wordsworth, his wife, at home in Grasmere. And if the thirty-three-year-old poet had indulged himself in the fantasy of being married to a child of fourteen, that would almost certainly have seemed even more awkward, more unseemly—and for obvious reasons. Yet it is apparently only by positing some such Nabokovian scenario that Wordsworth could have preemptively cleared himself of the accusation of class prejudice (surely baffling in the case of “The Highland Girl” with its heartfelt solicitude for this child of the peasantry) that awaited him when Ross would build his case against the poet. Admittedly there is a certain absurdity to all of this, but the ultimate source of that absurdity lies, I believe, not so much in my ridiculous counterarguments to Ross’s conclusions but rather in what has called these counterarguments forth: the historically unsupportable methodology that has enabled the adversarial critic to make his complaints against Wordsworth, a methodology, I would add, that has become so
commonplace that we routinely pass by arguments like those of Ross without a murmur of the demurral that they should obviously evoke.\textsuperscript{18}

While Ross’s discussion of “The Highland Girl” is an especially blatant example of what I believe to be the error of these adversarial ways, in the pages that follow I will point to numerous other examples of similar and often no less blatant errors. Moreover, I do this not to show that these adversarial critics, new historicists, and historically inclined feminists, are would-be historians who illicitly apply alien standards where only aesthetic standards should apply, as so many of those who justifiably write against these critics do, but to demonstrate that in their rush to disparagement the new historicists are, too often, not really historians at all--or at least not really very good ones. Paying little attention to the rich complexity of the historical moment about which they write, they too often ignore or distort virtually everything that does not suit their ostensibly historically justified but, in truth, unabashedly present-oriented, ideological purposes. Prone to ignore or distort all evidence that runs counter to their political ends, they too often arrive at the most dubious of historical conclusions and, in some cases, fall into the most remarkable historical errors,
errors for which, surprisingly, they are almost never called to account. I hope in the chapters that follow to set some of that historical record straight and call to account some of those critics who have used it to further their own agenda.

But beyond this, I have two other goals. One is to show that much of the new historicist and feminist quarrel with Wordsworth derives from the tacit and almost universal acceptance as literary fact that the essentially antinature and consciousness-privileging portrayal of Wordsworth promoted by the Yale critics and by M. H. Abrams is the real Wordsworth. This is a view of Wordsworth that was disputed, at least by some (including myself), even at the time of its initial promulgation, one that seems to me still open to debate and, indeed, in important respects, mistaken. But if that view is mistaken, or at least still open to debate, then it follows that the condemnation by these adversarial critics of a Wordsworth conceived of as the Yale school and Abrams conceived of him is, therefore, similarly open to debate and perhaps similarly mistaken. Finally, I also believe—and hope to demonstrate—that Wordsworth, especially the Wordsworth of 1798, properly understood, is in his politics, and especially on matters of class and gender, more enlightened, more progressive,
indeed more politically correct than his new historicist and feminist adversaries would ever imagine.
Chapter 1

William and Dorothy: A Case Study in the Hermeneutics of Disparagement

Probably nowhere are the attitudes, premises, and conclusions that govern the hermeneutics of disparagement more pervasively in evidence than in the growing body of adversarial commentary on the relationship of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, especially as that relationship is represented in "Tintern Abbey," that dark and bloody ground over which so many of the battles of Romantic new historicist historiography have been fought. Among an older Romantic critical establishment's scholarly castigators of the new historicism, Abrams, Helen Vendler, and Thomas McFarland, to mention the best known, the very term new historicism has been synonymous with Marjorie Levinson's essay on "Tintern Abbey," that notorious accusatory exercise alleging guilt by omission. But a second, only slightly later new historicist essay on "Tintern Abbey" is likely to have even greater staying power as feminist concerns gradually incorporate themselves more and more into new historicist practice. For in her exposé of Wordsworth's political shortcomings, Levinson has surprisingly little to say on the role of Wordsworth's sister Dorothy in that poem, scarcely indicating her usefulness in supplying further proof that even as early as 1798 Wordsworth was already a reactionary, a leader lost from virtually the moment at which he began to assert his
mature poetic powers. Not until the publication of John Barrell's essay, however, two years after Levinson, does Wordsworth's treatment of Dorothy really become part of the bill of adversarially inspired indictable particulars that new historicist criticism of "Tintern Abbey" has become.\(^{20}\)

In the closing verse paragraph of "Tintern Abbey," when the speaker addresses the "dear, dear Friend" (116) and "dear, dear Sister" (121) who has apparently stood next to him throughout his long and, to this point, self-focused meditation, he expresses a wish that, looking into "the shooting lights / Of thy wild eyes" (118-19), he might "yet a little while," still "behold in thee what I was once" (119-20). But even as he gazes he already knows that the wildness that he would nostalgically preserve "in after years" (137) will "be matured / Into a sober pleasure" (138-39) through the agency of a beneficent and humanly concerned "Nature" that "never did betray / The heart that loved her" (122-23), a maturation--albeit in some regards a loss--that he, nonetheless, still sees as the best of outcomes for his sister. When I wrote on this passage a good many years ago, I suggested that Wordsworth had placed his sister, in accordance with his own classificatory scheme, at the same stage of personal development at which he found himself on his visit to Tintern Abbey five years earlier, when "the sounding cataract / Haunted me like a passion" (76-77). It was a visit made, it should be added,
when he was well along in his own adult intellectual and social development: after he had graduated from Cambridge, been radicalized by his stay in France during the Revolution, and published a volume of poetry, though before, by his own testimony, he had undergone sufficient moral growth to be able to hear the "still, sad music of humanity" (90) and before he could develop his powers of metaphysical cognition to the point where he could experience "a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused" (95-96) indwelling within the natural and the human world. The maturation he had now undergone, he confidently asserted, his sister too would undergo, and the moral and spiritual benefits that had thereby accrued to him she too would acquire.

It was an interpretation, I somewhat reluctantly add, of no great originality and, in fact, merely restated views held by many. But what I did hope to demonstrate was that these developmental articles of faith--because he could behold in her what he was once, she would become what he was now--were further confirmation of Wordsworth's basic uniformitarian empiricism in 1798. I believed then, and I still believe, that in "Tintern Abbey" we can see at work an optimistic and perfectibilian environmental determinism in the tradition of David Hartley and Joseph Priestley in England and Helvétius in France, implicitly radical, democratic, leveling, though in 1973 the political implications of Wordsworth's empiricism were not really the
focus of my interests. But I did know even then that at the end of the eighteenth century, most radicals, not just in England but in France and America as well, subscribed to some version of an environmentally conditioned, uniformitarian empiricism as the basis of their claims for a general human equality. And I have subsequently learned that, like their male counterparts, the leading female radicals of the time—the first generation of feminists in Britain, Catherine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary Hays—similarly subscribed to an environmentally conditioned, uniformitarian empiricism, especially in making the case for providing women with the same education as that provided to men. As Mary Hays, admirer of "[t]he great and good Dr. Hartley" and "the excellent Dr. Priestley" (27) and defender of Helvétius in a debate on his environmental determinism in the *Monthly Magazine*, states it with the starkest simplicity: "[M]ind, as has been finely said, is of no sex." Or if we would wish to reformulate that proposition in more technically empiricist terms, we might say that the tabula rasa has no gender, appropriate language surely for a writer like Hays, who (quoting Godwin's views as identical with her own) will insist "[t]hat man (including the species without distinction of sex) was simply a perceptive being, incapable of receiving knowledge through any other medium than that of the senses." It is just such empiricist, uniformitarian, and egalitarian epistemological premises, I
would submit, that condition the sexual politics of "Tintern Abbey." The nature that can "inform" (125), "impress" (126) (the implied imprinting of the stamp upon the wax in the Lockean and sensationalist model of the epistemological transaction), and "feed" (127) "[t]he mind that is within us" (126) will lead Dorothy to the same level of moral and spiritual development that her brother has already attained. Nor is the difference in their rates of moral and spiritual development to be ascribed to some innately gendered developmental capacity separably common to each sex, since it is already evident that both brother and sister have already morally far surpassed that ominously threatening and, one suspects, numerous host of "selfish men" (129), whose "evil tongues, / Rash judgments" (128-29), and "sneers" (129), William reassuringly tells his sister, "Shall" never "prevail against us" (134) nor "disturb / Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold / Is full of blessings" (132-34).

Writing out of the harshest of adversarial presuppositions, Barrell obviously reaches very different conclusions from mine about the presence and function of Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey." The sister who has been present throughout the visit to Tintern, Barrell, explains, is introduced at poem's end to assure the poet himself and the male reader who reads it that the abstractly formulated argument of "Tintern Abbey" goes far beyond the intellectual capabilities of the sister who has presumably
just heard it. She is, in effect, at last acknowledged only to insult her (and by that insult to make the males involved as poet and readers feel better about themselves), to make sure that she will recognize her intellectual limitations, that she will understand by dint of her incomprehension of that argument that she is one of "the uneducated and impressionable" required "to know and to keep their place."24 (Barrell 166). "It is a fact that we should never lose sight of, in eighteenth-century Britain," Barrell tells us, "that women were excluded from what was called the 'republic of letters,' for the qualification of citizenship in that republic was the ability to reduce the data of experience to abstract categories, and women, it was commonly assumed, could only think in terms of the particular and concrete" (160-61). That Wordsworth, even if an educated male, should, at the time of writing "Tintern Abbey," axiomatically regard "abstract categories" as superior to "the particular and concrete," woman's inferior way of thinking, is in itself surprising, since only a few months later in the prose fragment, the "Essay on Morals," he would scathingly condemn "lifeless words and abstract propositions" and "bald & naked reasonings" that "contain no picture of human life" and "describe nothing" for their baneful moral effects (PrW, 1:103-4). Be that as it may, David Simpson, another prominent new historicist, can still insist that Barrell's "argument is essential for our further understanding of the relation between gender
and class at the moment of Wordsworth's writings, "25 and he fleshes out that argument by explaining that what the closing section of "Tintern Abbey" is more or less engaged in is "the poetic construction of the preliterate female" and "the marginalization of the exemplary female, who may be a worshipful and proleptic companion but who can never be a reader" (550).

The historical evidence for the new historicist's sweeping historical generalization is sparse indeed, with the single piece of data pointed to, the sole historical analogue to the closing section of "Tintern Abbey" cited by Barrell, being a quotation from a popular eighteenth-century grammar with a large-print text and small-print notes. The large-print "text, the author explains, is all that need concern as he puts it, 'women and children, and the ignorant of both sexes.'"26 (Barrell 161). But that grammar, as Barrell tells us, was actually published in the early eighteenth century, and Barrell never explains why the grammar he cites should have anything to do with the views on women of William Wordsworth in the 1790s, who, after all, during that tumultuous decade had lived in revolutionary France as a sympathizer with the Revolution and upon his return to England had moved in the most advanced radical circles, in fact in the very same circles to which Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays belonged. Barrell in effect concedes this, telling us (with what seems to me the new historicist's equivalent of a wink and
that one "could be reasonably sure that Wordsworth would not openly or even privately have endorsed such an account of the intellectual 'imbecility' of women"—that is, the account given in the early-eighteenth-century grammar described by Barrell, and, mutatis mutandis, in that grammar's ideological analogue, the closing section of "Tintern Abbey"—at least not openly or even privately "in the late eighteenth century, and especially in the radical circles within which Wordsworth had moved" (161). Yet Barrell certainly insinuates that, under poetic cover, Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" implies something very much like this, that, while he might not have thought Dorothy altogether deserving of the charge of "intellectual imbecility," he nonetheless still did not believe her to have his own masculine capacity for grasping "the principles of abstraction," apparently the indispensable requisite for gaining membership in "the company of the intellectual" (161). And much of Barrell's rationale for ascribing to Wordsworth so contemptibly self-serving a sexist bias is ascribed finally to the inescapable hold over him of his class origins. For Barrell, the fact of Wordsworth's radical affiliations are to count for practically nothing in explaining his opinions, though these affiliations were presumably entered into out of conviction and maintained at great personal risk. (We must remember that Wordsworth had been under surveillance by the Home Office only a year before "Tintern Abbey" was
written.) Instead, these opinions are to be accounted for, including his alleged intellectual disdain for his sister, by suggesting that what is most determining for Wordsworth—far more influential certainly in the shaping of his opinions than his almost daily contacts and conversations with those radicals with whom he habitually associated—is his alleged membership in that far more nebulous and certainly more-likely-to-be-prejudiced category of men designated by Barrell as the "polite male" (166).

But at almost every point, this exercise in an adversarially grounded historicizing of the Wordsworthian text—an "argument" that David Simpson tells us "is essential for our further understanding of the relation between gender and class at the moment of Wordsworth’s writings"—is contradicted by the historical evidence. Even if I were hypothetically to concede—and let me hasten to add I concede nothing—that Wordsworth's assumptions about the intellectual capabilities of women were more likely to be those of the "polite male" rather than those of the politically committed male radical (who, as I hope to show, almost to a man, as their diaries and letters indicate, were sympathetic to the cause of women's rights and particularly admiring of Mary Wollstonecraft), we still would not necessarily be able to draw the conclusions from that characterization of Wordsworth in terms of class that Barrell assumes we would draw. In fact, the historian who has long been a historian of choice for new historicists,
Lawrence Stone, writing on women's education at the end of the eighteenth century and the attitudes of "polite males" toward that education, reaches diametrically opposed conclusions to those of Barrell on this question, conclusions, I should add, that make that early-eighteenth-century grammar brought forward in evidence by Barrell wholly irrelevant: "The change in women's consciousness," Stone writes,

from a humiliating sense of their educational inferiority in 1700 to a proud claim to educational superiority in 1810 is little short of revolutionary. Men also admitted the change, and in 1791 The Gentlemen's Magazine could also observe that “at present the fair sex had asserted its rank, and challenged that natural equality of intellect which nothing but the influence of human institutions could have concealed for a moment.” The standard male attitude towards women's intellectual character had significantly modified over the previous half century.27

But it is not the counterarguments of the historian, even one so eminent as Stone, that call most into question the adversarially directed arguments of Barrell, as augmented by Simpson, designed to prove Wordsworth's intellectual disdain for his sister: it is the historical
record itself, especially that part of it that is to be found in the letters, journals, and poems of William and Dorothy Wordsworth themselves. One would like to think that the unavoidable starting point for any discussion of William's assessment of the intellectual capabilities of his sister would be that letter of 25 July 25, 1832 to W. R. Hamilton, in which, discussing Coleridge, William states, "He and my beloved Sister are the two Beings to whom my intellect is most indebted" (LY, 4:536). The adversarially inclined critic might wish to discount or even dismiss a statement so clearly counter to his own presuppositions, ascribing to brotherly partiality the equating of his sister in her intellectual contribution to him with a man whom John Stuart Mill only eight years later would call "the great awakener in this country of the spirit of philosophy." But in none of the burgeoning literature I am acquainted with on the relationship of William and Dorothy do any of the adversarially minded critics of Wordsworth ever make mention of this assessment of Dorothy by her brother. While the brevity of this great compliment renders it virtually impossible to know how William, on further inquiry, might have differentiated the intellectual contributions of Coleridge from those of his "beloved sister," one can hardly suppose after reading it that he would have regarded his sister, as Barrell asserts, as incapable of comprehending the abstract language of "Tintern Abbey" or, as Simpson would have it, as
"preliterate" and therefore as one who "can never be a reader."

In fact, in the one poem of 1798 in which William addresses Dorothy in his title, "To My Sister," she is addressed as a reader and urged by him on this, "the first mild day of March" (1), to come out of doors "[a]nd bring no book" (16), apparently a request to her to deviate at least for that morning from what would seem to be an otherwise habitual occupation, since he adds, "[F]or this one day / We'll give to idleness" (15-16). Of course the critic who is still resistant to accepting the conclusions that would seem necessarily to follow from this evidence might claim that, though Dorothy reads, her reading could never meet the literate standards of a Cambridge graduate like her brother, that it would be a woman's reading, escapist reading, which from the masculinely elitist vantage point of an educated male like William Wordsworth could hardly be expected to count as reading. But we know enough about the reading habits of Dorothy to safely conjecture that it is unlikely that the book she would bring with her on a day not given to idleness would be some work of escapism. In a year-long period covered by the Grasmere Journal, she tells of reading Chaucer's "Knight's Tale"; Spenser's "Prothalamion" and the first canto of the Faerie Queene; poems of Jonson; book 1 of Paradise Lost; eight plays by Shakespeare; a canto of Ariosto; Schiller's Wallenstein; two or three of Lessing's fables, which she
also translated; several works by her contemporaries, Coleridge, Southey and Lamb; and, of course, poems by her brother William, with the only novels mentioned being Fielding's *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*. Most of these poems, plays, and novels were read in the year in which the *Grasmere Journal* was most intensively kept up. And these are only the books she read to herself. Together, William and Dorothy (the woman Simpson would have us believe was regarded by the poet as someone who could never be a reader) read aloud (during the period covered by the *Grasmere Journal*) selections from Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Fletcher, Bishop Hall and such contemporaries as Campbell and Rogers, and, of course, once again the poems of William himself (*GJ*, 271).

But nothing in the relationship between William and Dorothy probably calls more greatly into question the assumptions of Barrell and Simpson that William would have doubted his sister's intellectual capabilities or regarded her as "preliterate" than the apparently jointly planned project in translation alluded to at the time of their first deciding to live together and referred to on a number of occasions in the following years. Indeed their original plan for living together was to live in London, "maintaining themselves by their literary talents, writing and translating," this according to Dorothy's cousin, friend, and confidante, "Aunt" Elizabeth Rawson, who thought it "a very bad wild scheme."[^29] But William had just
returned from France, while Dorothy apparently knew French well enough for William to include her in his plans. (It is worth noting that, according to Mary Moorman, William's knowledge of both French and Spanish while at Cambridge "was probably self-taught and confined to the grammar-book stage," so that his university education, at least in the initial stages of this endeavor, did not really provide him with a significant advantage over his sister, who had been instructed in French by her uncle.) This "bad wild scheme" was fortunately rendered unnecessary by the chance given them to live in the country instead of in London, an understandably attractive option to the Wordsworths—who were after all the Wordsworths and lovers of nature. Even while they lived in the country at Racedown though, the translation project seems still to have persisted, with Dorothy reporting that she has been "studying Italian very hard" a little more than three months after her arrival there and William asking William Mathews for his assistance in her learning of Italian, noting that Dorothy had "already gone through half of Davila and" that "yesterday we began Ariosto" (EY, 170). And even after William had already written most of Lyrical Ballads and seemed by any reasonable measure well on his way to a career as a professional poet, the idea of translating together still remained a significant goal. Only a month before their visit to Tintern, in a letter of 13 June 1798, Dorothy informs Aunt Rawson of what is at least the publicly stated
and practical motive for the trip to Germany: that by residing there they "hope to make some addition to our resources by translating from the German, the most profitable species of literary labour, and of which I can do almost as much as my Brother" (EY, 221). But, as we know, William learned little German while in Germany. Being housebound much of the time by the bitter cold, instead of going out among his neighbors to learn their language, he spent most of his days writing the opening books of *The Prelude* and the "Lucy" poems, for most of us a trade-off we would hardly wish to have otherwise. But though we have no comparable account from Dorothy of her progress in German while in Germany, we have her own report in the *Grasmere Journal* that almost three years after their return to England she was still keeping up with her German and, in fact, translating the fables of Lessing (GJ, 63) with what Pamela Woof describes as "not inconsiderable prowess" (GJ, 201).

That Wordsworth recognized a clear correlation between encouraging (or inhibiting) women in the learning of foreign languages and estimating their intellectual abilities becomes evident in what is, as far as I know, his only recorded unfavorable comment on Milton, a poet on whom he otherwise bestowed the most lavish praise. "Speaking of Milton's not allowing his daughters to learn the meaning of the Greek they read to him, or at least not exerting himself to teach it to them, he"--that is Wordsworth,
according to the account reported by Mrs. Davy—"admitted that this seemed to betoken a low estimate of the condition and purposes of the female mind." And then, in words that one would think would surely win the approval of any feminist critic, Wordsworth goes on to express surprise that Milton should hold such an opinion: "'And yet, where could he have picked up such notions,' said Mr. W., 'in a country which had seen so many women of learning and talent'? Finally, Wordsworth concludes these strictures against Milton on women by drawing a bead on the best-known of all Miltonic judgments of women: "He for God only, she for God in him." 'Now that,' said Mr. Wordsworth earnestly, 'is a low, a very low and a very false estimate of woman's condition.'"³¹ Admittedly, these comments were made by Wordsworth in 1847, very late in his life, though at a time when he is generally understood to have become, if anything, more conservative in his social views. Still, they are words spoken by Wordsworth himself, expressing views consistent with his behavior to his sister in the 1790s, and therefore, as historical fact almost surely of far greater relevance to an understanding of Wordsworth's estimate of his sister's intellectual abilities at the time of "Tintern Abbey" than Barrell's early-eighteenth-century grammar with its large-print text for "women and children, and the ignorant of both sexes.'"

If the biographical evidence does not support Barrell's contention that William regarded his sister as
intellectually inferior to him, then on what grounds does Barrell assume that he must have so regarded her? The answer would seem to lie in the fact that in “Tintern Abbey” William described his sister as “wild,” or at least as having “wild eyes” (119) and being given to “wild ecstasies” (138), being “wild” a notion that Wordsworth would have equated, according to Barrell, with being “primitive” and being “childish” (159), thereby differentiating her from those “cultivated elites” (159) to which he himself as a “polite male” belonged (though it should be noted, that her “wild ecstasies” were, Wordsworth insists, the same as the “wild ecstasies” he had experienced during his first visit to Tintern Abbey, when he was already a published poet and a Cambridge graduate, surely ample grounds for consideration for membership in the category of “cultivated elites”). Still, if the biographical evidence indicates that William was intellectually respectful of Dorothy, why then did he represent her in “Tintern Abbey” as he did? One obvious answer would seem to be that he regarded her as wild because she was wild, strong-willed, intense, and passionate, though as we shall see from the discussion of “Nutting” in the following chapter, Wordsworth is careful to distinguish Dorothy’s being wild from her being unintelligent or, more to the point, being intellectually uncultivated. Lending credence to the view that William’s characterization of Dorothy in “Tintern Abbey” as “wild”
may be seen as plausibly realistic and not as the product of an ulterior and sexist motivation is the fact that William’s account seems roughly to conform to what we find in other accounts of Dorothy written at the same time. For example, in telling of their first acquaintance with the Wordsworths in 1797 (well before William was to write "Tintern Abbey"), both Joseph Thelwall and Coleridge describe Dorothy as "ardent," Thelwall speaking of Dorothy in "Lines Written at Bridgewater" as "the maid / Of ardent eye" and Coleridge, seeing her for the first time at Racedown, reporting to Cottle that "her manners are simple, ardent, impressive." The claim that William's characterization of Dorothy is essentially something imposed by him upon her—a projection of his needs, desires, or prejudices—seems to me considerably weakened by the fact that all three saw her in much the same way, and that the descriptions by Thelwall and Coleridge are very close to first impressions.

But what perhaps should be most significant to us in all three of these accounts of Dorothy is how much they differ from what we are always taught is the stereotype in the late-eighteenth-century's representation of women. In her study of that important French proponent of women's rights during the Revolution, Olympe de Gouges, Joan Wallach Scott, a noted women's historian, lays out certain complementary characteristics that it was conventionally assumed differentiated male from female within the
Enlightenment and which carried over into the French Revolution itself. Choosing just the first three from Scott’s list of defining stereotypical attributes, men were looked upon as "active" and endowed with "liberty" and "individual sovereignty," while women were regarded as "passive," bound by "duty" and by their assumed "dependency." Moving closer to home, at least to William and Dorothy's home in England, we find Mary Wollstonecraft identifying similar traits as those most commonly promoted and inculcated as suitable for women and thereby serving the stereotype. "Women," Wollstonecraft complains, "are not to be contradicted, in company, and are not allowed to exert any manual strength; and from them the negative virtues only are to be expected, when any virtues are expected--patience, docility, good humor, and flexibility--virtues, incompatible with any vigorous exertion of intellect." In a still earlier section of *A Vindication*, she complains of "Gentleness, docility, and a spaniel-like affection" being "consistently recommended as the cardinal virtues of the sex" (118). To this list of mistakenly commended virtues that for Wollstonecraft are, in reality, faults, she adds another, the cultivation by women (in keeping with the apparent desires of men) of a false sense of delicacy, a characteristic greatly detrimental to their physical well-being. Describing an acquaintance, "a woman of fashion, who was more than commonly proud of her delicacy and sensibility," Wollstonecraft writes, "I have
seen this weak, sophisticated being neglect all the duties of life, yet recline with self-complacency on a sofa, and boast of her want of appetite, as a proof of delicacy that extended to, or perhaps arose from, her exquisite sensibility" (131). As an antidote to such a clearly disabling delicacy, Wollstonecraft urges that women be "allowed to take the same exercise as boys, not only during infancy, but youth," so that they may "arrive at perfection of the body." Only then, she believes, could they be able "to earn their own subsistence, the true definition of independence; and to bear those bodily inconveniences and exertions that are requisite to strengthen the mind" (186). In this, connecting delicacy with dependency and exercise with independence, Wollstonecraft takes her place as perhaps the first in a long tradition of advocates for women who believe that cultivation of bodily strength and physical prowess are an indispensable first step toward human equality, a tradition that most notably includes Simone de Beauvoir, who would have girls climb trees and even fight with their fists as a way of achieving that autonomous sense of existential subjectivity and selfhood that boys take for granted.

If a delicacy and passiveness that induce dependency are the stereotypical characteristics to be resisted, and if exercise and fitness in the interest of independence are the activities to be encouraged, according to those seeking equality for women, then one can hardly find any
representation of a woman by a male author in the late eighteenth century that seems more profoundly empowering than the great prayer for Dorothy in which "Tintern Abbey" culminates, the representation of a future that is both an expression of desire and a statement of prophecy, what should be and will be. "Knowing that Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her" (122-23) and that their lives shall validate their “cheerful faith, that all which we behold / Is full of blessings” (133-34), Wordsworth, with a confidently pivotal “Therefore” (134), selects, as his primary illustration of such blessings bestowed, an event that might seem better suited to illustrate the loneliness and physical hardships that nature imposes on those who dwell within it:

Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee.

(134-37)

The woman Wordsworth writes about, who braves the not only "misty" but, one suspects, bone-chilling "mountain-winds," is, in fact, the very epitome of that robustness, that physical strength and prowess, which for Wollstonecraft and Beauvoir are a virtually necessary precondition of female independence. Nor should we concern ourselves too much
that Wordsworth at that future time when perhaps he "should be where I no more can hear" (147) his sister's "voice" (148) would wish her "solitary" (rather than, let us say, married) in her walks without him, for Wordsworth is the poet who most clearly equates independence with solitude and who, in fact, a year after writing "Tintern Abbey" will wonder if in youth he himself had not been taught by nature "to feel, perhaps too much, / The self-sufficing power of solitude" (Prelude, 2:77-78).

One can perhaps appreciate how much Wordsworth's stated wish for Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey" went against the stereotypical grain by remembering another famous walk by a woman in inclement weather described in a relatively contemporaneous novel by a woman, Elizabeth Bennet's trapse through the mud to Netherfield to see her sister Jane on her sickbed, an act of sisterly mercy and love whose indecorousness provokes the scorn of Miss Hurst and Miss Bingley, women whose preferred form of exercise is to stroll around the great house's drawing room in Jane Austen's mocking representation of the female stereotype. Of course, in accordance with Austen's marriage plot, Elizabeth's walk through the mud, a deviation from her more customarily decorous behavior (though a deviation amply justified by devotion to her sister), has as its unintended though implicitly desired consequence, the gaining of Darcy's attention and, eventually, his affection and plays a not insignificant part in making Elizabeth mistress of
Pemberly. But in the case of "Tintern Abbey," Dorothy's prayed-for walk in mist and wind--solitary and thus observed by no one--is plainly an intrinsic good for both brother and sister, its pleasureableness its own reward. Furthermore, the "solitary walk" William wishes Dorothy to take is no deviation from customary behavior but a regular part of Dorothy Wordsworth's daily routine, even at the time the prayer was uttered, and would continue to be so for most of her adult life. To any reader of Dorothy Wordsworth's biography the scope and difficulty of her daily walks is simply astounding (this is to say nothing of the great walking trips proposed as vacations in which she sometimes covered forty miles in a single day). There are the frequent seven-mile hikes to Ambleside and back to check for mail, often in the worst of weather; routinely added to this on many otherwise ordinary days are immensely long walks around the lake or elsewhere in the vicinity of home with William or Mary or Coleridge or some neighbor or sometimes, best of all, alone, with Dorothy arriving at Keswick or some other destination "wet to the skin" (GJ, 83). Furthermore, in assessing William's motives in offering that prayer, we must also bear in mind how much pride he took in Dorothy's remarkable accomplishments as a walker, in fact, in her keeping pace with him. Nowhere are this pleasurableness in walking and pride in Dorothy more in evidence than in that wonderfully exuberant letter to Coleridge that William wrote immediately after arriving
with Dorothy for the first time at their home in Grasmere in December of 1799. It was an arduous journey along "half-frozen roads" in "intermittent snow showers,"\textsuperscript{38} clearly requiring the most strenuous physical exertion, and William describes it all in language that exudes the sheer pleasure both derived from it: "Will you believe me, when I tell you that we walked the next ten miles, by the watch over a high mountain road, thanks to the wind that drove behind us and the good road, in two hours and a quarter, a marvellous feat of which D. will long tell" (\textit{Ey}, 280). Such excursions were, however pleasurable, also frequently uncomfortable and difficult and, on occasion, life-threateningly dangerous, as we learn from Dorothy's recounting of how in bad weather (a Lakeland constant) she too had come perilously close to the edge of a precipice from which their Grasmere neighbors, George and Sara Green, had fallen to their deaths. But Dorothy's arduous walking was plainly a case of a woman's physically doing what the men were doing, and doing it as well; and it would certainly have won Wollstonecraft and Beauvoir's approval, as it did her brother's.

That Wordsworth's portrayal of Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey" goes against the stereotypical grain, that he prays and predicts that she will become a strong, active, and independent woman, even when he can no longer be with her, gains him no credit with his adversarially minded critics, and the prayer itself simply becomes additional grist for
the accusatorial mill. Charles Rzepka, for example, adversarially insists that, in the closing section of "Tintern Abbey," the poet in his prayer for Dorothy "destroys her independence as a person," a charge of the most strident harshness leveled against Wordsworth for no other reason than that, as his sister wanders "solitary" in the mountain winds and mists, feeling perhaps "[t]he self-sufficing power of solitude," he would have her remember him even when he is no longer present; and Barrell, inveighing against Wordsworth still more sternly, contends that "the ‘prayer’ he begins to utter at line 120 . . . is no more or less than a prayer to nature to arrest Dorothy's development, and for his benefit." Thus, the apparently un stereotypical representation that would seem to emerge from "Tintern Abbey" of Dorothy as ardent, strong, and potentially independent can be and is almost invariably turned to Wordsworth's detriment by his adversarial critics, who would have us regard this representation as just another instance in which what Wordsworth took to be innate sexual differences disadvantageous to women were exploited by him to further his own masculine need for domination.

Of course, Barrell and Simpson do not provide the only historically grounded adversarial explanation of Wordsworth's gender-determined unjustness to his sister in "Tintern Abbey." In her feminist study of Wordsworth, Wordsworth and the Cultivation of Women, Judith Page tells
us that the explanation of Barrell and Simpson "misses the point," not because it is unfair and mistaken (as it is) but because they have failed to observe the primary and therefore real reason for William's essentially masculinity biased misrepresentation of Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey," that he sees in "her wild eyes" himself, imposing a "masculine narrative" where a feminine narrative is required (45). Initially Page turns not to history but to the literary criticism of Carolyn Heilbrun to identify the plots that Dorothy might have used in her own self-representing narrative, "the marriage plot and the plot of abandonment and death" (46). But since Dorothy Wordsworth gives no indication of any interest in marriage at the time of "Tintern Abbey" and would have had no reason to feel herself abandoned then when she would seem, in fact, to have been cherished, Page suggests a third plot, taken not from literature but from historical generalizing in the 1980s, a plot that had "the unmarried sister or daughter live in the household of a brother or her father," and where "such a sister contributed immeasurably to the economy of the household and helped raise the children" (46), a generalization propounded by Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall in their important Marxist-feminist study of family history in the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850. Coming from professional historians, the generalization of Davidoff and
Hall would seem far more likely to prove helpful in explaining the relationship of William and Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey" than would the flawed hypothesis proposed by Barrell and Simpson, resting as it does on such thin historical underpinnings. Moreover, the use to which Page would put the historians' generalization seems more than justified by the fact that, as their very first illustration of the seemingly incontrovertible proposition that "[t]he combination of women contributing resources and gaining a place was common"\(^{42}\) in the households of England in the years between 1780 and 1850, Davidoff and Hall put forward a two-sentence summary of the history as dependent of Dorothy Wordsworth herself: "Dorothy Wordsworth," the historians tell us, "when in her early 20s, lived as a 'mother's help' with her elder brother, a Suffolk vicar. After she had inherited her share of the family property (1800 pounds invested at 4 per cent), she and her brother William were able to set up housekeeping and later she helped care for William's children" (280). But adversarial presuppositions are not confined to literary critics alone among our current practitioners of an ideologically driven hermeneutic of disparagement, and adversarially minded historians too are prone to err, distort, and misrepresent in order to have their presuppositions come true. Consequently, virtually every statement of ostensible fact in this two-sentence summary by the adversarially minded Davidoff and Hall is staggeringly erroneous. And I would
further add that, even if these glaring errors of fact were corrected, the corrected summary would still distort and misrepresent the history of Dorothy's relations with those upon whom she would seem to have depended and, more important, whom she claimed to love.

The facts are that between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three Dorothy lived not with an elder brother but with an uncle who was a vicar—not in Suffolk but in Norfolk. Moreover, the bare-bones characterization of her position in the household of that uncle as simply a "mother's help," with its insinuation that she simply lived a Cinderella-like life as a drudge, seems to me a very narrow and indeed pinched rendering of that portion of Dorothy's history and a serious injustice to that uncle who, along with his wife, emerges from Dorothy's letters as the soul of generosity and kindness: "[T]here is not a better man in the world than my Uncle; nor a more amiable woman than my Aunt" (EY, 18). In truth, her uncle proved to be something of Prince Charming to Dorothy's Cinderella, but I hasten to add, a Prince Charming without any apparent romantic intentions. For in inviting the orphaned Dorothy into his own household, her uncle took her out of a situation in which she was desperately unhappy, a fifteen-month residence in the home of his parents and her grandparents, a stay that the sixteen-year-old Dorothy must surely at the time have anticipated would last as long as her grandparents lived. Confined amidst the "ill-nature of
my Grandfather" and "the cold insensitivity of my Grandmother"—a woman who showed "so little of tenderness in her manner or of anything affectionate" to her granddaughter that Dorothy would write "that while I am in her house I cannot at all consider myself as at home, I feel like a stranger" (EY, 9)—Dorothy apparently found relief from her misery only upon the return home from graduation from Cambridge of that kindly uncle who would tutor her for two hours every day in French and arithmetic while they both lived in his parents' home. And then—in what seems an act of kindly intended generosity—he spirited his virtually destitute niece away from that unhappy place to the new household he would establish with his marriage a year later. "I was almost mad with joy" (EY, 18) is how Dorothy, in a letter to Jane Pollard, describes her reaction to that invitation to take up residence in a household where, by every indication in her letters, Dorothy found a home in which she never felt a stranger.

Even more troubling because it so erroneously and unfairly characterizes a relationship of such consequence in current scholarship is Davidoff and Hall's statement that William and Dorothy "set up housekeeping," only "after she had inherited her share of the family inheritance," thus "gaining a place" by "contributing resources," an ostensible fact that the historians claim rests on the authority of the 1938 biography of Dorothy Wordsworth by
Ernest de Selincourt. The page they cite does deal with Dorothy and her brothers' coming into their family inheritance, but it deals with events of 1802, when Lord Lonsdale's heirs decided to satisfy all of their father's "just debts" by giving the Wordsworths the money the late Lord Lonsdale had unjustly withheld from them. But as anyone familiar with the story of the Wordsworths knows, and certainly anyone familiar with the de Selincourt biography, William and Dorothy had "set up housekeeping" seven years earlier, with Dorothy contributing practically nothing in the way of financial resources to that arrangement. In fact, the story of their setting up housekeeping, correctly told, almost inevitably leads to conclusions diametrically opposed to the economic explanations of family relationships between men and women favored by Davidoff and Hall.

Any narrative of William and Dorothy's establishing of a home for themselves must, on the one hand, begin with an episode of the most undeniably shocking patriarchal callousness--with the female child as victim. Immediately following her mother's death, Dorothy at six was sent to live with a cousin of her mother's--unlike her brothers who were at least sent off to school--and she was never thereafter invited to spend "a single moment under my Father's Roof" (EY, 663), as she bitterly remarked thirty years later, not for Christmas (the date of her birthday) when her brothers routinely returned home from school, not
even for her father's own funeral six years after her mother's death. But on the other hand, the narrative of William and Dorothy Wordsworth seems also to illustrate the most admirable male devotedness—at least as I read it—the devotedness to his sister of a brother who, having spent most of his life with his brothers and later his male friends, still chose out of what can only be called brotherly love to be his sister's keeper. For Dorothy, the desire to live in something akin to the immediate family that she had been forced to leave at six remained a fervent hope—a "fantasy" as Susan Levin terms it—clearly voiced by Dorothy in her earliest extant correspondence. But as far as we know, her other brothers, busy making their way in the world, did not share that fantasy, nor did Richard, the attorney and financially most successful of the brothers, apparently ever attempt to help her realize it.

In 1795, just before they began to set up housekeeping together, William, while "desperate for money" in the words of his biographer Stephen Gill, was also footloose and free, associating with some of the leading British radicals of the day in what certainly must have been an exciting life in London. But what made possible the establishing of a shared household by William and Dorothy, what Davidoff and Hall term Dorothy's "gaining a place," was not any contribution to that arrangement by Dorothy but a financial contribution made to it by William himself. In that same year, William became beneficiary of an astonishing bequest
in the will of Raisley Calvert, brother of a college friend, who, believing (on the basis of what seems to us relatively meager evidence) that William would someday accomplish great things, left him nine hundred pounds. And that bequest was used by William, not to further his independence, his footlooseness and freedom, but to set up a household with his sister and, moreover, to insure Dorothy's future security through a codicil to the will surely inserted at the urging of William, granting him full power to invest any portion he wished of that money "for the use and benefit of his sister Dorothy Wordsworth" (EY, 134). To understand why William should enter into an arrangement that on the face of it seems financially so disadvantageous as housekeeping with his sister Dorothy, we must, I believe, in this case impute motives to the male partner in the relationship between a man and a woman—even when brother and sister—that now seem almost prohibited by the adversarial presuppositions of our hermeneutics of disparagement, motives such as generosity, affection, and love, motives that figure too rarely in current accounts of the relationship between William and Dorothy Wordsworth. Unfortunately for Page then, "the middle-class plot" of "the sister or daughter living in the household of a brother or her father" and contributing "to the economy of the household" and helping "raise the children" has little applicability (as I believe my analysis of the two-sentence summary of Dorothy's history in Davidoff and Hall
indicates) to the situation of William and Dorothy Wordsworth at the time of "Tintern Abbey." If in July of 1798 Dorothy required a plot approximating the events of her own life in order to explain it, the most appropriate and meaningful plot for her would almost surely have been that of companionate respect and brotherly affection propounded by William and expressed through those terms of endearment we find in the poem itself: "dear, dear Friend" and "dear, dear, Sister."

One last example from new historicist histories of William and Dorothy Wordsworth will once again show how adversarial presuppositions lead to errors, distortions, and misrepresentations in the writing of that history, with brother and sister in this case presented not as aligned in gendered opposition to one another but instead as united in middle-class solidarity against the undeserving poor. The one literary critic who seems the exception to the rule of a frequently cavalier approach by new historicists and feminists to the historical record and to the findings of historians is Alan Liu, who in a long and excruciatingly intricate and certainly historically informed discussion of The Borderers concludes that, since the crime rate was in decline at the time Wordsworth wrote it, the play could not have been most fundamentally about crime, the conventional view of its subject matter, but instead must have expressed "a deeper, more central social agony."46 And drawing upon the writings of the social historians, including Stone, Liu
further concludes that, at a time when the ideology of the middle-class nuclear family was coming into ascendancy, Wordsworth, as a member of that class—indeed, as someone who, in Liu's words, "worshipped exclusively the ethos of the nuclear family" (249)—constructed "the deeper, more central social agony" underlying *The Borderers* out of the "virtually tribal rift" that existed between the middle-class family and a specially designated class of 'illegitimates,' the poor" (251-52). Liu offers page upon page of historical summary to document the claim that from the perspective of the middle class the poor did stand for the Other, that the poor were identified with an immorality that defied the ethos of the middle-class nuclear family, and in consequence of that immorality the poor were identified with illegitimacy and its attendant evils, child neglect and even infanticide. This view of the poor, according to Liu, would have been inculcated in Dorothy and William Wordsworth as children by some family elder and counselor, father or grandfather or uncle, who would have told his charges of the moral failings of the neighborhood poor in language that Liu tells us he will attempt to "ventriloquize" (261) and thereby to approximate: "You know those poor children from down the road who sometimes come to beg at our door. Their father died many years ago. Some say he was murdered. Their mother drinks and worse... Be glad you are not like them. We are still a family" (262).
Such indoctrination obviously took, or so Liu says, not just for William but for Dorothy too. In fact, in a curiously parenthetical call for a much-needed "history of prejudice," (266), a term that would seem synonymous for Liu with middle-class ideology toward the poor, he tells us that "there is no better way to instance the abundance of such material--and its importance in Wordsworth's milieu--than to quote a passage from Dorothy Wordsworth's Grasmere Journal" (266), a passage that Liu surprisingly quotes in full. (I say surprisingly, since the plain sense of that passage, which I too will quote in full, seems so transparently at odds with what Liu says about it, his assertion that it supplies material for a history of middle-class prejudice against the poor.)

When we were at Thomas Ashburner's on Sunday Peggy talked about the Queen of Patterdale. She had been brought to drinking by her husband's unkindness and avarice. She was formerly a very nice tidy woman. She had taken to drinking but that was better than if she had taken to something worse (by this I suppose she meant killing herself). She said that her husband used to be out all night with other women and she used to hear him come in the morning for they never slept together--"Many a poor Body a wife like me, has had a working heart for her, as much stuff as she had." (GJ, 51-52)
I feel certain that any reader coming to this passage for the first time without the new historicist's adversarial predisposition would be simply mystified by Liu's claim that from it one would virtually automatically cull what is self-evidently material for "a history of prejudice" or by his assertion that this description of the Queen of Patterdale somehow illustrates the proposition that "[f]or Dorothy, the legitimacy of home life depends on representation" of what Liu terms "an antonymic impure nature whose social avatars must be watched askance with mixed pity and terror," such "avatars," he adds, being "the 'naturals,' in another sense, of the illegitimate poor."

And any reader who knew anything of the true historical background of this passage from Dorothy Wordsworth's _Grasmere Journal_ would, I believe, find it almost perversely ill-chosen as an illustration of middle-class prejudice against the poor. In the first place, it is not Dorothy Wordsworth who recounts this tale of a woman who, in Liu's words, is one of "the local poor, the impure Queen of Patterdale" (266), but Peggy Ashburner, who could herself be fairly described as one of the "local poor," her husband, Thomas, in the words of Woof, having been "forced to sell his patrimonial land" (GJ, 147), and her family having "all got up at 5 o clock in the morning to spin & Thomas carded" (GJ, 41) in order to repay their profoundly burdensome debts. But it is the social status of the
subject of Peggy Ashburner's anecdote, the Queen of Patterdale herself, that most severely undermines Liu's class-based analysis of this passage. Liu may take it for granted that, in keeping with the prejudices of "Wordsworth's milieu," any entry in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal that relates the history of a woman who drinks because her husband is unkind and unfaithful must be a cautionary tale told about the "impure" and "illegitimate poor." But the truth is that the Queen of Patterdale was not one of the "local poor" but one of the local rich. Her husband was nothing less than "the richest man in Patterdale," worth forty thousand pounds, according to one estimate reported by Joseph Budworth in a section of his A Fortnight's Ramble in the Lakes (120) dealing with the King of Patterdale and given the heading "Astonishing Accumulation of Wealth" (119), an accumulation explained in part by the fact that he was the descendant of a family that "for time immemorial" had had "no one near them greater than themselves," and in part by that notorious avarice of which Peggy Ashburner speaks. The name "Queen of Patterdale" had therefore been given to his wife not as a mock title bestowed on the town drunk with heavy-handed derisiveness by the residents of Patterdale but because she was the wife of John Mounsey, the King of Patterdale, a title of honor having "descended by local courtesy from an ancestor who had headed the neighbourhood in defeating a party of Border raiders at Styborrow Crag in Ullswater."
And she lived not in a cottager's hovel but in Patterdale Hall, a house known locally as the "Palace of Patterdale."
That Dorothy knew all this is evident from a letter she wrote from Patterdale only four years later, in which, after expressing relief that the "Dale has not yet been intruded on by any of the 'Fancy builders,'" she goes on to complain that the new Patterdale Hall built by the present King of Patterdale, also named John Mounsey, on the site of his father's residence, the Palace of Patterdale, is an "offensive object" because of its apparent garishness (Ey, 637).

Yet one can understand how someone--especially someone with Liu's adversarial presuppositions--might mistakenly assume the Queen of Patterdale to be a poor woman, for Peggy Ashburner's narrative seems devoid of any obvious indicators of the Queen of Patterdale's social class. Though critics like Liu would have us believe that this was a society in which consciousness of the hierarchy of class relationships was pervasive, we certainly find in that narrative neither the deference we might have expected from a poor woman describing her betters nor, contrastingly, anything like the resentful pleasurableness that Peggy Ashburner might have felt at seeing one of the high and mighty brought so low. In truth, what seems to me most prominent in the passage in question is pity, not the pity mixed with the class-engendered terror Liu finds there but the pure unalloyed pity of one human for another, Peggy
Ashburner's sisterly sympathy and concern for a woman who would have been "a nice tidy woman" but "had been brought
to drink" by the "unkindness and avarice" of a "husband"
who "used to be out all night with other women," an account
given especial poignancy by the added detail that the Queen of Patterdale only "used to hear her husband come in in the
morning for they never slept together." Even the moral
weakness of her drinking--presumably the most visible sign
of her impurity--is apparently mitigated for Peggy by its being preferable to a forbidding "something else"--Dorothy takes Peggy's guarded phrase to mean "killing herself," that terrible alternative that the Queen of Patterdale in her life's misery might under the circumstances understandably have chosen instead. And this brief account of the Queen of Patterdale concludes with a summary sentence by Peggy Ashburner that Dorothy Wordsworth with marvellous artistic tact and moral understanding gives us, not as reported speech like the material that came before it (speech given in what her brother would have called "the real language of men" [PrW, 1:118], though with that language unobtrusively "purified" [PrW, 1:125] by the journal's more literate author), but instead as a literal rendering in her poor and less well-spoken neighbor's own compassionately heartfelt words of identification with the troubled Queen of Patterdale, words that suffer from a certain syntactic and even semantic awkwardness but, nonetheless, convey their speaker's sympathetic
understanding well enough and are therefore carefully set off by Dorothy Wordsworth in quotation marks: "Many a poor Body a wife like me, has had a working heart for her, as much stuff as she had." In this utterance by Peggy Ashburner, and in what she says before this, needless to say, I can find nothing that could conceivably be construed as material for Liu's yet-to-be-written history of middle-class prejudice. What I find there instead is the best of illustrations for the most profoundly affecting of Wordsworthian propositions and assertions of faith: the great claim of "The Old Cumberland Beggar" "[t]hat we have all of us one human heart" (153).

But it is from an earlier passage in the same journal entry in which Peggy Ashburner's sad history of the Queen of Patterdale appears—an earlier passage that is unquestionably about one of the poor—that we learn just how wildly wide of the mark Liu's charge against Dorothy Wordsworth of prejudice toward the poor actually is. "Preoccupied on December 22, 1801," according to Liu, with what he tells us he has "elsewhere called 'purity' . . . but will here name 'legitimacy,'" Dorothy, prior to recording Peggy Ashburner's account of the Queen of Patterdale in the Grasmere Journal, "speculates about the past of a vagrant beggar," someone she had in fact met on the road earlier on that same day, a sailor who had spent "57 years at sea" and now at "75 years of age" has plainly fallen on very hard times (GJ, 50). Thinking back to the
encounter earlier on the same day, Dorothy does recall something about the old man's appearance that the adversarially inclined reader might wish to take as evidence of her preoccupation with "purity," but I myself am most struck by how matter-of-factly and unjudgmentally she notes this detail that a more sanctimonious writer might well have used to link that "vagrant beggar" with what Liu believes the middle class regarded as the "bad poor": "Half the Seaman's nose was reddish as if he had been in his youth somewhat used to drinking, though he was not injured by it" (GJ, 50). But it is her description earlier in the same entry of the encounter itself that most clearly illustrates how much Liu misrepresents Dorothy's frame of mind on that day, only three days before Christmas in 1801. We find there not some censorious middle-class repugnance to one of the "impure" poor to whom Dorothy, "preoccupied" with "purity" and "legitimacy," coldly extends charity but rather a moment of highly self-critical personal scrutiny by Dorothy Wordsworth of the impulses that underlie her own charitable giving, an act of recollection sufficiently hard on herself that her inclusion of it in a journal intended not just for her own but her brother's eyes redounds to her credit: "As we came up the White Moss we met an old man, who I saw was a beggar by his two bags hanging over his shoulder, but from a half laziness, half indifference & a wanting to try him if he would speak I let him pass. He said nothing, & my heart
smote me. I turned back & said You are begging? 'Ay' says he--I gave him a halfpenny" (GJ, 50). While we cannot finally gauge how little or how much that halfpenny might have meant to the Wordsworths, we do learn later in that entry that on the very same day William and Dorothy "talked of going to Ambleside after dinner to borrow money of Luff" (GJ, 51). After reading the entry from Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal, I can only say that if I were to write the "history of prejudice" that Alan Liu believes "needs to be written," I would be tempted to begin--at least if the term "prejudice" retains its dictionary meaning of "an unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand"--with Liu and his adversarial allies in their practice of the hermeneutics of disparagement, with critics who approach the texts or events that come under their scrutiny with "beforehand" presuppositions designed to find fault with and to assign blame to the work or writer they have made the object of their ostensibly scholarly consideration.

But if we can acquit Dorothy Wordsworth of the charge of simply being a conduit for the most prejudiced of middle-class values, a smugly uncritical faith in the ethos of the nuclear family and a corresponding animus against the poor for failing to adhere to that ethos, what of her brother? We must bear in mind that it is to catch him up that the accusations against Dorothy are really made, since she, like William, is said to belong to "Wordsworth's
milieu," with all of the unflattering insinuations that assignment to that milieu carries with it. "On the basis of massive documentary evidence gathered by family historians," Liu as adversarial critic tells us, "the middle class consolidated itself in the eighteenth century through the regulation of actual family form by a much more narrowly defined form resident in the concept of love." And since Wordsworth is to be understood as inescapably the typical and conventional product of his age and class, Liu also informs us that "the poet worshipped exclusively the ethos of the nuclear family," in general promoting through his poetry what the eighteenth century took to be "family values." But not all members of the middle class in the 1790s worshipped that ethos nor believed in the primacy of those values, and, in a valuable recent essay, Evan Radcliffe has shown how during the revolutionary decade the idea of universal benevolence and the ethos of the nuclear family built on the private affections came into conflict in Britain, came, in fact, to be viewed as mutually exclusive ethical motives, touchstones for defining and differentiating radical and reactionary. Thus, as Radcliffe states, Burke held that the universal benevolence appealed to by the radicals "simply did not exist" (233) but yet believed that this ethical chimera still threatened to have "catastrophic" consequences, that adherence to that doctrine would ultimately destroy "what civilization depends on: all our social feelings and attachments,"
beginning in the family and ending in the nation" (234),
while Godwin, the most unswervingly radical of all in his
faith in the moral and political efficacy of a purely
rational benevolence, maintained that "ties of kinship,
affection and gratitude simply inhibit us from choosing the
proper action" (231). Not all liberals were, of course, as
willing to throw out the private affections as Godwin, and,
in his regular column in the first volume of the Monthly
Magazine (the issues of which had been sent to Wordsworth
at Racedown by his friend James Losh), William Enfield had
answered the question that served as the title of his essay
"Is Private Affection Inconsistent with Universal
Benevolence?" with an unhesitating "No." The "dear
charities," according to Enfield, what one gave out of
private affection for one's children, one's spouse, one's
parents, "may remain, without violating the supreme law
which unites man to man, and being to being throughout our
universe" (276), for the private affections "are not to be
considered as the scaffolding by means of which the
structure of universal benevolence is raised, but as the
very materials of which it is composed" (275).

At issue for us is where Wordsworth is to be situated
in 1798 and 1799, the years most in dispute, in this
critically defining debate between advocacy of universal
benevolence and commitment to the primacy of the private
affections. For Liu the answer is obvious: Wordsworth even
earlier than this, at the time of writing The Borderers,
had already shown that he "worshipped exclusively the ethos of the nuclear family" and concurred in the class-driven corollary to that ethos, that the poor were the illegitimate Other who invariably violated and threatened those family values that the poet cherished, such views certainly being a far cry from the attitudes of the philanthropist in his generalized love for the species as a whole, and especially in his professed do-gooder's love for the poor. What is surprising, though, is that on the few occasions in these early years where Wordsworth speaks to the issue directly, he takes what can only be described as the extreme radical position, not only one far closer to Godwin than to the one Liu assigns him, but also one closer to Godwin than to even that compromise position proposed by Enfield, since, for Wordsworth, following the private affections would appear, in these instances, to be inconsistent with the practice of a universal benevolence that is both feasible and needed.

At the end of the 1798-99 Prelude, when Wordsworth, casting himself—in Coleridge's words—as one of the "visionary philosophes,"\(^{56}\) reflects on those "good men" who have "fallen off" (Prelude, 2:451-52) and would now utter "sneers" on "visionary minds" (Prelude, 2:455-56), he dismisses the "gentle names / Of peace, and quiet and domestic love" (Prelude, 2:453-54) these allegedly "good men" have taken up as mere disguises for "selfishness" (Prelude, 2:453). The private affections here being
conceived, not as a transitional means to and certainly not as a constituent element in a universal benevolence that had as its goal what Coleridge described as the "amelioration of mankind" but merely as an extension of the self-love that stands as the primary obstacle to that general amelioration. Making this point even more directly is "The Old Cumberland Beggar," where universal benevolence, perhaps the principal ethical end that that poem looks to, is presented as basically antithetical to the private affections. From acts of charity like those performed in behalf of the Cumberland beggar, especially when undertaken in childhood, a disposition toward philanthropy on a universal scale is naturally and necessarily inculcated, as one comes to feel a sense of shared humanity, of the brotherhood of man, of being "kindred with a world / Where want and sorrow were" (115-16). And benefiting most from those encounters are those who (as Wordsworth explains in a manuscript variant) will eventually perform the greatest good for the greatest number, philanthropists in the Godwinian mold,

lofty minds
And meditative, in which reason falls
Like a strong radiance of the setting sun
On each minutest feeling of the heart

(PW, 4:237),
men who out of such childhood episodes of charitable giving are to become

authors of delight
And happiness, which to the end of time
Will live, and spread, and kindle.

(107-9)

And, as Wordsworth makes clear, acts of charity so formative in our moral development, our giving to one who has no personal claims on us like the Cumberland beggar, one who thus comes as close as any individual in the narrow range of our direct experience can to humanity in the abstract, are a very different matter from "acts of love" (139) fostered by the private affections, the kindness of men "to those with whom they dwell, / Their kindred, and the children of their blood" (139-40). Such acts of kindness and of love toward those to whom we are bound by the private affections, acts that Enfield speaks of as the "dear charities," are in "The Old Cumberland Beggar" relegated to the morally inferior status of "inevitable charities" (145). Though doubtlessly motivated by love, these actions apparently confer little merit on those who perform them, since, according to Wordsworth, they lack "[w]herewith to satisfy the human soul" (146).
But it is in a fragment probably written in Germany between 6 October 1798 and April 1799 that Wordsworth deviates most sharply from Liu's characterization of him not only as someone "worshipping exclusively the ethos of the nuclear family" but also as one who judged the poor to be "illegitimate" in their seeming refusal to live by that ethos as well.

For let the impediment be what it may,
His hand must clothe and nourish them, and there
From hour to hour so constantly he feels
An obligation pressing him with weight
Inevitable that all offices
Which want this single tendency appear
Or trivial or redundant; hence remains
So little to be done which can assume
The appearance of a voluntary act
That his affections in their very core
Are false; there is no freedom in his love.
Nor would he err perhaps who should assert
That this perceiv'd necessity creates
This same constriction of the heart, the same
[    ] in those with whom he lives,
His wife and children. What then can we hope
From one who is the worst of slaves, the slave
Of his own house? The light that shines abroad,
How can it lead him to an act of love?
Whom can he comfort? Will the afflicted turn
Their steps to him, or will the eye of grief
And sorrow seek him? Is the name of friend
Known to the poor man? When is he to hear
The sweet creative voice of gratitude?58

This is, of course, the tale of a "poor man," one who does not, however, demonstrate the propensity of the poor to drink and be promiscuous and to neglect and even abandon their children, the view of the poor that Liu "ventriloquistically" tells us was propagated in middle-class households like those of the Wordsworths. Indeed, the "poor man" of the Goslar fragment is accused of being guilty of the very same charge that Liu levels against Wordsworth, that he "worships exclusively the nuclear family," though we might say in extenuation that in the poor man's case financial hardship, the economic "impediment" to his meeting the need to "clothe and nourish" his family, is so compelling, so narrows his options of what he may attend to, that he would seem to lack any real choice in the matter. And yet despite these extenuating circumstances, Wordsworth is still surprisingly hard on the unflaggingly responsible "poor man." The "act[s] of love" performed by the "poor man," "pressing him with weight / Inevitable," would seem to have no greater moral standing because he is poor than the "inevitable charities" bestowed upon "[t]heir kindred and the children
of their blood" by his more affluent counterparts in "The Old Cumberland Beggar." In fact, the motivating "affections" of this apparently exemplary family-loving man "in their very core / Are false, "Wordsworth insists, "false" because nothing he does "can assume / The appearance of a voluntary act," his "acts of love" having their moral worth negated by their inevitability. And therefore Wordsworth concludes, in what is certainly an unexpectedly harsh summary condemnation, that because "there is no freedom in his love" the poor man who cares only for his family must suffer a morally fatal "constriction of the heart," and so too, apparently learning by example, must "those with whom he lives / His wife and children."

I would suggest that the case against this seemingly morally unexceptionable "poor man" is put forward with such unforgiving harshness by Wordsworth because the criterion he uses to measure virtue is benevolence, as that term was understood by the antifamily radicals of the 1790s. For them, the prime requisite of virtue was that we look beyond the self and beyond kinship, disinterestedly seeking to do good where we have no attachment, no interest (and surely acts motivated by the private affections, the "dear charities" bestowed on those by nature "dear" to us, are inescapably interested), and by so conducting ourselves, we would take the necessary first steps toward eventually acting philanthropically in behalf of mankind at large, the
"humanity" whose "sad music" so powerfully moves Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey." Having adopted so morally austere a measure of rectitude, Wordsworth apparently feels himself free to judge the family-centered "poor man," ceaselessly toiling to "clothe and nourish" his wife and children, as no more than a slave (his "manacles" doubtlessly "mind-forged"), indeed "the worst of slaves," being "the slave / Of his own house."

Yet if the "poor man" does ill by his single-minded devotedness to his family, constricting his own heart and the hearts of "those with whom he lives," he pays a heavy price for it, depriving himself, and presumably them as well, of the happiness that accrues to those who act disinterestedly. Confined within the limiting horizons of "his own house," the "poor man" is virtually incapable of viewing anything or anyone by "[t]he light that shines abroad," the enabling condition for a true "act of love." ("The light that shines abroad" in the Goslar fragment bears a more than passing resemblance to other instances in Wordsworth's poetry in which the workings of benevolence are identified with the sun's light: the description in the unpublished fragment intended as an introduction to "Nutting," in which Wordsworth speaks of "benevolence" as "spread / Like the sun's light upon the open sea";\(^{59}\) and the manuscript passage in the "Old Cumberland Beggar" where he tells how among the benevolent, those "By their good works exalted, lofty minds / And meditative," we find "reason
Grob

falls / Like a strong radiance of the setting sun.

Acting only in behalf of those to whom he is bound by ties of kinship, the self-enslaved "poor man" never feels himself "exalted" because he is never turned to by the "afflicted" or sought after by "the eye of grief / And sorrow." Saddest of all is Wordsworth's concluding question, "Is the name of friend / Known to the poor man?" a rhetorical question to which the answer is clearly no. The "poor man" is never to know "the name of friend" because he shall never experience the pleasure of that reciprocally flowing love that originates in a good will exercised disinterestedly and freely toward one who dwells "abroad," for only there can the moral life, the only true basis of friendship, be carried on. Thus, for Wordsworth, writing in Goslar, the exclusive worship of the nuclear family Liu disparagingly ascribes to him is not only not synonymous with Wordsworthian morality but is in truth a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to it.

The greatest of all limitations upon historical interpretation has always been ourselves, the intrusion into the enterprise of that inescapably subjective lens through which the materials selected for interpretation by the observing subject have always been viewed. But at no time, I believe, has the propensity to error, distortion, and misrepresentation, the dangers that beset all historical interpretation, been nearly as great as at the present moment, a moment ironically when those of us in
literary studies have been called upon to reject the vagaries of formalistic inexactness for the greater certainties of a factually grounded historicizing. But why is this so?

It has been over twenty years since Frank Lentricchia, in *Criticism and Social Change*, explained to "radical literary intellectuals in American universities" who desired to undertake "radical social action" that the way to do so was to engage in a literary criticism whose "point is not only to interpret texts, but in so interpreting them, change our society" (10). But if we were to engage in this salutary and certainly needed task of bringing about social change by our interpretive practice, Lentricchia warned, we would have to discard many of our politically crippling humanistic shibboleths and understand that "there is no morally pure, no epistemologically secure, no linguistically uncontaminated route to radical change" (35). To do otherwise and "attempt to proceed in purity" or "to proceed with the illusion of purity," he further warned, "is to situate oneself on the margin of history, as the possessor of a unique truth disengaged from history's flow" (36). Exactly what a criticism would look like that did not "attempt" "to proceed with the illusion of purity" is never really spelled out by Lentricchia, though he does quote approvingly the 1935 suggestion of Kenneth Burke, the unquestioned hero of *Criticism and Social Change*, that the radical who would foment social
change adopt the tactics of our oppressors and do what "our advertisers do when they recommend a particular brand of cigarette by picturing it as being smoked under desirable conditions." 61

Even if Lentricchia at one point indicates that he is untroubled at the prospect of being charged by traditionalists with holding the position that "the end justifies the means" (36), I do not finally believe that when he tells us to eschew the scholarly fetishizing of "purity" he really is urging us to proceed with the advertising copywriter's calculating cynicism, that in some vaguely encoded way he is proffering us a license to lie in behalf of some greater social good. And, correspondingly, when Davidoff and Hall identify Dorothy's uncle as her brother and assert that William and Dorothy set up housekeeping only after she came into her inheritance, or when Alan Liu speaks of one of the richest persons in the Lake District as one of the "local poor," it is surely not the case that, knowing better, these scholars have made these things up. Still there is in Lentricchia's counsel and the practice that succeeds it the implicit message that we are not to be overly fastidious about what was once understood to be the ethic of scholarship, an ethic, I should add, that in that earlier time served to restrain the possible excesses of a literary criticism that perhaps, in its own way, was similarly interested, even if that interestedness was rarely admitted. So we find in our
current adversarial criticism a sometimes scornful repudiation of the professed ideal of scholarly objectivity as a to-be-avoided-at-all-costs innocence or the tendency to turn a blind eye to the employment of what in the past would undoubtedly have been judged fundamentally questionable tactics. But perhaps most insidiously damaging of all is the reluctance of the adversarial critic to take seriously the critic's once understood obligation to consider all of the possible evidence and all of the possible scholarship--from whatever quarter--that might bear on a topic.

If those Wordsworthians who shared Lentricchia's ideological commitments had answered his call to social action (with its concomitant relaxing of scruples about the ethics of scholarship) by entering into some kind of tacit critical compact among themselves at the time he sounded that call, I have little doubt that what would have emerged almost two decades later in Wordsworth studies would be a critical scene very much like the one I have described in the preceding pages. And perhaps the best proof of this is that more troubling than the astonishingly inexplicable outright errors to which I have pointed is the selectivity so frequently shown by the often immensely knowledgeable adversarial critic in assembling evidence to support some adversarial argument and the critic's reluctance to look to any one other than the ideologically like-minded for scholarly authority in making the adversarial point. Thus,
a scholar who knows as much about Wordsworth as David Simpson does will accede to what in this instance seems the dubious authority of John Barrell in his claim that Wordsworth believed his sister incapable of membership in the intellectual community, and he will augment that argument by asserting that for William Dorothy could be no reader, despite the readily available and ample evidence to the contrary to be found in *The Grasmere Journal*. So too we find that Judith Page, writing a book on Wordsworth and women that shows an evident familiarity with the facts of William's and Dorothy's lives, accepts at a crucial place in her argument a hypothesis by Davidoff and Hall that is plainly incompatible with the true facts of those lives at the time of the writing of "Tintern Abbey." That Simpson and Page would do this finally must deeply perplex and deeply disturb any reader who would take for granted their scholarly integrity and fairness as he or she weighs their arguments. It is as if adoption of the critical practices that Lentricchia calls for and that the adversarial critics I have discussed engage in, the deployment of criticism to foster social change without any undue concern for the niceties of the ethics of scholarship, has instilled an ingrained and— I fear— willful obduracy, which shuts out all inconveniently unassimilable detail and all differing and especially contrary voices.

Whether, in our emerging age of deepening conservatism in both political parties, the adversarial practices so
widely adopted in the past two decades have furthered the national or the global social changes that Lentricchia and his ideological counterparts—in what is more and more coming to be our Romantic critical establishment—would like to see take place is a question I do not intend to take up, though my framing of it obviously indicates my suspicions as to how that particular adversarial project is playing out and is likely to play out in the larger political world in the foreseeable future. But in the academy, and especially in literary studies, these practices and the political assumptions that undergird them are clearly in the ascendant.62 Thus in the best (and probably in most) of our graduate schools and increasingly in the classes in Romantic poetry and those sophomore surveys into which the views propounded in the graduate schools eventually filter down, what is learned about the relations between William and Dorothy Wordsworth is not that he was the most loving of brothers as she believed him to be nor even that he was a better brother to his sister than his other brothers were—indeed, a better brother, I suspect, than I certainly and possibly you in similar circumstances could imagine ourselves being. Instead, what students are increasingly told is that William was intellectually disdainful of the sister he lived with, inhibiting her growth as a poet, which might otherwise have been as great as his own, that theirs was a relationship fundamentally exploitative in which he was virtually the
sole beneficiary, his behavior toward Dorothy to be explained perhaps as simply in keeping with the spirit of the times or perhaps by the charge that, in his treatment of Dorothy, William did not even meet that exceedingly low standard. (After all, for "feminist criticism over the past decade," Wordsworth "is a domestic tyrant in his life," 63 (Page 2), a characterization of the feminist criticism of Wordsworth, I hasten to add, that is not my own but that of Judith Page, a self-described feminist critic herself, whose recent _Wordsworth and the Cultivation of Women_ is intended to soften the portrayal of Wordsworth presented by her feminist predecessors, though, in truth, it seems to me only minusculely less severe.)

Even so, we might present the relationship of William and Dorothy Wordsworth in such a way that it could help foster some of the social change that our adversarial critics and I both desire, and do so while still remaining faithful to the traditional ethics of scholarship. That is, if we would adhere more closely to what seem the real facts of the case, we might, in a world of still persisting gendered prejudices and gender-imposed disabilities, have our students look to William Wordsworth as a model of what a brother of a sister might be. They would have as a model one who, out of what would seem to be the purest family feeling, would under the most financially strained circumstances still undertake the care of a sister he had hardly seen since childhood, yet who had found in that
relationship with his "beloved sister" much more than what family feeling in and of itself would produce. That is, she was to be not only his "dear, dear Sister" bound to him by ties of blood but also his rationally chosen partner and companion, a "dear, dear Friend," whose invaluable intellectual assistance to him he would gladly acknowledge. But to his credit, having invested so much of his love and loyalty in his relationship with his sister, Wordsworth, still the true radical, paradoxically remained convinced--certainly at the time of "Tintern Abbey"--that the genuinely moral life existed only outside the family. Only there, among those to whom he was not related, could he behave benevolently because disinterestedly and thereby begin the great work of ameliorating the lot of humanity at large. On the other hand, that individual whose acts of kindness were confined wholly to his "kindred" and "those with whom" he "dwelled," whose only values were family values, was in Wordsworth's eyes "the worst of slaves, the slave / Of his own house."

The examples of error, distortion, and misrepresentation I have presented from adversarial studies of Wordsworth are not rare lapses from a norm of general accuracy but seem to me typical of what is being produced in Wordsworth scholarship today and, in most cases, produced by those who have emerged as our leading scholars. Moreover, while I cannot state with utter certainty that what I have said about the criticism of Wordsworth
necessarily applies to criticism written about other writers--I know no other writer as well as I know Wordsworth and I believe that, with the possible exception of Shakespeare, no English writer has been as subjected to the adversarial tactics of feminism and the new historicism to the extent that Wordsworth has--I have read enough in the criticism of other writers to suspect that the current situation in Wordsworth studies is representative enough. Driven by the need to find fault with writers we have long admired and who perhaps simply cannot be as bad in their lives and art as our adversarially inclined critics would have them be, the contemporary criticism that would build its arguments on a hermeneutics of disparagement seems to me doomed to err by its very ideological fervor, a liability compounded for this generation of critics by their belief that genuine truth is most likely to reside in what is displaced or absent. My arguments on behalf of Wordsworth and with his adversarial critics are, I believe, based on historical fact and on the plain sense of the texts I have discussed, but I recognize that in our current critical climate such appeals to fact and the plain sense of texts may not be sufficient.
Chapter 2
The Politics of “Nutting”

One recurrent feature of the structure of those scientific revolutions so famously traced by Thomas Kuhn was the emergence of a crisis problem within the governing paradigm that stood on the verge of being displaced, some major topic of investigation that had proven intractable to the methods and premises of the still ascendant paradigm. It would finally become evident that solving the crisis problem required the adoption of radically new premises and radically new methods, nothing short of the adoption of a wholly new paradigm, a scientific revolution that would eventually alter all normal practice within physics or chemistry or biology or whatever the scientific discipline was in which the crisis problem had emerged. Thus, the inability to solve the problems of planetary positioning and the precession of the equinoxes was to provide a major impetus to the supplanting of Ptolemaic astronomy by the Copernican system; the inability of phlogiston theory to deal with issues that arose in pneumatic chemistry was instrumental in the formulation of the oxygen theory of Lavoisier and the emergence of modern chemistry; the difficulties in resolving by means of the traditional
Newtonian paradigm the problems created by the electromagnetic behavior of bodies in motion studied by James Maxwell were to prove crucial to the development of relativity physics; and so on and so forth.\textsuperscript{64}

While Kuhn cautioned against applying his model of scientific discovery to disciplines outside the sciences, the tendency to think of the great changes that have occurred in literary studies over the past forty years (and, for our purposes, especially in Wordsworth studies) as paradigm shifts, in Kuhn’s sense of that term, has proven irresistible to literary critics and scholars, and in this I am no exception. Nor should it be difficult for most of us in Wordsworth studies to identify what would seem the crisis problem (or crisis text) that preceded or even precipitated that paradigm shift. When Judith Page tells her audience of Wordsworthians that most feminist critics of Wordsworth regard him as an “exploiter of nature” (rather than as a “worshipper of nature”--as he regarded himself and as most of those who wrote on him forty years ago regarded him in accordance with the ascendant paradigm of that time),\textsuperscript{65} we know that “Nutting” is the text by Wordsworth that the feminists who speak of Wordsworth as exploiter or even rapist of nature have in mind. Forty-five years ago, “Nutting” was considered a
relatively minor poem, marginal to that canon of essential texts by Wordsworth out of which the then dominant paradigm was constructed. But over time, as this poem of a seemingly willed transgression against nature proved intractable to the interpretive premises that governed the old paradigm of Wordsworth as nature poet, “Nutting” became more and more the point on which the interpretive machine might rest, an essential text in the making of the interpretive paradigm that is dominant today in Wordsworth studies.

From the time David Perkins and especially David Ferry began to write extensively about “Nutting,” it has been a poem that has been in the forefront of not one but actually two paradigmatic shifts in the study of Wordsworth. The first of these was that paradigmatic shift for which Perkins and Ferry were forerunners and that would culminate with Geoffrey Hartman’s Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787–1814 in the transformation of Wordsworth for a generation of critics from a poet of nature to a poet of consciousness. In keeping with the universalizing habits of an older criticism, the boy’s transgression against nature in “Nutting” was understood by those who elaborated that first revolutionary paradigm as only metaphorically a rape, the figurative expression of an innate human propensity to
overcome, master, even destroy a nature that stood as an obstacle to the imperiously aggressive aims of a generalized (and implicitly ungendered) human consciousness and imagination. But as criticism has become more politically fragmented, more deeply polarized, and, above all, more unrelentingly adversarial toward the canonical writer in keeping with the attitudes and goals of our current identity politics, readings of “Nutting” have become ever more literally sexualized, gender-specific, and accusatory. Thus, the episode of boyish transgression recounted there has increasingly been taken as a fantasy of an explicitly male rapaciousness against a nature feminized, but feminized only to lend male desire the displacing cover needed to conceal the real object of that fantasized rape, woman herself. It is a poem that both in the apparent duplicities of its maskings and in its hostile aggressiveness toward what it marks out as the feminine would seem almost to have been fortuitously given us by Wordsworth to anticipate and confirm what two centuries later feminist criticism understands as the form a male-determined Romanticism would have to have taken, an especially vivid putting before us of that abusive domination, denial, indeed debasement of woman that Romanticism required as a precondition for what its male
poets would disingenuously trumpet as a generalized human achievement.

In the pages that follow, I shall propose an argument that goes very much against the grain of the past forty years, but especially against the adversarial tendencies of the last fifteen, proposing an interpretation of “Nutting” that is less sexualized and certainly less sexually biased than those with which we are now routinely presented. In fact, I hope to show that even in “Nutting” Wordsworth asserts just those egalitarian values toward politics, including sexual politics, that most of us who write about him in our own time would wish him to hold and chide him for not holding. To this end, I shall follow present-day injunctions and historicize, but not by situating “Nutting” within some sure-to-disparage historical context dictated by presentist antipathies to Romanticism. Instead, I shall consider it within that historical context to which I believe it most properly belongs, the republican discourse of philanthropic virtue by which in the 1790s proponents of radical political and social change on both sides of the Channel gave expression to their political ideas. It is a discourse upon which Wordsworth himself habitually drew in the years between 1794 and 1800, and it is nowhere more patently in evidence in his writings than in a body of
interrelated manuscript passages clearly intended, at one
time or another during the course of composition, as
additions to the poem eventually published as "Nutting."
From that historical context Wordsworth derived a way of
looking at the world that was progressive, enlightened, and
at moments hearteningly utopian and--what is perhaps still
more surprising--one that, on the subject of women, should
satisfy even the standards of the feminism of our own day.
Though deeply aware that "Nutting" is a favorite whipping-
boy in contemporary feminist criticism of Wordsworth, I
hope to show that it can and should be read as presciently
politically correct, that it puts forward as the tacit
corollary underlying the parallel narratives of its male
and female protagonists a firm conviction of the equal
intellectual and moral potentiality of male and female and,
more surprisingly, an equality in the sexes' capacity for
an aggressiveness that would seem to find, at the very
least, figurative expression in sexual desire.

To test this claim, I shall focus primarily in the
discussion of "Nutting" that follows, not on the
transgressive, childhood excursion to that "one dear nook /
Unvisited" (17-18) that serves as the main body of the poem
and the subject of most of the extensive commentary upon
it, but on the later, perfunctorily mentioned, adult walk
in the woods by a pair—widely assumed to be the adult William and Dorothy—to a site sometimes spoken of in a vocabulary of feminist wariness as one of Wordsworth’s "scenes of a sister's instruction": 

Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.

(54-56)

In most contemporary readings of "Nutting," William instructs the "dearest Maiden" (generally assumed to be Dorothy) who accompanies him on this day’s walk in the woods to move "[i]n gentleness of heart" and "with gentle hand / Touch," because that is what her poet-brother understands his sister really to be, "passive," or "gentle" or, in a more elaborate figurative interconnection with the body of the poem, seen "like the bower, as endowed with feminine interiority, the 'quiet being' which it gives up to the rapacious poet." But why Dorothy would have to be instructed to "move" and "[t]ouch" gently if the speaker already knows her to be gentle is only one of many perplexities left unanswered by those readings. Of course, according to these same critics, for
the poet to have regarded her as gentle means not that she really was gentle but only that he would coercively reduce her to gentleness to fit her to the prevailing female stereotype required by his own ideologically masculine needs and goals.

Such a case against Wordsworth was, in fact, laid out with exceptional adversarial clarity and rigor by Marlon Ross in "Naturalizing Gender, Woman's Place in Wordsworth's Ideological Landscape," where he argued that "[t]he gentle maiden is forced to inhabit the psychic space in Wordsworth's male-identified history where the female is perceived to fit comfortably and naturally,"71 and that she had been made to do so because, in order "to heal the wounds he has inflicted on nature and on his own conscience" and "restore nature to its virginal state," Wordsworth must introduce "a female presence, and that presence must be pure in order to repurify nature and purge masculine guilt" (394). In other words, to assuage his conscience for the harm he had done nature as a child, Wordsworth, acting as a male living in Britain in the last years of the eighteenth century, must do something akin to sacrificing a virgin, even his own "gentle" sister, if she should happen to be the virgin nearest at hand. Such an allegation should not entirely surprise us, given the kinds
of accusations regularly brought against Wordsworth by his feminist critics, and, indeed, Jonathan Arac, one of the poem's most stridently adversarial critics, minces no words in saying exactly this in a widely cited analysis of "Nutting": "[I]t seems the maiden must be the sacrifice," he tells us, fixing the blame for Wordsworth's apparent brotherly callousness on male-determined historical circumstances, which the poet presumably helped perpetuate and yet was also controlled by, an "Enlightenment" which "has eliminated blood ritual"--the practice of animal sacrifice in antiquity--only so that "the line between humans and animals is now redrawn between men and women."\(^7\) Applying the same kind of basically unsubstantiated adversarial premises, Ross himself draws a number of other, no less condemnatory inferences from Wordsworth’s text. One inference to be drawn from "Wordsworth's metaphor of rape," Ross alleges, is that it "tends to dismiss the possibility of conceptualizing feminine aggression of any kind."\(^7\) Moreover, in putting forward this scenario of male domination and female passivity, Wordsworth, according to Ross, also gives voice to his deep-seated, historically conditioned masculine disdain for the intellectual capabilities of women: "By casting the act of self-determination in what has been socio-historically decided
as masculine behavior, Wordsworth effaces the very issue of the growth of the female mind" (395).

In this essay, I shall argue that Wordsworth enjoined or exhorted or advised or pleaded with Dorothy (the precise degree of domination and command here is not easily ascertained) to

move along these shades

In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand

Touch,

not because, in keeping with a historically determined male bias, he believed that as a woman she already was stereotypically gentle, docile, passive, submissive, but because he wished her to become gentle since, at this moment, she was aggressively otherwise. In the first place, that is the most reasonable inference to draw from the imperative mood of the few lines in which the maiden addressed appears, a mood more easily thought of as employed to induce change rather than to preserve what are perceived as the inherent conditions of the gendered status quo. But there is one further difficulty with these critics' gentling of the Dorothy addressed by her brother in "Nutting." That is, almost all such readings either ignore, minimize, or seek to explain away several lengthy
manuscript passages apparently intended as "beginning[s]" to "Nutting" that are plainly at variance with that premise. In a letter to Coleridge containing the text of a just-written poem by her brother that in its essentials is the poem eventually published as "Nutting," Dorothy Wordsworth apologetically explains that the poem sent Coleridge was unfinished, that it was "the conclusion of a poem of which the beginning is not yet written" (EY 338). Wordsworth plainly did rectify that perceived failing, writing not one but several interrelated beginnings to that conclusion, even at one point combining both a later written beginning and that earlier written conclusion in a single text that still survives, clearly indicating that at one time he thought of beginning and conclusion as conceptually unified. Yet as we know, when he finally published "Nutting," he chose to omit that beginning, leaving us only with what Dorothy had described as the mere conclusion to a work as yet unfinished. It is a complicated course that Wordsworth has set out for us. But for at least heuristic ends, the unpublished beginning that still survives in manuscript bears looking into. For in that intended beginning, the "dearest Maiden" who is urged to be gentle in the published text is clearly represented as ardent, even wild, a female companion much more like the
wild-eyed sister of "Tintern Abbey"—only more so—than she is like the stereotypically gentle female of most of "Nutting"'s" feminist critics. If the maiden of the manuscript—"Lucy," as she is called there—is to be identified with the maiden of the published poem (and there seems no reason not to do so), then the ardency of the Lucy of that beginning would seem to call seriously into question the commonly held view that Wordsworth assumed his female companion in "Nutting" to be docilely gentle.

Most of these manuscript materials had been generally available to readers of Wordsworth in the de Selincourt edition for over fifty years, and they have received even wider dissemination with the publication in 1992 of the Cornell edition of Lyrical Ballads. Because this manuscript material has such interpretively significant implications for “Nutting,” I believe it worthwhile to quote at length from at least one of them, DC MS16 (reserving the right to draw upon others for the purposes of argument), as it appears in the Cornell edition of Lyrical Ballads:75

Ah! what a crash was that! with gentle hand
Touch these fair hazels--My beloved Maid!
Though 'tis a sight invisible to thee,
From such rude intercourse the woods all shrink
As at the blowing of Astolpho's horn.—
Thou, Lucy, art a maiden "inland bred,"
And thou hast "known some nurture"; but in truth
If I had met thee here with that keen look
Half cruel in its eagerness, those cheeks
Thus [ ] flushed with a tempestuous bloom,
I might have almost deem'd that I had pass'd
A houseless being in a human shape,
An enemy of nature, hither sent
From regions far beyond the Indian hills.—
Come rest on this light bed of purple heath,
And let me see thee sink into a dream
Of gentle thoughts, protracted till thine eye
Be calm as water when the winds are gone
And no one can tell whither. See those stems
Both stretch'd along the ground, two brother trees
That in one instant at the touch of spring
Put forth their tender leaves, and through nine years,
In the dark nights, have both together heard
The driving storm—Well! blessed be the Powers
That teach philosophy and good desires
In this their still Lyceum, hand of mine
Wrought not this ruin—I am guiltless here.
For, seeing little worthy or sublime
In what we blazon with the pompous names
Of power and action, I was early taught
To look with feelings of fraternal love
Upon those unassuming things which hold
A silent station in this beauteous world.

(1-33)

On the basis of this passage alone, a number of the adversarial charges that figure prominently in the criticism of "Nutting" should almost certainly be discounted: most obviously and most significantly, we can certainly eliminate the accusation that for reasons of temperament or anatomy or, more commonly, a "socio-historically" determined ideology of gender (as Ross and Arac would have it), Wordsworth necessarily identified woman with a self-serving masculinely imposed stereotypical gentleness. The discussions of "Nutting" by Ross and Arac largely ignore these manuscript versions of the poem (though older critics should not be too hasty to criticize, since it was similarly ignored by any number of earlier commentators on "Nutting" as well: David Ferry, David
Perkins, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom to mention only a few of the best known). Yet if Wordsworth can have imagined—to say nothing of having lived with—a woman as wild as the Dorothy of the manuscript, it seems unlikely that he was biologically or historically programmed to conceive of her as passive or gentle, as most of our adversarial critics almost reflexively assume he was. Nor, in light of these lines, does it make much sense to say, as Ross does, "that Wordsworth's metaphor of rape tends to dismiss the possibility of conceptualizing feminine aggression of any kind," Plainly, "that keen look / Half cruel in its eagerness," exhibited, the speaker tells us, by the "beloved Maid" who now accompanies him, seems to exemplify perfectly the "conceptualizing" of "female aggression."

To Wordsworth’s feminist critics that concept of aggression does not really mean aggression per se, aggression in the broadest sense, a generalized disposition to fight and quarrel in pursuit of one's ends; but it means a more explicitly sexualized aggression, with the boy’s assault of the bower to be read as "a rape of nature by the male poet." Implicit too in the feminist construal of the episode is a concomitant assumption that the true underlying signified of this figurative rape of nature's
unsullied grove is not some innately human longing for mastery over nature but the desire of the more narrowly masculine will in its fantasies of sexuality and power to achieve domination over the gentled human female, to penetrate, possess, and despoil in the familiar sexual sense. Yet if sexual transgression is what is figuratively indicated by the pulling down of the hazel bough in the published poem, then we cannot but conclude that a similarly sexual transgression is also indicated by the manuscript account of the later visit to a once-unspoiled but now-desecrated grove, a "ruin" of broken trees, "stems / Both stretch'd along the ground." On this later occasion, the "crash" of falling trees overheard by the adult listeners has apparently been produced by some "rude intercourse" from which "the woods all shrink," terms that would appear to point to another act of sexualized aggression that should be thought of as a similarly figurative rape. But in this case, if a rape has been enacted or even imagined, the alleged perpetrator is plainly a female, who with her "keen look / Half cruel in its eagerness" and "cheeks" that are "flushed with a tempestuous bloom," seems a far more likely potential rapist than her adult male companion. (It is worth noting, too, that in the manuscript the nature that is ravaged is
also gendered in a way the adversarial critic would not expect, the trees whose “stems / Both stretch’d along the ground” being termed “brother trees.”) On the other hand, his own once "unquiet heart" having now been subdued by the "general ministry" of the overseeing “Powers” who rule nature, the male speaker is careful to clear himself from any suspicion of guilt for this particular apparently sexually characterized misdeed, assuring us that "hand of mine / Wrought not this ruin."  

Yet the presence of a presumably sexually aggressive female in the manuscripts, a potential rapist, if rape is what is at issue, has not really seemed to deter those critics who would have Dorothy “gentled” because her brother’s ideological bias could not allow her brother to conceive her to be otherwise, even when those critics claim to have consulted the manuscripts. Thus Mary Jacobus, one of Wordsworth’s most resistant feminist readers, does take note of the intended but finally unpublished beginning to “Nutting,” at least in passing in a footnote; yet she ends up ascribing to the manuscript text "a pedagogical agenda not very different from that of the final version of "Nutting." But the consistency she finds in "Nutting" requires that we read both manuscript and published text as poems of repressively exploitative male instruction that
makes "a gentle maiden the poet's pupil, then refuses to let her grow up to enjoy a spot of pleasurable roughness" (257). It is a pedagogical agenda that, according to Jacobus, has its framing historical context in the "libertine system" (245) of Rousseau (who, as far back as Wollstonecraft, has been a principal bête noire of feminist criticism), one that requires that we see "Woman's empire" in Wordsworth's poem as it is in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Émile, "an empire of gentleness" (254), though the woman with the "keen look / Half cruel in its eagerness" hardly seems to have gentleness on her mind, nor does the self-avowedly "guiltless" male speaker who blesses "the Powers / That teach philosophy and good desires" seem a likely promoter of a "libertine system."

Also called in question by these manuscript materials are judgments like those we find in Ross's assertion that "[b]y casting the act of self-determination in what has been socio-historically decided as masculine behavior, Wordsworth effaces the very issue of the growth of the female mind." Perhaps the most intriguing feature of Wordsworth's intended beginning to "Nutting" (and one highly pertinent to the issue of his female companion's intellectual capabilities, particularly as this issue is formulated by Ross) is the curiously parenthetical
insertion into his own text of several phrases from that scene in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* where Orlando explains that, if he has behaved rudely toward the exiled Duke and his fellow exiles in the forest of Arden, it is present "distress" and not ill-breeding that has driven him to do so, since he himself is in actuality well-bred. So, despite the fact that the demeanor of the woman the speaker addresses in this manuscript version of "Nutting" displays all the earmarks of the nomadic savage "hither sent / From regions far beyond the Indian hills," one who could easily be mistaken for "a houseless being in a human shape" and deemed "[a]n enemy of nature," Wordsworth prefaces this account of his Lucy with exactly the disclaimer offered by Orlando, letting us know in Shakespeare's words that she too, like Orlando, is "inland bred / And hast known some nurture."

It is a most perplexing introduction to a woman who, when subsequently described, seems even wilder than her female counterpart in "Tintern Abbey," the manner of the Lucy of "Nutting" verging, indeed, on savagery. But I think the real purpose of this seemingly irrelevant and certainly cryptic allusion is to forestall his readers from drawing any such conclusions about his sister's intellectual capabilities and attainments from the
description of the wild Lucy that follows it—conclusions like those which Ross draws or, as we have seen in chapter 1, which Barrell draws from Wordsworth's analogous ascription of wildness to Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey." For Barrell, Wordsworth's describing Dorothy as wild in "Tintern Abbey" is the poet's way of surreptitiously communicating to his male readers that his sister is intellectually limited, confined as a female to a language of things, a "language of primitive peoples," and therefore she is not yet capable of that level of civilization and language of abstraction that is the real mark of a truly cultivated person, that is, a polite, educated male. But the Dorothy of the manuscript, for all her evident wildness, is—Wordsworth tells us, borrowing Shakespeare's words—"inland bred," and knows "nurture"—meaning that she is "educated, trained," at least according to the customary gloss of the latter term in the standard editions of Shakespeare's _As You Like It_. So, in that regard, Wordsworth would have us know (contrary to what we are told are the widely held and gender-based prejudices of his age) that his sister's level of intellectual attainment is not all that different from that of a male like Shakespeare's Orlando and, with the analogy brought up to date, not all that different either from that of the polite
males Wordsworth would have as readers, nor, finally, all that different from a brother who, at the time of his own parallel wildness at twenty-three--when he behaved toward nature "like a man / Flying from something that he dreads" ("Tintern Abbey," 70-71)"--nonetheless, might have similarly described himself as "inland bred," being already a graduate of Cambridge, a published poet, an aspiring pamphleteer, and, therefore, someone who also quite obviously knew some "nurture." By qualifying his subsequent description of Dorothy in this way, by allusively telling us that Dorothy is intelligent and educated, Wordsworth makes clear that he believes two seemingly disparate assessments--that one can be both wild and cultivated--could hold true for a single person at the same time and not be, at the deepest level, ultimately contradictory.

Though the manuscript materials connected with "Nutting" had been made widely available by de Selincourt, it was not until the publication in 1992 of the Cornell edition of Lyrical Ballads, with its more convenient assembling of these materials, that Wordsworth's critics began to really address them in anything like sufficient detail, and some have at least conceded the seemingly indisputable fact that the Lucy of the manuscript is
probably not to be assumed to be stereotypically gentle. But even that concession has not really led critics conditioned by the prevailing adversarial paradigm to the logical next step that would appear to follow in generalizing from evidence—acquitting Wordsworth of the charge of a sexist bias in his treatment of women as innately passive. If the representation of the Lucy of the manuscripts must be acknowledged to deviate from what we should expect from the male Romantic poet, and especially from Wordsworth, the aim of the critic is still to show that the exception only further confirms the rule, that the seeming anomaly is, at bottom, not really an anomaly but only another variant within the implacable masculine (and more particularly Wordsworthian) quest to render the objectified female powerless.

So Susan Wolfson, in a long review-essay of the Cornell \textit{Lyrical Ballads} centered upon "Nutting" and its "drafts and revisions,"\textsuperscript{82} comes to predictable accusatory conclusions about Wordsworth when she takes up the new composite "Nutting." To be sure, the female of the manuscripts in Wolfson's account does not reign over an "empire of gentleness" as Jacobus would have it, for "this Lucy is a physically vigorous being in the mold of a masculine adventurer" (27). But in being "a girl who has
behaved just like a boy,” Lucy “has violated nature and culture” (26), transgressed against the inescapably gendered decorum of the age in ways that her conventionally minded brother would have her correct so that she might become the compliant female he wishes her to be. In urging her to become “gentle,” the speaker really wants to tame her, to wring the vigor and adventuresomeness out of her, so that she will become what she should have been all along, a properly behaved and therefore “gentle” young woman, meaning by that one who conforms to “the desired ideal of a maid as quiet and inactive as nature in its most serene and nurturing aspect” (27). Indeed, according to Wolfson, the model that her brother apparently wishes the “vigorous” and adventuresome Lucy of this poem to follow is not himself, as the text of “Nutting” with its dependent “drafts and revisions” seems to suggest, a quiescent and gentled beneficiary of nature’s “Powers,” the “gentle Stewards of a Poet’s time”

whose general ministry it is
To interpose the covert of these shades,
Even as a sleep, betwixt the heart of man
And the uneasy world, ’twixt man himself,
Not seldom, and his own unquiet heart.83
but rather the Lucy of other poems, "the passive, ethereal, and ultimately dead Lucy of the songs in the 1800 Ballads" (Wolfson 27) (though these adjectives so casually thrown out by Wolfson hardly capture the spirit, while alive, of even the ballad Lucy, a girl "sportive as the fawn / That wild with glee across the lawn / Or up the mountain springs" ("Three years she grew in sun and shower" [13-15]).

Conditioned by the now dominant adversarial paradigm, Wolfson never is willing to consider the possibility that Lucy "has behaved like a boy" because, as the speaker implies, boy and girl are essentially alike, and--I would only add--alike in ways that matter most, in the first place, in a common aggressiveness that is best understood by representing it as a form of sexual energy. But most significantly, they are alike also, I would argue further, because, in keeping with the tenets of Enlightenment uniformitarianism, Wordsworth conceived of both as generically human, her course of personal development, like his, designed to carry her from aggression to gentleness, a gentleness that is really just another name for that implicitly universalized quiescent and morally consequential goal that the mature Wordsworth spoke of in
The Prelude as "The calm existence that is mine when I / Am worthy of myself" (Prelude, 1:349). But the story Wolfson asks us to believe Wordsworth tells in "Nutting" is one inescapably determined for him by the traditional distinctions of gender, with its reiterated "assertion of masculine over feminine."\(^{85}\) If there are elements in the composite "Nutting" that are not easily assimilable to the governing adversarial paradigm or seem even "subversive" (29) of it, for Wolfson that is because the composite "Nutting" is a poem replete with "confusions" (25), with "ultimately blurred distinctions, ones to be sorted out perhaps only by cultural imposition" (25)--and we can be sure how sorting of that kind will turn out. Even the quotations from As You Like It, which seem on the face of it to say something positive about the Lucy of "Nutting," apparently assuring us that she is a cultivated person, in this reading simply become more grist for the adversarial mill, further evidence of the poem's "confusions," a reference that merely "exposes a crux about the basis of female 'gentleness'--nature or culture?" (33 n. 17)--a crux that for Wolfson the poem clearly never manages to resolve.

Of the numerous discussions of "Nutting" that have appeared since the publication in 1992 of the Cornell edition of Lyrical Ballads, unquestionably the fullest,
richest, deepest—the very best—of them has been Gregory Jones’s “‘Rude Intercourse’: Uncensoring Wordsworth’s ‘Nutting.’” The first contemporary critic of “Nutting” to make really extensive use of the manuscript materials, Jones adopts a far less adversarial stance toward the poem and toward Wordsworth than his adversarial predecessors do, concluding, as any attentive reader of these materials must, that the speaker’s companion is not gentle and passive, as so many of the poem’s critics have maintained, but unquestionably assertive and aggressive and, indeed, possessed of destructive impulses. Moreover, as Jones shows, Wordsworth did sometimes employ the word “intercourse” with its modern sexual connotations and might very well be doing so here, using the phrase “rude intercourse” by which he describes his companion’s apparent destruction of a bower of hazels during their adult excursion into the woods to also suggest that he implicitly recognizes that women—or at least this particular woman—are capable not just of wantonly destructive impulses toward nature but of strong and indeed violent sexual feelings. It is a view of the matter, Jones wants us to understand, that is in sharp contrast to “the current male dominant social paradigms of sex and gender” to be found in “turn-of-the-nineteenth-century-England” (241), a paradigm
that Wordsworth’s feminist detractors have unquestioningly assumed Wordsworth shared as well.

But in the end, we find Jones, too, powerfully constrained in his apparently against-the-grain interpretive practice by too strict an adherence to the dominant adversarial paradigm. Like most current readings of “Nutting,” Jones’s is also almost wholly framed by considerations of gender viewed from a psychosexual perspective, and his also culminates in what finally must be construed as an adversarial and oppositional reckoning of the poem’s ideological balance sheet. To be sure, Jones does significantly credit Wordsworth with a kind of admirable political correctness, even by presentist standards, claiming that, when read “as a \textit{political} poem,” “Nutting” “can actually affect the future practice of sexuality” since the poet, after all, suggests “that the power latent in sexuality can belong as much to women as to men, perhaps to women even more” (242). But for all this, in “Nutting,” according to Jones, Wordsworth shows “extreme ambivalence” (214) about what he professes to accept: in fact, looked at “as a \textit{personal} poem” (242), “Nutting” actually takes away more from the Lucy whom we know to be the poet’s sister than it sympathetically grants her when we regard it as a “\textit{political} poem.” It is not just that
the poem’s “social idiom” has “hampered” the poet; beyond that, Jones contends that Wordsworth’s “personal fear of Dorothy’s erotic independence” insinuates itself even “more crippling” into the text (238). Jones goes on to say that, having written of her “rude intercourse” and thereby acknowledged the strength of the sexual desire she has expressed through it, Wordsworth, nonetheless, still asks his sister through the lesson appended to the poem’s parallel narratives “to curtail” this desire “for his sake (‘think of him, the ragged boy,’ he implores in the expanded version’s of the poem’s ending)” (241). By means of this “repression” (241), we are to conclude that she is to become a gentle person, meaning that she is to “conform to the gentle conventions of female sexuality” (238), an ultimate request for gentling by Wordsworth that finally brings Jones’s argument more or less into line with those of Ross, Arac, Jacobus, and Homans.

One reason that Jones is able to maintain his almost exclusively psychosexual focus and draw the conclusions he does is that he makes surprisingly less use of the manuscript materials than one might anticipate he would after reading his opening statement with its complaints about other critics’ neglect of the unpublished versions of “Nutting.” In his account of the long version of
“Nutting,” Jones usefully divides the text or texts that Wordsworth has left us into four parts: “an outcry, a lecture, a childhood memory, and a lesson” (215). But many of the issues raised in what Jones terms the “lecture,” that is, the most explicitly and abstractly discursive portion of the manuscripts, are left undiscussed, and some of them clearly have little apparent relevance to Jones’s psychosexual concerns. In fact, Jones pointedly discounts the truly astonishing ecological claim made by Wordsworth in the “lecture”—that he “would not strike a flower” (27)—reasoning that Wordsworth offers “so many exceptions,” occasions when he apparently has not abided by this precept, that “it is hard to imagine that they do not overwhelm the rule.” But Wordsworth’s point here would seem to be not that his desire to refrain from striking a flower is a rule more honored in the breach than in the observance but that, even if he sometimes violates this rule in a “freak of power / Or from involuntary act of hand / Or foot unruly with excess of life” (30–32), he does not regard such behavior with “unreprov’d indifference” (37), but, instead, reflecting on what he has done, even when what he has done is involuntary, he condemns that behavior as morally blameworthy, a striking illustration of just how
rationalistic in its account of the highest stages of moral development Wordsworth's ethical orientation is.

Of course, from the manuscripts Jones does derive the evidence for his primary claim, that the Lucy described there is not the gentle and submissive female of the cultural stereotype but a woman aggressive to the point of violence in her "intercourse" with nature and, by inference, in her sexual feelings as well. Otherwise though, the manuscripts prove primarily useful to Jones largely because their several allusions to Renaissance literature make possible an argument for intertextuality that proves a key strategy here. While the broad critical consensus that regards the poem as dealing mainly with issues of sex and gender derives almost entirely from making the figurative and the faintly connotative primary and the overtly manifest inconsequential, Jones maintains that Wordsworth enlarges his frame of sexual reference and liberates his poem from the sexual constraints of his own age by the references in the manuscripts to Shakespeare, Spenser, and Ariosto. Under the "cover of 'the literary,'" Jones contends, Wordsworth in "Nutting" is able to reveal "a poetic experience of sexuality and gender far less determinate than contemporary social convention could admit,"89 (228), the literature of the Renaissance supplying
the late-eighteenth-century poet with a kind of enabling code by means by which he is able to introduce into “Nutting” essentially post-Freudian sexual concerns near and dear to him: “confusions of gender, violent bisexual fantasies, problematic relations between people and their genitals” (Jones 228). That allusion functions largely as a vehicle for expanding the poem’s range of sexual reference is for Jones especially true of the directly quoted words of Orlando from As You Like It: “By associating Lucy with a male character from a Shakespearean drama, for example, Wordsworth can suggest that her gender, and the idea of gender itself, is essentially performative, that she puts it on like a garment and acts it out as a role, just like the boy actors who played the female roles at the Globe” (Jones 228-29). But in asking us to believe that Wordsworth sought to circumvent through literature what the historicist critic usually insists is ideologically determining for the writer in question, the sociohistorically constructed attitudes of his own age, Jones places a considerable strain on our own historical understanding, for he asks his reader to assume that Wordsworth read the literature of the Renaissance virtually with the same concerns and values that the critic of today possesses (concerns and values, I should add, rarely
displayed by critics of Shakespeare before the past twenty years), that he read *As You Like It*, for example, not with the writings of Johnson or even conversations with Coleridge pointing the way to critical understanding, but as Jones himself presumably reads the play, with Shakespeare’s text in one hand and the writings of, let us say, Stephen Orgel and Stephen Greenblatt in the other.

In keeping with these concerns and values, Jones looks mainly to the general rather than to the particular in discussing *As You Like It*, seeing the allusion to it as Wordsworth’s way of surreptitiously importing into the long version of “Nutting” broad concepts of sexual and gender instability. Yet Jones never really tries to explain why the words themselves that Wordsworth quotes are quoted, why Lucy is said to be “inland bred” and to “know some nurture.” At the risk of repeating myself, I would again suggest that, by means of these quoted words spoken by a well-bred male in a play by Shakespeare, Wordsworth would tell us that no matter how wild Lucy’s ecological transgressiveness and perhaps even her metaphorically sexual transgressiveness may be, she remains, like the Orlando whose words the poet repeats, a cultivated person who, under the conditions of civil life away from the forest, could justifiably be expected to behave as an
intelligent and educated person should. Nor should the fact that Wordsworth prefaces his condemnation of his companion for wildness with such a qualifying statement of apparent praise for her intellectual accomplishments seem altogether surprising, coming as it does (as I noted in the preceding chapter) from a writer who would later describe his “beloved Sister” as one “of the two Beings”—the other is Coleridge—“to whom my intellect is most indebted” and who also would take issue with Milton’s “low estimate of the condition and purposes of the female mind” on the grounds that he lived in “a country which had seen so many women of talent and learning.”

I would therefore suggest that we move beyond this single-minded (and too often narrowly adversarial) concern with sex and gender and turn instead to that “lecture” that Jones largely neglects so that we may identify those broader epistemological, ecological, ethical, and, ultimately, political beliefs that I believe the composite “Nutting”—that is the published poem taken together with its “drafts and revisions”—most truly expresses. Further, I would also suggest that the most appropriate and most interpretively useful context for understanding those beliefs is that broader set of beliefs that, as I have argued elsewhere, we find expressed almost everywhere else
in the poetry Wordsworth wrote roughly contemporaneously with the composition of "Nutting" and its "drafts and revisions," an empiricist epistemology in which the individual moves from intensity to tranquillity and, concomitantly, in ethical terms, from self-interest to benevolence through the seemingly purposeful workings of the spirit of nature. So in the long version of "Nutting" we find the Lucy of the manuscript enacting a scenario of essentially generically human moral and spiritual development, going from wildness to gentleness (its explicitly ethical corollary a parallel evolution from self-centeredness to benevolence), a course of development essentially like that laid out in the 1798–99 books of The Prelude and even more pertinently in "Tintern Abbey," where accidents of gender are, similarly, ultimately irrelevant. Thus it is not because she has committed a "transgression against maidenly breeding," against the culturally imposed and inherently sexist "ideal of a maid as quiet and inactive as nature in its most serene and nurturing aspect,"90 that Wordsworth chastises his sister for ungentleness. His complaint is rather that she has not yet advanced as far as he has and as she should in this process of development toward this desired gentleness, at least as far as he has come in his moments of experiencing "The calm
existence that is mine, when I / Am worthy of myself." It really are those moments of interconnected quiet and ultimate self-worth that represent for Wordsworth the ideal of a person as "quiet and inactive as nature in its most serene and nurturing aspect." But nature, as Wordsworth conceives of it in these places, is an anthropomorphically nurturing nature that, even in the male's poet's earliest infancy, had transmitted to him,

Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,
A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm,
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves

(Prelude, 1:283-85),

and thus a calm that, male though he be, he would and will eventually attain through nature's shaping influence.

But the wildness imputed to Dorothy, which leaves her a stage behind her brother in what is understood to be her personal development, is, even in the manuscript where it is most fully laid out, nothing like a fixedly static condition. In fact, in DC MS 1591 Wordsworth recalls a Dorothy who, "[w]hile in the cave we sat," seemed a lover of nature, one who
dids't o'erflow
With love even for the unsubstantial clouds
And silent incorporeal colors spread
Over the surface of earth and sky.92

Or, at least, she "dids't" so "oerflow" until a still latent aggression was triggered, transforming the woman who had loved "clouds" and "earth and sky" into an apparent "enemy of nature." In that respect she seems, perhaps, not unlike the youthful poet himself in "Tintern Abbey," who during his earlier visit to Tintern Abbey was already appreciative of nature as a good in itself, regarding it as "all in all," but who, nonetheless, in "[flying] from" it, showed himself to be still ungently wild--the crucial signifying mark of his not having as yet attained his full moral potential.

But since Dorothy had earlier already established herself as a lover of nature, the poet can perhaps reasonably expect that the change from that lovingness to a now seemingly manifest hostility to nature can be reversed, and her progress toward a morally beneficial gentleness like her brother's resumed. Wordsworth's only real instruction to Dorothy in the manuscript (according to DC MS 15) amounts to little more than that she unwind and
relax, that she "Come rest on this light bed of purple heath" and let nature take its course, allowing herself to

sink into a dream

Of gentle thoughts, protracted till thine eye
Be like the heart of love and happiness,
Yet still as water when the winds are gone
And no man can tell whither.\(^93\)

(Such a state of being, one suspects, may even be roughly analogous to that rarely achieved "blessed mood" her brother attains when "with an eye made quiet by the power of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things"["Tintern Abbey," 47-49].)

Admittedly, even if Lucy is able to sink into a "dream of gentle thoughts," she still has not achieved the moral maturity her male companion has, a maturity that allows him to assert confidently, as she obviously cannot, "hand of mine / Wrought not this ruin." But even here, we should be cautious in ascribing to some sexist bias this implied superiority of the speaker to his companion. His moral advantage over her, it would seem, has come about not because of any gendered propensity to virtue on his part,
some strictly male innate moral or intellectual superiority, but rather because earlier in life he was granted the opportunity to come under the shaping influence of a morally purposeful nature, allowed to become the object of intentions carried out by the genius loci of the bower. The "guardian spirits" of that place (as Wordsworth calls them in the manuscript variants of "Nutting"94) have, for his sake, and to their own detriment, actually "led" him to the very site of that transgression and, out of love for him, enticed him to commit that act of mutilation of the nature over which they stand guard, an act he now paradoxically recognizes as instrumental in effecting his moral transformation.

On the basis of the analogous episodes that constitute the narrative of "Nutting," we are asked, I believe, to infer that as it was then so is it likely to be now. Just as the brother as child had been "led" to transgression against nature by these "guardian spirits," inducing him by their beauty and seeming helplessness to undertake their painful ravishment in order that they might shape a "favor'd being" (Prelude, 1:364) to morally desired ends, so too might we extrapolate from this later episode in a brother and a sister's adult life together a parallel scenario. In this second scenario, we would see an adult
sister led to a similar site in order to have aroused in her imaginings no less transgressive than those the speaker had experienced as a child, and led there, we might further hypothesize, by a similarly morally purposeful genius loci, "a spirit in the woods" willing to have his companion inflict upon that "spirit" a no less painful ravishment. Thus, this morally shaping spirit of nature would employ as means his sister's still untamed capacity for violence, just as those earlier "guardian Spirits" had used a comparable untamedness in the poet as child to achieve their end of effectuating the moral transformation of a similarly loved and favored being.

The linkage of the brother as child and the sister as adult in a shared (and perhaps sexually charged) aggressiveness (a trait that most of the poem's current critics would have us regard as exclusively masculine) is reinforced in the slightly expanded version in DC MS. 15 of that concluding exhortation to the "dearest maiden" to "move" and "touch" gently:

Then, dearest maiden, if I have not now
The skill to be thy teacher think of him,
The ragged boy, and let his parting look
Instruct. Move, sweet maid, along these shades
In gentleness of heart.--With gentle hand
Touch, for there is a spirit in the woods.\textsuperscript{95}.

What is worth noting here first is the unexpected diffidence expressed by the adult Wordsworth, usually identified in our almost uniformly adversarial criticism of "Nutting" as the male poet, a designation that in most cases is put forward as a term of opprobrium, implicitly carrying with it the charge that the writer so identified is inevitably to be regarded as too assertively egotistical and too oppressively domineering.\textsuperscript{96} Yet the Wordsworth of DC MS 15 scarcely fits the stereotype, since, following his argument in propria persona at one of his "scenes of a sister's instruction," he modestly disavows any suggestion that he has the right to propose any of that instruction to which his gender (or even his genius) might seem to entitle him, choosing instead, even during this poetically dazzling annus mirabilis in Goslar, to put forward the modest disclaimer that he still lacks "[t]he skill to be thy teacher." If Dorothy is to be moved toward gentleness, then the only effective agent of instruction is likely to be, not the highly discursive arguments of the adult poet in the manuscript "Nutting"'s "lecture," but the descriptive image that, from the very earliest stages of
composition until eventual publication, almost always concluded "Nutting's" narrative of childhood destructiveness, that remembered "parting look" of pain—if pain it was—cast upon the devastated bower by the long gone "ragged boy."

Perhaps the reason Wordsworth, as adult poet, feared he lacked the skill to be his sister's teacher was the very same one for which he condemned the moral philosophers in his "Essay on Morals" a few months earlier: their inability to bring about the moral improvement of mankind. That is, like them in their failed enterprise, he too might have been guilty in the poetic argument that serves as the manuscript beginning to "Nutting" of relying too heavily on "lifeless words and abstract propositions" and "bald & naked reasonings," of providing “no picture of human life,” "describ[ing] nothing," a fatal defect of style, he told us in the “Essay on Morals,” for a practical moral discourse whose aim was to amend human behavior in general and thereby transform human society at large. From this fatal defect of abstractness the concretely recollected childhood episode that serves as the conclusion to the composite "Nutting" given us in DC MS 15 is happily free. Furthermore, that same preference for what is pictured and described over a highly suspect set of "abstract
propositions," compounded out of "bald & naked reasonings," may also explain why Wordsworth, with unerring poetic instinct, even after composing the missing beginning to the conclusion sent in the letter to Coleridge, would, on further reflection, ultimately omit that beginning and have the conclusion stand alone as the "Nutting" he would publish in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.

But this does not mean, as Margaret Homans suggests, that the published poem is a kind of recantation of the principles he so abstractly and therefore overtly stated in the ultimately abandoned beginning to "Nutting," especially since that published poem was, in fact, essentially completed and shown to Coleridge before its beginning was apparently ever begun, so that any hypothesis of recantation would presumably require Wordsworth to have reversed himself completely not just once but twice. Instead, I would contend that Wordsworth believed he could publish what eventually became "Nutting" without its elucidating preamble, not because he would have Dorothy's "active presence canceled out and replaced with a passive one"--Homans's thesis--but because he finally regarded the poem, even in the form of the virtually bare-bones narrative of the childhood outing he had initially sent Coleridge, to be manifestly self-explanatory and, thus, in
need of no further elucidation. Clearly, despite the efforts of critics over the past forty years to equate the male child with the male adult of the published poem, condemning both as would-be rapists, "Nutting" is self-explanatory in its differentiating of its speaker's "present feelings" of guilt-ridden pain and obvious remorse from the sexually resonant childhood aggressiveness that led him to inflict "merciless ravage" upon nature's quiet bower. It is not Dorothy but William who has evidently changed from an active to a passive presence, if that is what the adult supplanting of aggression by gentleness necessarily implies, and with that apparent change from ostensibly active to ostensibly passive has come a concurrent moral change from destructiveness to benevolence, a change finally to be explained in accordance with nature's beneficent theodicy. To be sure, Wordsworth does finally banish from the poem as published those "guardian spirits" who, in every manuscript version of the childhood episode, are credited with leading him to the bower he would "ravage" (a decision to cut very much in keeping with his regular tendency to reduce or even excise his most extravagantly animistic manuscript claims on publication), but that animistic faith still remains very much present, even within the published poem, by his
retaining there the triumphant revelation of its closing line that "there is a spirit in the woods."

Underlying these claims for a nature-induced moral improvement, achieved by him and desired for her, is the logic of associational psychology, its governing assumption that when event and emotion are strongly conjoined--either by contiguity in place or time or by resemblance or by cause and effect--then the occurrence of a similar event will call up not only the memory of the earlier event but the memory of the associated emotion as well. So the fear prompted by the striding mountain in book 1 of The Prelude--on the occasion of a similarly transgressive temptation in adult life--will also be remembered and, indeed, recur at the very same moment when the image of the striding mountain associatively called up by that later temptation is recollected. And such fear, even diluted by memory, can be sufficiently painful to inhibit later misconduct and point us toward that teleologically directed course marked out by nature that will direct us, first, toward a disinterested love of nature and, then, toward a correspondingly disinterested love of man. Similarly, in the manuscript "Nutting," the crash of falling branches during an adult outing with his sister (an event apparently reduced to the briefest of references to a walk in the
woods in the published poem) also triggers remembrance of an earlier episode, a nutting expedition as a child when Wordsworth had both caused destruction—then too signified by fallen branches—and suffered pain. It is through the associative conjoining of the destruction of nature and the suffering of pain, Wordsworth tells us, that he had had instilled in him those habits of forbearance that he later displayed during this adult excursion.

But the real and ultimate goal here is not to show how the poet was moved to virtue but to have his sister moved to a similar forbearance and eventually a similar virtue. To effect this end, the vehicle of instruction is to be not an abstractly reasoned precept, the misguided way of the moral philosopher, but the associational—and, in its concreteness, implicitly poetic—method of teaching by vivid depiction. He would hope to implant in her memory too—merely by telling the tale—a conjoined image of the devastated scene and the "parting look" of "[the] ragged boy" responsible for that devastation, as these had been implanted in his own memory by the event itself. And he would further hope that, in subsequent circumstances in which nature was threatened with violation, that image with its attendant pain would again be recalled by his sister, at first inhibiting and then finally eradicating the
aggression that her manner and countenance express here at this later scene of nature's devastation.

These conclusions, of course, follow from the empiricist conception of mind that underlies associational psychology: the emphasis upon the primacy of experience in the formation of the moral self; the assumption that it is the virtually gravitational attraction among ideas related by contiguity, resemblance, and causality that binds them together in the storehouse of memory and not the intrusion by some form of Kantian relational powers of mind into an otherwise randomly confused sense-experience; and finally, and most pertinent to our purposes, the conclusion about gender that logically follows from this, that differing developmental outcomes for men and women are the result, not of innate sexual differences, but of differences in experience, since "[m]ind," as Mary Hays rightly understood, "is of no sex." If the "ragged boy" is, in some ultimate respect, father of the man in "Nutting" and its manuscripts, it is not because fatherhood is genetically encoded in the developing adult but because the child has had experiences instrumental in the transformation of the older Wordsworth into a moral being who is very different from the morally callous person he had been as a child. And if he could accurately transcribe
that formative childhood experience in such a way that it is sufficiently vivid to adhere to the memory, first of the sister and then of the female readers to whom he would also eventually transmit it, Dorothy and these readers, too, would find themselves set on a course of corresponding moral development, and to that extent, we can say that "[t]he ragged boy" who is father of the man can be father of the woman as well.

Karl Kroeber, in remarks that obviously run counter to the conventional wisdom, has called for a more literal approach to "Nutting," urging that we, at least, set aside "the purely psychosexual interpretations that have dominated our criticism for two generations" and recognize "Nutting" as perhaps the first poem in "European poetry," that "centers on the shame of an individual's careless ravaging of the natural environment" (62). When I mention to colleagues the arguments of Kroeber and Jonathan Bate that, in terms of our current political categories, Wordsworth is perhaps better classified not as a "red" but as a "green," an environmentalist avant la lettre, these views are invariably regarded with amusement or amazement—so far have we traveled over these past two generations in our understanding of Wordsworth from what seems most obvious and surely most true about his poetry, that he is
our principal spokesman for the value and sanctity of nature. These arguments receive strong support, though, not only from the published "Nutting," as Kroeber interprets it, but also from its manuscript versions, since in them we find what is probably the most radical statement by Wordsworth of his ecological Romanticism. Assuring us in DC MS 16 that he is "guiltless" of bringing about the ruin he now stands before, he offers as his explanation of why he could not have done it the good consequences that seem to have accrued from just such childhood episodes as the one he goes on subsequently to relate:

I was early taught
To look with feelings of fraternal love
Upon those unassuming things which hold
A silent station in the beauteous world.\textsuperscript{100}

In consequence of those feelings, the adult Wordsworth in DC MS 15 tells us that he has developed a habitual and, in the eyes of the world, no doubt eccentric gentleness that would seem to link him to the deepest of deep ecologists by his refusal to engage in any hierarchical ordering of the species, especially one based on the criterion of usefulness to man:
I would not strike a flower
As many a man will strike his horse, at least
If from the wantonness in which we play
With things we love, or from a freak of [ ]
Or from involuntary act of hand
Or foot unruly with excess of life,
It chanced that I ungently used a tuft
[ ] or snapp'd the stem
Of foxglove bending o'er his native rill,
I should be loath to pass along my road
With unreprov'd indifference, I would stop
Self-question'd, asking wherefore that was done.  

He then goes on to explain to that "dearest Maiden," who has herself just responded to some human despoliation of nature with a "look / Half cruel in its eagerness," that she should not deem attitudes that may seem to her not merely eccentric but trivial "idle sympathies" (46), this ecological argument providing the conceptual prelude to recitation to her of the story that we now know as "Nutting."
But the reverence for nature that manifests itself in the speaker's unwillingness to strike a flower—while a core belief of Wordsworth's, as Bate and Kroeber rightly assert, and plainly a good in itself—is still, more significantly, also a means to an end, love of nature according to the most basic of Wordsworthian formulas leading eventually to love of man. It was in an earlier manuscript passage—written at Goslar probably only weeks before the manuscript beginning to "Nutting" contained in DC MS 15—that Wordsworth for the first time made his ecologist's declaration that he "would not strike a flower / As many a man would strike his horse." But in that earlier passage he quite explicitly went on to defend an ecological forbearance he knew would be perceived as excessive fastidiousness on what should finally be understood as humanly centered ethical grounds. To counter those "who judging rashly deem that such / Are idle sympathies, he had rhetorically asked:

For can he
Who thus respects a mute insensate form,
Whose feelings do not need the gross appeal
Of tears and articulate sounds, can he
Be wanting in his duties to mankind
Or slight the pleadings of a human heart?
Of course, there is a kind of circularity in all of this: what nature would have us attain through this process of apparent human-centered moral development is not peculiar to the human species alone; it is a mode of being that nature already possesses. As Wordsworth makes clear in "Lines Written in Early Spring," if humans shall someday live sympathetically and harmoniously and joyfully with one another, thereby carrying out "Nature’s holy plan" (22), the men and women so transformed in that Utopian transformation will be doing no more than living out the life already lived by nature, in fact, living the lives of the plants, the birds, and the air. So in "Nutting," as in most of the boyhood episodes of the earlier books of The Prelude, nature's "guardian spirits" guide the "ragged boy" to what is deepest and yet most vulnerable in themselves, because they would have the young poet-to-be eventually put the "fretful dwellings" (Prelude 1:283) of mankind behind him and gain for himself "the calm, / Which Nature breathes among the hills and groves."

All of this, of course, is connected to what in an older critical discourse was commonly referred to as Wordsworth's animism, according to which nature was infused with spirit and spirits, animated and anthropomorphized,
intelligible and intelligent, and full of conscious and caring concern for the humanity that dwells within its precincts, which it would have become like itself. Such an animistic conception is clearly present in the nature of "Tintern Abbey," "the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart" (109-10) purposefully directing the young poet in his development so that he might, with that development complete, become what nature is, that same nature having been identified by Wordsworth with a moral agency that, implanted in himself, becomes the "soul / Of all my moral being" (111). Similarly, in the intended beginning to "Nutting" of MS 15, that animistically anthropomorphized nature is also present, not only in the spirits who guide and guard but, in more conventionally human ways (especially for the professors who write on the poems), in the academically pedagogical function with which Wordsworth endows

the Powers

That teach philosophy and good desires

In this their still Lyceum.

These last, quite remarkable lines convey what are probably the most extravagant of Wordsworthian claims, that
nature instructs us in matters that we usually think confined to a realm of purely human discourse. True, the philosophy taught by these "Powers" in "this their still Lyceum" has little to do with any of the specialized metaphysical and epistemological interests traditionally associated with the term "philosophy" since Descartes. But in a more narrowly historical context, the philosophy that nature teaches is indeed most truly philosophy--at least as the antiphilosophical philosophers of the Enlightenment, the philosophes, understood it, a practical wisdom whose fundamental aims are the instilling of virtue and, by that means, the effecting of significant social and political reform and improvement. Profoundly optimistic, that philosophy has as its governing premise, as one standard nineteenth-century formulation puts it, "that human nature is good, that the world is capable of being made a desirable abiding place, and that the evil of the world is the fruit of bad education and bad institutions."\textsuperscript{105} What really distinguishes Wordsworth from these other reforming "philosophers" of his age are not the ends he seeks but his belief that the world is to be turned into a "desirable abiding place"--not just through the reforming of human institutions but more literally by submitting ourselves to the intellectually and morally determining operations of
nature itself, sky and earth, flowers and trees, those phenomenal appearances that express nature's indwelling intentional agency, In a famous passage from "The Tables Turned," written shortly before the composition of the intended beginning to "Nutting," Wordsworth makes this very point, claiming there that, as a purveyor of knowledge and morals, nature is superior to even the best of our human pedagogues:

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

(21-24)

But if Wordsworth thought nature to be a better philosophe than the philosophes, the philosophy it teaches is still, like theirs, the practical moral and social philosophy of the philanthropic philosophes Wordsworth read of and knew in France and England, men who in the 1790s sought, in Karl Marx's famous phrase, not to understand the world but to change it. Yet, conversely and paradoxically, the very philosophy taught by nature and espoused by Wordsworth, however disposed we may be to class it among the
philosophies of praxis, is the philosophy railed against by Edmund Burke as an illicit intrusion of the abstractly philosophical into social and political arrangements heretofore governed by a truly pragmatic traditional wisdom.

But it is the second topic taught in this "still Lyceum"--"good desires"--that most strikingly indicates how the idea that nature teaches is not a repudiation of but an incorporation into a Utopian project of social and political transformation still imbued by Wordsworth with the spirit of the French Revolution, for those "good desires" that nature had apparently already taught the poet--and would also teach his sister--bear a more than passing resemblance to the "desires more wise" Wordsworth speaks of in another contemporaneous text, the conclusion to the 1800 manuscript version of The Recluse. To forestall anticipated objections to the autobiographical excesses of the long poem to come, to the disproportionate attention he will give "[t]he transitory being that beheld / This Vision" (Home at Grasmere 1038-39), Wordsworth explains there that he is going to write so much about himself not out of the egotism of Romantic genius but so that his life may be read as that of a forerunner, a harbinger, a typical life in the good society to be, one
that even now would "Express the image of a better time / Desires more wise & simpler manners" (Home at Grasmere 1045-46) (italics mine)) Thus if nature has picked him out specially for tutelage in "good desires" and in its "philosophy," as the projected beginning to "Nutting" suggests, it may have done so, as this closely linked passage indicates, so that the life he autobiographically describes might serve, even now, as an example to others. But if William was among the first so chosen as exemplar, Dorothy is apparently to follow close behind, having been exposed to just such an ethically manipulative confrontation with nature as he himself had been exposed to in the course of acquiring those "good desires" and that "philosophy" that nature has already taught him and is now teaching her. While what we read in adversarial critics like Barrell, Simpson, Ross, and Jacobus would certainly have us conclude otherwise, I can find nothing in this earliest manuscript conception of "Nutting" that would lead me to think that the "better time" now in the making through the social engineering of nature is to be a "better time" for men only, that because she is a female Dorothy must automatically be excluded from its benefits or, for that matter, from having a corresponding role as forerunner in bringing that "better time" into being.
The agenda of the "Nutting" materials does not stop, then, with the championing of the purely ecological, nor even with the claim that out of ecological respectfulness the moral goods of duty and sympathy will arise. These materials put forward an implicit politics as well, and it is not the politics that adversarial critics usually ascribe to Wordsworth's turn to nature in 1798, the politics of the incipient reactionary who, in attending to nature, averts his gaze—and would entice us to avert our gaze—from the needs of the poor and dispossessed: the desired and achievable end product of such episodes as that recorded in "Nutting" is not simply the inculcated ecological self-restraint of one who "would not strike a flower / As many a man would strike his horse" nor even the comparatively narrow ethical receptivity of the man who would not "slight the pleadings of the human heart"; the end product is nothing less than the nature-abetted construction of the man of rational benevolence, the true reformer because true philanthropist in the idiom of the radicalism of the 1790s. Thus, as Wordsworth explains in the concluding lines to that other manuscript fragment beginning "I would not strike a flower," "he" who "fosters such regard for things / In which he finds no traces of himself"—that is, those things of nature that, like the
"dear nook / Unvisited" of "Nutting," do not belong to him—shall find self-interest disappear as a motive to conduct, to be replaced by a truly disinterested "benevolence":

those bastard loves,
Those low and fickle yearnings of the heart,
The wayward brood of vanity, must die
Within him, and benevolence be spread
Like the Sun's light upon the open sea.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps most striking here is the necessitarian "must" with which Wordsworth explains both that death of self-interest induced by regard for nature and the attainment of the truly disinterested "benevolence" that is to follow. The benevolence, moreover, that is thus necessitated is broadly expansive to the point of universality in its choice of objects—"spread / Like the sun's light upon the open sea"—and doubtlessly rational in its sunlike mode of operation. (Earlier, in the 1797 manuscripts of the "Old Cumberland Beggar," Wordsworth had expressly identified benevolent reason with the sun, endowing the philanthropists of that poem—those "[b]y their good works exalted," who "to the end of time / Will live, and spread,
and kindle"—with minds in which "reason falls / Like a strong radiance of the setting sun.") Of course, universality and rationality are the key components of the benevolistic discourse of radicalism in the 1790s, its advocacy of a revolution or—in the aftermath of the generally acknowledged failure of the French Revolution—at least of a reform without borders to obtain those inalienable rights with which all men are endowed, rights plainly ascertainable by and, for a philosopher like Godwin, to be achieved by reason. Thus, read in the most truly contextual way—that is, in the context of the contemporaneous writings of Wordsworth most closely associated with the text at issue, in this case, "Nutting"'s intended beginning and the apparent poetic "overflow" from that beginning—"Nutting" can be seen and, I think, should be seen as a poem in which Wordsworth kept faith with his radical past, incorporating that appallingly destructive childhood episode within the framework of a theodicy of political reform.

But if "Nutting" is still a poem of the left in the traditional political sense, perhaps more "red" than "green" in its moral emphasis, it still remains, even when we look to the implied conclusion of that process of social improvement, significantly "green." For the beneficiaries
of that "better time," for which Wordsworth serves now as forerunner, are to be not just men and women but the loved objects of nature as well, those "unassuming things which hold / A silent station in the beauteous world." Probably the primary evidence that ecology, too, will have its place in the Utopian political and social order toward which "Nutting" and its manuscripts suggestively point is Wordsworth's characterization of what he was "early taught" to feel for "those unassuming things" as "fraternal love," a term whose radical connotations in an epoch of revolutionary championing of liberty, equality, and—most relevant here—fraternity are too evident to require further elaboration. Moreover, such linking of "fraternal love" toward objects other than humanity with the most Utopian of revolutionary hopes for humanity has a precedent in an earlier and indisputably radically committed poem, Coleridge's address to the young ass he would hail as "Brother" (an appellation for which he would be roundly mocked for years afterward) and would have join him on the banks of the Susquehanna in a Pantisocratic "Dell / Of Peace and mild Equality" (27–28).\(^{109}\) By turning from this very early instance of a self-admitted radical poet's associating fraternal love toward the seemingly meanest of nature's creatures with an overtly political fraternal
feeling for his fellow humans to the later Wordsworthian text, we can, I think, be made mindful—contrary to many current assessments of Wordsworth's politics at the time he wrote "Nutting"—of just how much of the spirit of pantisocratic and other kindred idealisms from Wordsworth and Coleridge's most overtly radical years still survived, even in the days of "dereliction and dismay" (Prelude 2:457) of 1798 and 1799.

In the closing lines of the "intended beginning" in DC MS 16 to the poem that is now "Nutting," Wordsworth offers what seems to be his original rationale for recounting the episode that comprises most of the published text of "Nutting." Addressing those animistically imagined "Powers" who preside over the order of nature and whose moral intentions have our good as their primary aim, those "gentle Stewards of a Poet's time," those "Powers! without whose aid the idle man / Would waste full half of the long summer's day", those who "Restore the springs of his exhausted frame," and, most important, those

whose general ministry it is
To interpose the covert of these shades,
Even as a sleep, betwixt the heart of man
And the uneasy world, 'twixt man himself,
Not seldom, and his own unquiet heart,

Wordsworth informs these varied spirits of the grove of his wish for

a music and a voice

Harmonious as your own, to tell the world

What ye have done for me.¹¹⁰

And clearly the tale he would tell if he possessed such "a music and a voice" is the very one that that beginning is intended to introduce, the tale, as eventually published, that opens with the phrase "It seems a day" ("Nutting," 1) and goes on to tell of the soon-to-be-desecrated grove stumbled upon by the very young Wordsworth. It is clearly a tale told to illustrate what these spirits of the grove "have done for me," to prove that even such an episode of apparent human destructiveness has contributed a natural theodicy, to demonstrate that (as Wordsworth would write in 1805) "[a]ll" is "gratulant, if rightly understood" (Prelude, 13, 385). The elements that would contribute to that theodicy clearly are already in place in Wordsworth's published narrative of "Nutting": the "sense of pain" (52) the boy might perhaps have felt on beholding the "mutilated
bower" (50) but which the adult Wordsworth certainly feels
now in recollecting "[t]he silent trees" (53) through
which, as a result of his despoliation of the grove, "[t]he
intruding sky" (53) then peered, a sight so painfully
instructive that he will turn to the maiden who accompanies
him and who views a later and similar scene with "a keen
look / Half cruel in its eagerness," according to the
manuscript and urge her to "with gentle hand / Touch," an
imperative that sounds very much like a plea to one who is
far from gentle to become gentle.

One can, of course, finally believe that, in
publishing only that part of the original that takes up the
childhood outing and the brief request to his sister that
she move and touch with gentleness, Wordsworth had been
somehow compelled to remove the husk of the manifest with
its pious irrelevancies, thereby bringing us closer to the
hermeneutically significant kernel of the psychosexually
latent--closer, that is, to that perhaps otherwise
repressed memory that would speak to us (and perhaps
cathartically to the poet himself) of male sexual
aggressiveness and anxiety and the implicit misogyny toward
its object that the guilt-ridden male sexual aim so often
carries with it. But that is a case that remains to be
made, and made only after sorting through the evidence--
including the manuscript materials of the intended
beginning to and the overflow from "Nutting"—and not
simply assumed in accordance with those adversarial
presuppositions that at present still govern most readings
of Wordsworth's poem. Not sharing these presuppositions, I
obviously do not find that case persuasive and read
"Nutting" very differently. To me, what is hermeneutically
most significant about "Nutting" is the way in which
Wordsworth takes an event that seems on the face of it to
be nothing so much as an illustration of our human capacity
for cruelty to nature ("All men are like this in their
relation to nonhuman nature, since even this innocent young
child is a libertine and a destroyer" is how Ferry in a
highly influential analysis of this poem written more than
forty years ago tells us Wordsworth would have us
understand this event) and then, against all odds, adapts
it to the optimistically perfectibilian scenario of
individual development and general human progress that he
repeatedly describes and prophesies between 1797 and 1800.
And while plainly evident in the manuscripts, that meaning
can certainly be derived from the published text alone. In
its presentation of this scenario, "Nutting" offers
parallels with "Tintern Abbey," though not in the
misogynistically biased way that Wordsworth's adversarially
minded critics assume. Instead, what it provides, just as "Tintern Abbey" does, is a narrative of personal growth whose implicit possibilities for replication in humanity at large are illustrated through the briefer but still parallel narrative of a sister now undergoing her own process of personal growth, one that at this point, though, still lags behind his. She, too, shall undergo a transformation from wildness to gentleness similar to what has already been produced in her poet-brother by those powers of nature of which he will speak when telling "the world / What ye have done for me," that doing by nature being what is recounted in the boyhood episode that is "Nutting."

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, that much-written-about poem "Nutting" has probably been the crisis poem most instrumental in bringing about the paradigm shift (or rather shifts) that we have seen take place in the past forty years of Wordsworth study. But perhaps now, with these once neglected manuscripts increasingly foregrounded, indeed with their having become an unavoidable resource for the critic who would understand the poem, the long version of "Nutting" or even the published version informed by its "dependent drafts and revisions" will emerge as our crisis poem. And because we
shall find it a text inexplicable by applying the presuppositions of our governing adversarial paradigm, we will perhaps have to devise a new paradigm, produce a revolution in the way we see this great writer, once more presupposing him to be the ecologically and morally and politically enlightened poet he is.
Chapter 3
Feminists and Radicals: The Rights of Women

Ever since Frederick Jameson first exhorted us to historicize, literary critics more and more have sought to heed that exhortation, to situate historically the texts they would interpret. (In most cases, the sole stipulation governing the selection of contextualizing materials has been that the interpretation arrived at by the critic fit itself to a hermeneutics of disparagement, enable him or her to find fault and assign blame, especially when the writer in question is a traditionally canonical male writer and the interpretive issues raised involve considerations of gender.) Often, of course, to effect the proper historicizing, virtually any context will suffice, with Barrell's early-eighteenth-century grammar providing a prime illustration of the arbitrarily seized upon contextualization designed to disparage. And any context will suffice because it is so often assumed by the contextualizing critic that opinions, at least those opposed to the interests of women, are sociohistorically determined and therefore monolithically held--appearances to the contrary notwithstanding--by all members of the ascendant class and ascendant sex. Thus the contextualizing adversarial critic can anticipate that within the patriarchal order of a particular epoch what one polite male prejudiciously believed about women essentially
all polite males must have likewise believed. But the age of Wordsworth, as I have argued earlier, stands at the beginning of an episteme of choosing, so that the informed intellectual with choices available may decide for himself or herself whether to be an egalitarian or an elitist, a male chauvinist or a feminist. If the individual can so choose, it then follows that our interpretive conclusions must rest finally not upon the invocation of deterministically mandated absolutes but upon the weighing of probabilities and possibilities and be understood as tacitly provisional.

In this chapter I would like to historicize, to develop what seems to me an appropriate historical context in which to situate Wordsworth on the issue of the rights and wrongs of women, and come to probabilistic conclusions that I understand to be tacitly provisional. (It is probably unnecessary to add that I do not expect these conclusions to be disparaging.) First, I will show how major feminists of the late eighteenth century deduced their notions of female equality as the logical corollary to the general egalitarian empiricist epistemology that Wordsworth certainly—and other radicals bent on reform—held during the 1790s. And then, while conceding that most reformers resisted that seemingly unassailable logic and ignored or opposed the idea of equality for women, I hope to show that many of the radicals in England with whom Wordsworth associated did express support for women's
rights and admiration for the women who advocated this view. Obviously, in the absence of any similarly overtly unambiguous statements of commitment to women's rights by Wordsworth, such contextualization hardly provides clinching evidence that, on the basis of his own egalitarian empiricist epistemology, he either inferred or implied the claims for the equality of women that the feminists did or that he shared the sympathy for the feminist cause his fellow radicals did; and I must therefore remain content with only modest probabilities and possibilities. But I cannot resist adding that both the empiricist epistemology Wordsworth held in common with Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine Macaulay, and Mary Hays and the support for women's rights by men who in the 1790s were friends and political associates of the poet provide, at the very least, a more appropriate context for understanding Wordsworth's attitudes toward women and their rights than Barrell's early-eighteenth-century grammar. In a useful summation of what might be considered the epistemological rationale for virtually all radical thinking in the later eighteenth century, Gordon Wood contends that America's revolutionary leaders "knew—-it was the basic premise of all their thinking—-that people were not born to be what they might become. Lockean sensationalism told the revolutionaries that human personalities were unformed, impressionable things that could be molded and manipulated by controlling people's
sensations." The denial of that doctrine of innate differences used from time immemorial to justify hereditarily unequal outcomes, the insistence, conversely, that both character and knowledge derived from the impingement upon a passively receptive tabula rasa of sensations that would subsequently be converted into simple ideas and be yoked together by the irresistible laws of association into compound and complex ideas, in short a necessitarian determination not by birth but by environment, a process in which education understandably played an important formative role--these tenets of John Locke (augmented and implicitly politicized by Helvétius, Hartley, and Priestley) provided the premises of revolutionary thought not just in America but in France and England as well. And they are the premises upon which the arguments for female equality of the pioneering British feminists of the late eighteenth century--Catherine Macaulay, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary Hays--are also based.

Of the three, the best-known, Mary Wollstonecraft, has the least to say on overtly and abstractly epistemological issues, but even she resorts to language of a markedly empiricist character--the conceptual basis for the title of the sixth chapter of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, "The Effect Which an Early Association of Ideas Has upon the Character" (Wollstonecraft 23) comes straight from Locke and Hartley and, it is worth noting parenthetically,
might well have been adopted by Wordsworth as the title of the opening books of *The Prelude*. Indeed, so deep are Wollstonecraft's empiricist tendencies that the most philosophically oriented of her critics, Ralph Wardle, concludes that "Mary subscribed wholeheartedly, when she became a teacher, to Locke's theory that man is the product of environment alone," a philosophic position that, according to Wardle, persisted essentially unchanged during the whole of her career as a writer.

But both Catharine Macaulay and Mary Hays were extensively engaged in a theoretical philosophizing usually thought of as man's work, and both were clearly adherents of that egalitarian empiricism identified with Locke and his more materialistic followers. The very possibility of education, the ability of "a tutor to fashion the mind of his pupil," Macaulay tells us, depends upon "an adequate knowledge of the power of association, by which a single impression calls up a host of ideas, which, arising in imperceptible succession, form a close and almost inseparable combination," a clear summation of the basic Lockean paradigm for the mind's development. And in accordance with that paradigm, she too sees the mind as essentially passive in perception, necessarily receptive to the inescapable influences of the external world. Thus, "the human mind," Macaulay asserts,
is quite passive in receiving impressions through the organs of sense. I can lay my hands close on my ears, and thus produce a temporary deafness; but if I have no natural imperfection of this kind, and keep my ears open, I cannot keep out the ideas which the discourse of others occasions. No; they will necessarily be received by the mind, and laid up in mental repository, where they will be ready to lead into the train of their associates; when thought is set into motion by any turn of the animal circulation favorable to such combinations, or when any corresponding impression is received by the mind; I can shut my eyes from seeing objects, but I cannot hinder the impressions which these objects, when they are seen, make upon the mind. (163)

In all of this she clearly concurs with Locke's view that "the objects of our senses do many of them obtrude their particular ideas upon our minds, whether we will or no"—or in the empiricist Wordsworth's words, "The eye—it cannot choose but see; / We cannot bid the ear be still" ("Expostulation and Reply," 17-18), an inescapable and fortunate subjugation of mind to the senses that for all three is the basis of our human educability and amendment. Then, after putting forward this most fundamental epistemological axiom of the Lockean creed, Macaulay offers her crucial summary assertion: "As the senses, Hortensia,
are the only inlets to human knowledge, consequently human knowledge can only be gained by experience and observation.\textsuperscript{118}

Most firmly linking Macaulay with the radicals of the 1790s is her willingness to abstract from these sensationalist epistemological tenets the political and social ramifications that logically and inevitably follow from them. Since "the doctrine of innate ideas, and innate affections, are in a great measure exploded by the learned" (203)--the learned in this case being Locke and those adherents of his who subscribed to his polemic against innate ideas in the \textit{Essay concerning Human Understanding}--and since therefore neither hereditary nor natural ability can any longer be invoked to justify differences in situation, Macaulay is firm in stating the radically egalitarian inference that is to be drawn from these epistemological findings: "The natural equality of man . . . is a truth which forces itself on the candid attention" (257). But the "natural equality of man" is for Macaulay not simply a natural equality of men; if there are no innate mental differences among individuals but only differences in experience, then it must logically follow, as the chapter heading to Letter 22 puts it, that there can be "No characteristic Difference in Sex" (203), that "the notion of a sexual difference in the human character," while it "has, with a very few exceptions, universally prevailed from the earliest times," is "an opinion which
close observation of Nature, and a more accurate way of reasoning, would disprove" (203-4). Moreover, in opposition to Rousseau, Macaulay is not just an epistemological egalitarian but, like Wollstonecraft, a moral egalitarian as well, maintaining that “there is but one rule of right for the conduct of all rational beings; consequently that true virtue in one sex must be equally so in the other, whenever a proper opportunity calls for its exertion; and vice versa, what is vice in one sex, cannot have a different property when found in the other” (201).

Mary Hays, too, is a committed empiricist and associationist who turns for precedence and authority for her own opinions to "the great and good Dr. Hartley" and to "the excellent Dr. Priestley," following them in asserting that "from the laws of association . . . moral principles may in great measure be formed" and in professing herself "a convert to the doctrines of materialism and necessity" (159), a declaration that she says has shocked her fictional correspondent in Letters and Essays, Aspasia, thus presumably preemptively conveying to her readers that Hays is aware that so radical a profession is likely to shock most of them as well. No less radical than her philosophic views are her political opinions: while "the present struggles in France" may be "ruinous and dreadful to those actually engaged in them," Hays has "no doubt" that "[p]osterity will," nonetheless, "reap the benefits" of them (17).
But it is in her advocacy of women's rights that epistemology and politics most strikingly converge: "For chained and blindfolded, as they most certainly are, with respect to their own rights," Mary Hays passionately insists, women "see--there is not an individual among them, who does not at times see,--and they feel too with keenest anguish,--that mind, as has been finely said, is of no sex," this last phrase the most crucial of all axiomatically justifying formulations in behalf of equality between the sexes. Indeed, Hays is careful to reject any of the conventional stereotypes that imply innate intellectual or moral distinctions between the sexes, and in *Letters and Essays* Hortensius, one of the wise men of her narratives, rejects in no uncertain terms "the absurd notion, that nature has given judgement to men, and to women imagination," maintaining instead that "Sexual distinctions in intellect and virtue have depraved and weakened the human species." Indeed given a proper education, one offering women the opportunity of "exercising their reason and unfolding their talents," women, "their eyes opened to their natural equality and consequence," would achieve an "eclaircissement," beholding "with astonishment and indignation, the arts which had been employed to keep them in a state of PERPETUAL BABYISM." (Hays *Appeal* 96–97). The result of their unjust treatment by men, being kept uneducated because assumed to be ineducable, is that "women," Hays complains, "are
considered in two ways only. In the lower classes as necessary drudges—In the higher as ornaments of society, the pleasing triflers, who flutter through life for the amusement of men, rather than for any settled purpose with regard to themselves" (160).

Nowhere though is the interconnectedness of radical epistemology and feminism more evident than in a series of letters written by Mary Hays as her contributions to ongoing debates on the philosophy of Helvétius and the talents of women in the liberal periodical the Monthly Magazine.123 (We know that copies of the Monthly Magazine from February to December 1796 inclusive, containing most of the materials in these debates, were in the packet of books sent by James Losh to Wordsworth on March 20, 1797.)124 Helvétius, who is the most radical of radical epistemologists in his "denial of inborn inequalities"125 (Pollin 274), insists instead that we are the products of our environment, that "the talents and virtue of every individual are the effects of their education," a view that comes under attack from J. T. in the very first issue of the Monthly Magazine, where he accuses Helvétius of propounding a system that does not appear "to be grounded upon nature, truth, or reason." If we were to take that system to its logical conclusion, J. T tells us, it would then follow "that if you could discover in what manner Homer or Shakespeare were educated, you have nothing to do but to get twenty boys, from any place whatever, and
educate them in the same manner in which Homer and Shakespeare were educated, and you would immediately produce the same number of Homers and Shakespeares." But as J. T. notes, even Helvétius knows this to be untrue, since he hedged his radically egalitarian claims by the fatally undermining concession "that no two persons ever do receive the same education." 126

In her rejoinder to J. T., Mary Hays concedes that no "two individuals" ever can "be precisely in the same situations and the same circumstances," so that obviously "no two persons can receive the same instruction," not even those who are "members of the same family, seminary or nation." But in the broadest and most consequential sense, Hays still insists that Helvétius is ultimately right enough: "notwithstanding these particular differences, a general resemblance may uniformly be traced to those who have been placed in a corresponding situation." Thus poor men, if placed in situations and circumstances "corresponding" to those of the rich, or females, if placed in situations and circumstances "corresponding" to those of males, while they would admittedly differ in noticeable particulars from their counterparts, would nonetheless bear a sufficient "general resemblance" to them so that we no longer would be inclined to believe that the vast disparities in situation, in wealth, in rights, or in privileges that constantly obtain between poor and rich, female and male, are somehow ordained by nature. And while
similarly conceding J. T.'s narrower objection, admitting, "It would be impossible to place anyone in "the circumstances which produced a Newton, a Milton, or a Shakespeare," since "[ma]ny of these" would "necessarily have been of a local and evanescent nature, or "too subtle, delicate, and complicated, to be analyzed," Hays still persists in the radical empiricist's fundamental creed, that if the great individual's history were satisfactorily analyzed and made generally available to others--and who better to accomplish this than that individual himself or herself--then that life could be, if not exactly duplicated, at least proximately followed with sufficient closeness that a likeness of outcome, intellectually and morally, could be anticipated. Thus Hays writes, "But were every great man to become his own biographer, and to examine and state impartially, to the best of his recollection, the incidents of his life, the course of his studies, the causes by which he was led into them, the reflections and habits to which they gave birth, the rise, the change, the progress of his opinions, with the consequences produced by them on his affections and conduct, great light must be thrown upon the most interesting of all studies, that of moral causes and the human mind." (This same creed motivates much of Wordsworth's early autobiographical writing: his belief that by accurately relating the situations and circumstances, the "little realities," that went into the
making of his "transitory being," a life that nonetheless offers "the image of a better time, / More wise desires, and simpler manners," others studying that life would be encouraged to seek out situations and circumstances roughly resembling those that shaped Wordsworth's development and thereby construct for themselves not an exactly replicating but a roughly resembling life with its own correspondingly "wise desires and simpler manners."

The point at issue in the Helvétian controversy—whether talent is inborn or acquired, a gift of nature or the product of education—is carried forward into a second controversy (this time one with explicitly feminist concerns) in the following volume of the *Monthly Magazine*. Once again Mary Hays feels herself obliged to enter into the dispute on the Helvétian side, in this instance when the name of Shakespeare is invoked, the individual who, if there is such a thing, would unquestionably best exemplify the idea of truly innately natural genius and who, because he was a male, was thus used to make the case for an innate male intellectual superiority. Why, if mind knows no sex, Hays's disputant, A. B., asks, has there not been a female Shakespeare? Why did not Elizabeth I, with her vast educational advantages over Shakespeare, not intellectually achieve what Shakespeare achieved? Here too, in rebuttal, Hays reiterates the Lockean creed of an "enlightened philosophy," this time by means of a long quotation she
attributes to William Godwin, Hays's self-acknowledged philosophic mentor:

"That man (including the species without distinction of sex) was simply a perceptive being, incapable of receiving knowledge through any other medium than that of the senses: that the actions and dispositions of men are not the offspring of any original bias that they bring into the world, in favor of one sentiment or character rather than another, but flow entirely from the operation of circumstances and events acting upon the faculty of receiving sensible impressions: that all our knowledge, all our ideas, every thing we possess as intelligent beings comes from impression."¹²⁸

Thus in the world as we know it, Hays herself goes on to argue, superiority in "intellectual attainment would be found on the side of men," not "from any occult or original difference in their conformation, but because the education of women has been uniformly more perverted, as well as neglected than that of men."¹²⁹ Conversely, if men and women were to receive essentially resembling educations—since "man (including the species without distinction of sex) was simply a perceptive being"—then we would have (according to the Helvétian paradigm), if not necessarily a
female Shakespeare, nonetheless, males and females of roughly resembling intellectual attainments.

Yet the seemingly unassailable logic that would self-evidently extend to women that natural equality and those inalienable rights that, if justice were done, should belong to all men—a term presumably intended to apply to humanity at large—never did take hold with most of those who made and succeeded in the great revolutions of the last part of the eighteenth century. For these revolutionaries, mind apparently did have a sex. In America "the republican definition of womanhood," which led to the creation of "republican academies" for females marked a significant advance in educational opportunities for women (including the opportunity to enter the teaching profession), but it was still understood that women so educated "would confine themselves to traditional female functions" (294). And despite a little understood episode in New Jersey where the constitution adopted in 1776 had given the vote to all "free inhabitants," thereby enabling women and blacks to vote until their disenfranchisement in 1807 (191-93), the right to vote by which the governed gave their consent to those who governed them was not otherwise extended to women until well over a century after the American Revolution succeeded.

In France, the Revolution began promisingly enough for women with some of the earliest revolutionary legislation significantly limiting the absolute control over the family
wielded by husbands and fathers. The National Assembly in 1790, for example, abolished the much abused lettres de cachet, coercively employed by husbands and fathers to settle family disputes in their favor, and abolished primogeniture, which had been "condemned as inherently unfair to younger children (including girls)." These laws were designed to restrict "paternal authority over children" and therefore affected women only incidentally, but in 1792 the Legislative Assembly passed a law more directly benefiting women as wives, one not only "establishing divorce" but giving "mothers equal rights with fathers in control over children after divorce." In education, prospects for women in the earliest stages of the Revolution seemed even more promising with submission in 1792 to the Legislative Assembly of the Report and Project for a Decree on the General Organization of Public education. Authored by Condorcet, whose advocacy of voting rights for women had already established him as the leading male proponent of women's rights in France during the revolutionary period, this remarkably egalitarian proposal for a system of universal education insisted that education had to be made available by the state to all and advanced the even more revolutionary principle that "[i]nstruction must be the same for women as it is for men." However, the advances for women anticipated by Condorcet's Report and Project were never realized. Not until 1794 was a proposal for educational
reform finally enacted with the passage of Lakanal's Law, a plan that considerably diluted the egalitarianism of Condorcet's original proposal by reinstating traditionally religiously oriented private schools and segregating girls and boys in an ostensibly equal but clearly separate (and hence inferior) program of instruction, a decision that, as Isser Woloch notes, meant "certain failure" for the goal of equal education for women since the female teachers needed to instruct the segregated female pupils were simply unavailable in sufficient numbers.134

But the most severe blow to feminist aspirations came with the denial to women of full political participation in government, most especially the right to vote, at the very outset of the Revolution, when eligibility for political participation was spelled out in legislation that fell far short of the demand for popular sovereignty annunciated in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. While property qualifications limited the eligibility of males to vote and hold office, women were, without exception, excluded from political participation. And in a single week in the fall of 1793, official hostility to whatever in the way of feminism had surfaced in the Revolution shockingly manifested itself in three events: the execution of Olympe de Gouges on November 3, the order for the closing of all revolutionary women's clubs by the National Convention on November 5, and the execution of Madame Roland on November 8, the women executed and the women of
the women's clubs all being represented as "dangerous deviants from the prescribed norms of domestic life"\textsuperscript{135} and "the Jacobin ideology of the obedient wife-mother."\textsuperscript{136}

But if the radicals whose revolutions in France and America had succeeded were so indifferent and even opposed to the rights of women, what attitudes toward these rights can we expect to find among those radicals in Britain who not only failed to achieve a revolution but found themselves beleaguered, persecuted, and finally disenchanted not only by what had not taken place in Britain but by what had, in fact, occurred in France? Turning to those "in the radical circles in which Wordsworth moved," those to whom, according to Barrell, he would have been reluctant to communicate the disdain for the intellectual capabilities of women allegedly implied in "Tintern Abbey"--the men, for example, who had been present during his first meeting with Godwin in 1795 and those radicals he was subsequently in contact with during his stay at Alfoxden--we certainly find no extended public brief for the rights of women like that of Condorcet. Yet it is evident from scattered comments in both published writings and in letters and diaries that Barrell is right in assuming considerable sympathy for the feminism of the time in "the radical circles in which Wordsworth moved." One reason why these failed revolutionaries could maintain such sympathy might simply be their very unsuccess, thus enabling them to retain an idealism uncontaminated by the
need to compromise with the prejudices of society at large, as the leaders of the revolutions that succeeded found themselves forced to do time and time again. But perhaps a more fundamental reason for that sympathy and support for the cause of equality for women was the publication in 1792 of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and the personal presence of Mary Wollstonecraft herself in those circles, often on terms of considerable intellectual and personal intimacy with their members. Expressions of approval of and admiration for Wollstonecraft probably provide the very best index to the feminist sympathies in the scattered poems, essays, letters, and diaries in which the issue of women is most often addressed by the male writers in the radical circles in which Wordsworth moved.

The most prominent of these writers was undoubtedly William Godwin, mentor to Mary Hays and, of course, husband of Mary Wollstonecraft. For Hays, Godwin had served as a principal authority for the view that "mind is of no sex," since, in her contributions to the debate over the talents of women in the *Monthly Magazine*, she had taken her definition of man as "simply a perceptive being" directly from *Political Justice*, a definition that in the original also contained the sexually egalitarian stipulation that this was to apply to the "species without distinction of sex." And some indication of Godwin's views on women or, at least, of how Hays understood these views, may be gleaned from Mr. Francis, a character in Hays's roman à
clef Emma Courtney apparently based on Godwin, who agrees with the complaint of the novel’s titular heroine that "the customs of society, then, have enslaved, enervated, and degraded woman." But it is as the first biographer of Mary Wollstonecraft with his Memoirs of the Author of "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" that Godwin makes his best-known contribution to late-eighteenth-century feminism. Though he may tactlessly complain of the "somewhat amazonian temper, which characterized some parts of the book," and observe that "[m]any of the sentiments are undoubtedly of a rather masculine description," ill-considered phrases for anyone who holds that "mind is of no sex," Godwin's admiration is evident for his wife's efforts "in defence of one half of the human species, labouring under a yoke which, through all the records of time, had degraded them from the station of rational beings, and almost sunk them to the level of the brutes." But it was in his critique of marriage that Godwin probably made his most original and significant contribution to feminist discourse in the period, since he denounced marriage on the Godwinian grounds that it runs counter to reason like all promissory arrangements in which circumstances may change over time; and, more fundamentally, that it invariably oppresses women, being "a monopoly and the worst of monopolies," one in which, as Godwin explains, "I seek, by despotic and artificial means, to maintain my possession of
a woman" and thereby "am guilty of the most odious selfishness."\textsuperscript{139}

Others present at that first meeting between Wordsworth and Godwin also appear to have been sympathetic to Wollstonecraft and supporters of female equality. In his radical novel of 1792 Anna St. Ives, Thomas Holcroft's rationalist heroine rejected "the unjust decree of prejudice, that mind . . . has its sex," and its hero, Frank Henley, denies, in Godwinian fashion, that family relations are to take precedence over truth, insisting that "[n]o human ties can bind us to error."\textsuperscript{140} In an even more personal statement of support for female equality, Holcroft, in a diary entry of 1798, records a dispute with Professor Porson, who "maintained that women are by nature and of necessity inferior to men," a point on which Holcroft, according to his diary, "to a very considerable degree, differed with him."\textsuperscript{141}

Present, too, at that first meeting of Wordsworth and Godwin was George Dyer, a leading radical in the 1790s, first in Cambridge and then in London. Dyer was best known as a friend of Charles Lamb's, but he was a lifelong friend of Wordsworth's as well. (As late as 1839 Wordsworth reminds himself in a memorandum written during a visit to London "to not neglect to call upon George Dyer.") As early as his Poems of 1792, Dyer was already "distinctly feminist in his sympathies,"\textsuperscript{142} rhetorically asking liberty, "the sweet enthusiast," of "Ode to Liberty" if she had not
urged "thy Wollstonecraft to break the charm / Where beauty
lies in durance vile oppresst,"¹⁴³ and more prosaically
telling us in a footnote of having "observed, that the most
sensible females, when they turn their attentions to
political subjects, are more uniformly on the side of
liberty than the other sex."¹⁴⁴ (It is worth noting that it
was Dyer who introduced Wollstonecraft and Hays to each
other.)

Still later, after Wordsworth entered more fully into
his career as a poet, many of those with whom he associated
also seem to have been supporters of the rights of women
and of Wollstonecraft. Even during his stay at Alfoxden,
Wordsworth would have had A Vindication of the Rights of
Women available to him, since it was the very first title
chosen by Thomas Poole in 1793 when ordering for the Stowey
Book Society.¹⁴⁵ And as Poole informs us, the equitable
treatment of women had been a prime concern of the planners
of the Pantisocracy: "The regulations relating to the
females strike them as the most difficult," these
difficulties deriving not only from the inadequacies of
female education, a principal complaint of feminist writers
of the day, but also from a growing awareness of the need
to reconceive the institution of marriage, perhaps under
the pressures of Godwin's analysis. So the Pantisocrats
found themselves outlining a program for "the employments
of women" that, while it would turn over to the women "the
care of infant children, and other occupations suited to
their strength," would try "at the same time" to insure that "the greatest attention is to be paid to the cultivation of their minds." Moreover, as Poole tells us, they also addressed (without apparent resolution) the far more socially disquieting question of "whether the marriage contract shall be dissolved if agreeable to one or both parties" (98). And in an exchange of letters with Robert Southey in 1794, Coleridge recommends (surprisingly, in view of his own conduct as a husband) that in the Pantisocracy the men should do most of the housework: "Let the married Women do only what is absolutely convenient and customary for pregnant Women or nurses--Let the Husbands do all the Rest--and what will that all be--? Washing with a Machine and cleaning the House. One Hour's addition to our daily Labor." Two years later, in the Watchman of 17 March 1796, Coleridge returns to women's issues in an essay with the unpromising title "A Historical Sketch of the Manners and Religion of the Ancient Germans, Introductory to a Sketch of the Manners, Religion, and Politics of Present Germany." To rebut Edward Gibbon's contention that when the barbarian women of ancient Germany "affected to emulate the stern virtues of man, they must have resigned the attractive softness in which principally consists the charm and weakness of woman," Coleridge seconds Mary Wollstonecraft's contemptuous judgment that when men equate the charms and weakness of woman they merely express "the philosophy of sensuality." Indeed, in what may be
described as an outburst of feminist enthusiasm, Coleridge goes on to argue that "[t]he women of Germany" in that ancient age Gibbon conceives of as barbaric were, in truth, "the free and equal companions of their husbands" and "were treated by them with esteem and confidence, and consulted on every occasion of importance." 147

Coleridge did not always hold such enlightened views of women, and in a 1993 essay, H. J. Jackson points to passages in which Coleridge clearly asserts the "natural superiority of the male to the female" in "the realm of intellect" and to a lecture in which he spoke of Mary Wollstonecraft's "foolish book--meaning probably Thoughts on The Education of Daughters, though possibly the Vindication." 148 For Jackson, these highly sexist denunciations of women and the principal advocate for women during the period constitute Coleridge's basic position on the subject, though Jackson holds back from condemning Coleridge for what by current standards we would judge to be sexism by a kind of mitigating historical necessity, explaining the unenlightened views that Jackson would categorize as Coleridge on women as "what we might expect of someone of his period and culture" (585). But Jackson's evidence comes entirely from comments about women made after 1800, none of it from those made during the radical years. Yet the fact that, during the planning for the Pantisocracy, Coleridge would propose a reworking of traditional domestic arrangements largely for the sake of
facilitating the development of the minds of the women who would go to America and that he would refer to Mary Wollstonecraft in support of his own opinion that women are entitled to do more than please men by their charms and weaknesses suggests that Coleridge came to his opinion that women were intellectually inferior to men not because this was an opinion he was necessarily bound to hold in accordance with his “period” and “culture” but because, living in an episteme of choosing, he had on this matter freely changed his mind, just as he had in his broader political opinions freely gone from radical to conservative. (Nor should we assume that making the broader shift from radical to conservative compelled a change in Coleridge’s attitude toward women, since after undergoing a similar shift from radical to conservative in his broader political views, Wordsworth, contrastingly, still clearly did not regard women as intellectually inferior to men, as he makes evident in his admonishment of Milton for his low estimate of the female mind in a nation where there were “so many women of learning and talent.”)

Surprisingly enough, given his notorious advice late in his career to Charlotte Brontë, discouraging her from pursuing a career of authorship on grounds that “[l]iterature cannot be the business of a woman’s life: & it ought not to be,” the most overtly committed proponent of women’s rights and the most ardent supporter of Wollstonecraft among the dreamers of the Pantisocracy was
probably the young Robert Southey.\textsuperscript{150} Even before meeting her, Southey had appended dedicatory verses to Wollstonecraft to an early poem, "The Triumph of Woman," though the fact that in 1795 he would dedicate his poem to Wollstonecraft undoubtedly does more to establish his feminist credentials than anything in the contents of either the vacuously conventional dedicatory verses or the no less vacuously conventional poetical whole submitted to Wollstonecraft for her approval. In 1800 Southey reiterated his commitment to the feminist cause by declaring himself willing to set aside his own work and anonymously lend his talents to a pet project of John Rickman. Intensely practical-minded and unpoetical, Rickman had audaciously suggested to Southey after reading his poetry that the facility that the eventual laureate had shown in composing verse be "exerted to some solid purpose in prose," that "solid purpose" being "the employment and consequent amelioration of womankind,"\textsuperscript{151} a project plainly near and dear to Southey's own heart. Though already coming into prominence as a poet, Southey agreed to be Rickman's ghost-writer, "little more than mason under the master architect," and write "[a]n essay upon the state of women in society, & its possible amelioration by means, at first, of institutions similar to the Flemish Beguinages," lending his abilities as cover for Rickman because Rickman, "a man of uncommon talents & knowledge" otherwise "would write too strictly & closely for the public taste"\textsuperscript{152} to
effect their mutually shared purposes. (While promising Rickman to "work and in right willing earnest,"\textsuperscript{153} Southey never did write the essay on beguinages, though in a gesture of admittedly delayed loyalty he urged their establishment in his \textit{Colloquies} of 1829.)\textsuperscript{154}

But the surprising depth and breadth of Southey's radicalism is perhaps best illustrated in a letter to Coleridge in January of 1800. Remembering a comment of Mary Wollstonecraft--two years earlier Southey had said of an earlier remark by Wollstonecraft that "like most of that woman's remarks it was a wise and true one"\textsuperscript{155}--Southey goes on to discuss the uncompromisingly revolutionary Francois Babeuf, whose radically redistributionist views on property had long been anathema to the Thermidoreans and who was eventually executed in 1797 for an alleged plot against an already republican government:

Babeuf was a great man. Mary Wollstonecraft told me he was the most extraordinary one she had ever seen--and in the orgasm of the Revolution the system of total equalization would have been wise. It would have rendered any return to common systems impossible and incited insurrections all over Europe. But Babeuf did not sail till the tide had set in against him. The second Consul (damn their barbarizing affectation of Roman titles!) Cambaceres is one of the fairest characters that has yet appeared and his nomination is
creditable to the government--but what of all this? Sieyes and the Corsican have trod upon my Jacobean corns--and I am a thorough English republican. (215).

It is an instructive statement in many ways for anyone interested in understanding what radicalism might be even at this late date, "in times of dereliction and dismay," among those who apparently did not "fall off": the high praise for Babeuf and for his scheme of "total equalization" indicates that "wild theories" were still "afloat" and at least theoretically subscribed to by those who, disenchanted by events in France, nonetheless still would call themselves "republican," though by now a purely "English republican." Moreover, in all of this the opinion of the late Mary Wollstonecraft, undoubtedly regarded as "a wise and true one," still carried considerable weight.

One especially intriguing advocate of women's rights, whose advocacy seems particularly tied to admiration for Wollstonecraft, is James Losh, a young radical who, according to Southey in 1796, "carries with him one of the most open manly democratic faces I ever saw." Losh was not only present at that first meeting of Wordsworth and Godwin at William Frend's in 1795—he was a friend of Wordsworth's during his nomadic wanderings from London to Racedown to Alfoxden—but also most interestingly, was Wordsworth's host for several days during the Wordsworths'
stay near Bristol in June and July 1798, not long after they were forced to leave their house at Alfoxden and not long before their visit to Tintern Abbey.¹⁵⁹ (The visit to Tintern would be the first of two excursions from the Bristol region to Wales by the Wordsworths during that nomadic summer—the second a visit in August to the beleaguered Thelwall, harried by his neighbors in Llyswen for political opinions widely deemed seditious.)

Losh began keeping a diary in 1796 that at first consisted almost entirely of a simple listing of the titles and authors of books read, persons seen during the day, places visited, and brief descriptions of the day's weather, but it was slightly expanded in 1798 to include occasional commentary on his reading and conversations.¹⁶⁰ Losh had read Wollstonecraft in 1796 (without comment in keeping with his initial practice as a diarist) and returned to her writings in 1798 when Godwin posthumously published those works left uncompleted at the time of her death. In his entry for 3 March 1798, Losh tells of having read "Wollstonecraft's travels" (presumably the 1796 Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark), and on 16 and March he mentions reading the posthumously published but unfinished The Wrongs of Woman, a book for which he expresses the most unqualified admiration he shows for any book he read that year—"most excellent—a loss to the world its not being finished."

Moreover, Losh's reading of Wollstonecraft evidently
figures in several subsequent conversations: On 20 April 1798 he tells us of a "Long Dispute" with Warner, "upon the present state of women in society"; and we may glean the side taken by Losh in this dispute from an earlier diary entry in 1798 on the same subject, the report of a conversation with Mrs. Lee, "who is described as very prejudiced as to education of girls—a violent enemy to Mary Wollstonecraft's opinions." Throughout 1798 and 1799, Losh, in fact, read a number of works by other women writers, particularly books on education, though never with the enthusiasm shown for Wollstonecraft. On 12 August he has been reading the "Young Philosopher," which he characterizes "as the worst of Charlotte Smith's novels, though it certainly shows some [degree?] of talents and some knowledge of character." In October 1798, he turns to Mary Hays, first reading her Appeal from the Women to the Men of Great Britain and then Emma Courtenay, which he tells his diary is "written with some spirit but has much of the cant of the Godwinian school." In July 1799, Losh notes that he has read Hannah More on Education and Edgeworth on Education, but he expresses no opinion about either work. Losh's reading in education was not confined, however, to books by women. On 12 June 1798, the date on which Wordsworth's five-day stay with Losh began, he notes in his diary that he has just finished reading "Locke on Education," a major influence upon Mary Wollstonecraft's own writings on education in its emphasis on the primacy of
education in the formation of the intellect and the moral character. While Losh is careful to explain that "I differ from the principles contained in it," he, nonetheless, speaks of it as an "admirable treatise" and "very superior in sound sense to the works of modern philosophers on the same subject." During the remainder of Wordsworth's stay with Losh between 12 June and 15 June 1798, Losh notes his further reading of Locke, turning from his educational writings to the more strictly philosophic *Conduct of Human Understanding*, a perhaps revealing instance of the continuing interest in the philosophy of Locke by young British radicals in the late 1790s.

Apart from describing Wordsworth as "pleasant and clear, but too earnest and emphatic in his manner of speaking in conversation" and noting "hearing his poems" during their meetings, Losh unfortunately tells his diary practically nothing else about his conversations with Wordsworth during the poet's stay at Shirehampton in that momentous spring and summer of 1798. Certainly those of us who have written on Wordsworth's philosophy would like to know what might have been said about Locke, a likely topic of conversation in light of Losh's reading at the time of Wordsworth's visit. Given the concerns of current criticism, we would probably be even more curious to know if they discussed the "present state of women in society," one of the few topics in the conversations engaged in by Losh significant enough to be noted in his diary during the
months immediately preceding the June visit by Wordsworth. However, if we follow Barrell, we can only assume that, if Wordsworth had truly spoken his mind on that topic just weeks before going with Dorothy to Tintern Abbey, like Warner and Mrs. Lee, he would well have shown himself to have been "very prejudiced" and "a violent enemy to Mary Wollstonecraft's opinions." And, if in his conversations with the obviously enlightened Losh, he had not shown himself so dismayingly retrograde, if that never written diary entry told us that the two agreed that "the present state of women in society" was deplorable or that women were the intellectual equals of men and therefore entitled to the same education as men, then, if we were to follow Barrell, we should simply conclude—in one of those catch twenty-two addenda so prevalent in contemporary adversarial criticism—that such an opinion by Wordsworth was sheer hypocrisy, though a hypocrisy to be expected, since in "the radical circles within which Wordsworth had moved," he "would not openly or even privately have endorsed such an account of the intellectual 'imbécility' of women" as the one that Barrell believes was implicitly put forward in "Tintern Abbey," however deeply in his heart of hearts Wordsworth believed in their essential imbecility.

Yet I find it difficult to conclude that in general terms Wordsworth was politically any less radical than were Losh or most of the other radicals he associated with in the summer of 1798 nor, by extension, that he would have
found himself any less sympathetic than Losh was to the need for amelioration of "the present state of women in society." Indeed, an earlier conversation between Losh and Southey recorded in that same diary on 3 April 1798 gives some hint that in politics Losh considered Wordsworth and himself kindred spirits. Expressing his concern to Southey that censorship would result in "a stop being put to [Southey’s play] Joan of Arc," Losh goes on to record Southey’s indignantly resolute response, "[I]n that case he declared his intention of leaving the country," and then sums up the matter with the clearly anguished conclusion, "We all agree that were there any place to go to emigration would be a prudent thing for literary men and the friends of freedom." It seems a not unreasonable inference that Losh had Wordsworth and Coleridge in mind, along with Southey, as the "literary men" whose political views, like those of "the friends of freedom," would make emigration a "prudent thing" in the increasingly repressive Britain of 1798. In the first place, Wordsworth and Coleridge had been under surveillance by the Home Office during the preceding summer, apparently for their political views and their association with Thelwall. But even more immediate grounds for associating Wordsworth and Coleridge with emigration as a politically "prudent thing" was the invitation Wordsworth had extended only three weeks earlier to Losh and his bride to join the Wordsworths and the Coleridges in embarking as members of "this little
colony “ (a term with a strikingly Pantisocratic ring to it) for an extended stay in Germany (EY, 215). True, Wordsworth by the spring of 1798 might have regarded himself primarily as a “literary” man and been anxious to give over part of the time spent in the company of Losh in reciting poems from the nearly completed *Lyrical Ballads*, poems of which he was understandably proud; but he would still, I am sure, consider himself “a friend of freedom,” beleaguered in a dark time, and one therefore for whom “emigration” (perhaps a notion not unentangled with the projected trip to Germany in the fall), in Losh's words of April, “were there any place to go to would be a prudent thing.” So it is not surprising that the dire political conversation with Southey should end with a direct reference to Wordsworth, with Losh noting in his diary how Southey had “repeated to me a fine little poem of Wordsworth.”

In fact, a year later, Wordsworth would still feel justified in representing himself as one who had kept something akin to the political faith of revolutionary radicalism by writing a poem in blank verse, as Coleridge suggested in his letter of 10 September 1799, "addressed to those who, in consequence of the complete failure the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes for the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for
revolutionary philosophes."\textsuperscript{162} In keeping with Coleridge's suggestion, Wordsworth did conclude what would become the second book of The Prelude by claiming for himself that "in these times of fear, / This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown" (Prelude, 2:448-49), he had kept "a faith / That fails not" (Prelude, 2:459-60), presumably still preserving something like the old "hopes for the amelioration of mankind," for what else could that faith be? And he had persisted in that faith "in this time / Of dereliction and dismay" (Prelude, 2:456-57) against a backdrop of not merely "indifference and apathy" (Prelude, 2:450) but "wicked exultation" (Prelude, 2:451) toward the failure of those hopes on the part of those who had once themselves practiced and sometimes preached that now seemingly discredited doctrine of the coming "amelioration of mankind." He would still speak of them as "good men," but he could see them now

\begin{verbatim}
On every side fall off we know not how,
To selfishness, disguised in gentle names
Of peace, and quiet, and domestic love,
Yet mingled, not unwillingly, with sneers
On visionary minds.
\end{verbatim}

(Prelude, 2:451-56)

But as entries from Losh's diary in 1798 and 1799 indicate, by the time of Wordsworth's 1799 declared renewal
of confidence in and commitment to an earlier faith--indeed by the end of 1798--Losh himself must be regarded as a prime candidate for inclusion among those "good men" who have fallen off, not perhaps in "wicked exultation" but certainly in "apathy." For Losh, it is not a question of apostasy, a defection from once held principles, nor an about-face adoption of reactionary views, since, in his summary diary statement for 1798, he declares that "I retain my opinions of the value of Liberty in general" and expresses a continuing desire "to promote those great truths, which I consider as essential to human happiness," ending with a spirited denunciation of "[e]very species of war" that "I consider as unlawful to a Christian man." Even in December 1799 he criticizes the new French Constitution as "too aristocratic" and containing "too few checks on the Executive power to deserve the name of a genuine representative Republic," though he concedes that the new constitution "is perhaps as good as the French nation could bear at present," concluding the entry with the still radically optimistic judgment that "I believe Buonaparte to be honest." But if Losh continues to be a radical in thought--and he certainly remained a political liberal during his entire life--he had clearly decided not to be a radical in action, resolving instead "to withdraw for ever from politics, never to interfere farther than calm discussion, and when that cannot be had I am determined to be silent," a declaration of intent that
might have led Wordsworth, if aware of it, to accuse Losh of "apathy." But what makes Losh a prime candidate for inclusion among those "good men" whose radical enthusiasm Wordsworth believes has fallen off is his particular vulnerability to the charge of "selfishness, disguised in gentle names / Of peace, and quiet, and domestic love."

Losh had married in February 1798, and from the year-end summary of his 1799 diary, marriage had clearly supplanted politics as his principal source of interest and gratification. Only months after Wordsworth had termed domesticity "selfishness disguised," Losh, in that self-revealing summary, while claiming to still "derive comfort from the hope of a better world," literally gushes with enthusiasm for the joys of family life: "In my own family, I am perfectly happy. My wife becomes daily more dear to me, and more worthy of being so--We have never disagreed for a single moment in our marriage--Our child too is a new bond of affection, and, though it no doubt causes some anxiety, yet it is the source of the highest pleasure and the most lively hope."

I have offered this admittedly incomplete sampling of opinions about the status and rights of women to show that support of or at least sympathy for what amounts to the eighteenth-century women's movement, especially as that movement was promoted by Mary Wollstonecraft, seems close to a virtual constant "in the late eighteenth century, and especially within the radical circles within which
Wordsworth moved." To be sure, not every supporter of reform or revolution was necessarily sympathetic to the cause of women. For example, Professor Porson, who not only supported the French Revolution and severely and publicly criticized his own government but also refused a fellowship at Cambridge for reasons of conscience, was the very man who had taken the "prejudiced" side in that 1798 dispute reported in Holcroft's diary, maintaining the certainly unenlightened proposition "that women are by nature and of necessity inferior to men." But Porson seems an exception to an otherwise general rule that among the friends of freedom in those circles and the literary men associated with them a belief in political equality more often than not carried with it a corresponding belief in the equality of the sexes.

Statistical probabilities then would suggest that Wordsworth as a radical, committed enough, in fact, to claim that he remained faithful to the cause even when others--"good men"--had fallen off, was a supporter of women's rights and a proponent of the intellectual equality of the sexes. But though such a conclusion seems probable, it is still not certain, and neither I nor Barrell, who holds views diametrically opposed to mine, can speak definitively to the question. Wordworth kept neither a diary nor a journal nor a notebook; his notorious aversion to letter writing, an aversion particularly evident in the period immediately preceding and immediately following
publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, when he rarely wrote on subjects other than business or family and personal concerns, leaves us with far fewer speculative statements on political and social matters than we find in his more ruminative letter-writing and diary-or journal-keeping contemporaries like Coleridge, Southey, Holcroft, and Losh. We have no explicit pronouncements by Wordsworth on the status or rights or equality of females like those made by his fellow-radicals, and his one reference to Mary Wollstonecraft is frustratingly ambiguous. In a well-known letter of 6 March 1798 in which he tells James Tobin that he has "written 1300 lines of a poem" whose "object is to give pictures of Nature, Man and Society," thereby signaling the commencement of his life's great project, Wordsworth also asks Tobin to collect books of travel for him since "without such reading my present labours cannot be brought to a conclusion." He then adds, "I have not yet seen the life of Mrs. Godwyn," a remark clearly understood by Tobin as part of Wordsworth's request for books to be used in the bringing of his poetic labors "to a conclusion" (EY, 212), since a month later Dorothy notes in her journal that "Mary Wollstonecraft's life, etc. came." But Wordsworth attaches to that apparently simple request that the life of Mary Wollstonecraft be sent him the troublingly ambiguous addendum: "I wish to see it, though with no tormenting curiousity" (EY, 212). Perhaps the most plausible explanation for Wordsworth's apparent disclaimer,
his professed lack of "tormenting curiosity" to see the book he has apparently requested, is not that he is indifferent to the views of the advocate for woman's rights who is the subject of the biography but that he wishes to assure Tobin that his interest in Godwin's Memoir has nothing to do with the sensational revelations that made it so notorious, the disclosures of Mary Wollstonecraft's affair with Gilbert Imlay, the out-of-wedlock birth of her daughter, and her attempt at suicide after Imlay abandoned her. (Further evidence that Wordsworth was neither hostile nor indifferent to the plight of Mary Wollstonecraft is that he, "at her death, had given 5s he could ill afford to a subscription for her child."\textsuperscript{165}

In the absence of any direct comment by Wordsworth on the status, rights, or capabilities of women or on his attitudes toward those who would vindicate those rights, we are left finally only with the indirect evidence to be drawn from the poet's behavior and, of course, from his poetry. On the basis of that evidence, I would contend that Wordsworth's views of and attitudes toward women--and, by extension, his opinions on women's rights--were not very different from those of Southey and Holcroft and Losh, those members of the radical circle within which Wordsworth moved and to whom I believe, contrary to Barrell, he could speak his mind and say what was in his heart because his views and attitudes were much like theirs. His statements of high regard for the poetry of women, not only during his
most radical period but even years after he had otherwise
given up most facets of his radicalism, plainly resonate
with respect for women's intellectual capabilities in the
vocation that mattered most to him (as we shall see in the
following chapter on the "British poetesses"), as do his
criticisms of Milton for forming such a low estimate of the
intellectual capabilities of women when he had the example
of "so many women of learning and talent" before him. And
from what we know about Wordsworth's relationship with his
sister, I find it difficult to draw any conclusion other
than that he took for granted their fundamental
intellectual equality in the broadest sense, even if in the
very depths of his being he believed in the special nature
of his unique genius, a genius that differentiated him from
virtually all others, men and women alike. Dorothy was,
nonetheless, treated as a friend and companion, his
intellectual indebtedness to her, as we have seen, freely
acknowledged. Brother and sister were bound together not
just by family affection and ties of blood but by the
dictates of reason and the pleasures of camaraderie in a
relationship of mutual respect between men and women that
seems the very epitome of the way Macaulay, Wollstonecraft,
and Hays would have us live. To be together they would
appear to have sacrificed a measure of financial security
and flouted convention. Even in their first days together
at Windy Brow, Dorothy's aunt had warned her that in living
with her brother she was placing herself in "an unprotected
situation," a charge that Dorothy vehemently protested against since, to her mind, her brother offered her protection enough (Ex, 177). We know, too, that one of the grounds for suspicion laid out against Wordsworth in that letter from Dr. Daniel Lysons to the Duke of Portland that led to his being placed under surveillance at Alfoxden was that he had "no wife with him, but only a woman who passes for his sister." And in what is probably the most ungenerously catty of judgments on the living arrangements of the Wordsworths, Coleridge, who had left his wife and child behind when he went to Germany, described William's taking Dorothy there as "a wrong Step," since "Sister here is considered only a name for mistress."  

Yet despite all the disadvantages of living together, they persisted in doing so, out of affection and respect certainly and because they shared interests and values. Like her brother, Dorothy read widely in the literature they prized most highly, sometimes actually reading that literature aloud together with him. And though she came to the writing of poetry well after her brother, he thought highly enough of her poems to include them in collections of his own work. But what has always struck me as the most persuasive piece of evidence for William's recognition of Dorothy's intellectual capability, indeed for their tacit assumption of their fundamental intellectual equality from the very beginnings of their life together at Racedown, are the schemes for translation that repeatedly surface,
projects in which they would jointly participate in order to earn their living by intellectual labor that it was understood both could perform. And what from the outset has been the point at issue, the disputed question—and generally disputed quite one-sidedly—of William's attitude toward Dorothy's intellectual capabilities in "Tintern Abbey" and in "Nutting," only further confirms, I believe, my claim that William believed his sister to be his intellectual equal, that his faith that she was what he had been and ultimately would be what he was then is predicated on the axiomatic fact that mind is of no sex, that the tabula rasa carries no intellectually differentiating gender markings that would make either sex innately inferior or superior to the other.

In my earlier book on Wordsworth, The Philosophic Mind, I argued that during the course of the "golden decade" Wordsworth moved from the empiricism of the years between 1797 and 1800—with the external world, particularly nature, formatively determining the development of mind—to a more transcendental view in which the mind of man was seen as inherently unaffected by, because superior to, the external world—"above this Frame of things" (Prelude, 13:448), as he would state it at the conclusion of The Prelude, "A thousand times more beautiful than the earth / On which he dwells" (Prelude, 13:447-48). And to further complicate this passage from one philosophy to another, a passage highlighted by the
change from the developmental empiricism of "Tintern Abbey" to the flirtation with innate ideas of the "Intimations Ode," I posited a transitional phase found in the lyrics of 1802, designating the characterized relationship between nature and mind at that time by the philosophically clumsy phrase psychophysical parallelism, with mind and nature operating on harmoniously parallel but ultimately unconverging separate tracks. In the poetry of 1802, I saw no indication of the agency of nature shaping and improving the inner life of man: the heart leapt up in adulthood, just as it did when life began. At most we find episodes of inner renewal coinciding with but not determined by corresponding episodes of renewal in nature, the correspondence of the appearances of the rainbow with the leapings of the heart providing the most familiar example of such an event. But mind itself, we see in this emerging epistemology, is conceived not as the uniformly uninscribed material of the tabula rasa, capable of being shaped by a determining environment to a common likeness in order to achieve some beneficial end, but as basically independent of one's environment, autonomous, self-contained, and changeless in its most significant and valued essentials. Each individual thus is to be fundamentally differentiated from all others: "Points have we all of us within our souls, / Where all stand single" (Prelude, 3:186-87) is how Wordsworth put it when he returned to The Prelude in 1804.
This shift in philosophic point of view, not surprisingly, probably coincides with a political shift, a very gradual turning away from the basic radicalism that I believe was still determinative for Wordsworth certainly at least until 1800. Furthermore, as Wordsworth began to emphasize the mind's autonomy and singleness, including a differentiation of traits and attributes that predictably follow from such individuating tendencies, his basic representation of his sister began to change as well, being brought into closer conformity with the sexually differentiating stereotype by an increasing "gentling" of Dorothy. So, in 1802 brother and sister are no longer seen as they were in "Tintern Abbey," as rendered fundamentally alike by the blank tablet of the mind, passing through common stages, though at different times, on their way to similar and similarly desirable developmental outcomes. Instead, they appear as fundamentally different, their differences already strikingly evident in childhood. The second stanza of the earlier of the two 1802 poems on the butterfly provides the obvious illustration of this revised representation that gives us a Dorothy very different from the potential "enemy of nature" we are told of in the manuscript version of "Nutting":

Oh! pleasant, pleasant were the days,
The time, when, in our childish plays,
My sister Emmeline and I
Together chased the butterfly!
A very hunter did I rush
Upon the prey:--with leaps and springs
I followed on from brake to bush;
But she, God love her! feared to brush
The dust from off its wings.

("To a Butterfly," 10-18)

Gender distinctions here have become stereotypically absolute: the young male, even in childhood, is aggressive to the point of being "A very hunter," while his sister, her "look" described four years earlier in the manuscript version of "Nutting" as "Half cruel in its eagerness," is now represented as gentle to the point of fearfulness. But one must be careful not simply to assume that the later representation of Dorothy in these stereotypical terms is merely the projection of Wordsworth's growing conventionality and conservatism on the imaginatively malleable material of the female image. As Dorothy explains in the 14 March 1802 entry in the Grasmere Journal, the poem on the butterfly is essentially the poetic transcription of a real conversation about their childhood, the differences between brother and sister that William writes about in his poem to be explained as real differences in behavior and attitude according to recollections separately annunciated by each of them: "The thought first came upon him as we were talking about the
pleasure we both always feel at the sight of a Butterfly. I told him that I used to chase them a little but that I was afraid of brushing the dust off their wings, & did not catch them--He told me how they used to kill all the white ones when he went to school because they were frenchmen" (GJ, 78).

But whether or not we exonerate William of the charge of prejudicially stereotyping his sister as femininely gentle on the grounds that the 1802 poem on the butterfly simply records what she herself told him about her childhood, the gentling of Dorothy continues in the books of The Prelude written in 1804 and 1805, with the wild Dorothy wholly displaced by a sister who is unvaryingly gentle. There has always been some question as to whether the woman referred to in book 11 as "Nature's inmate" (Prelude, 11:214) is Dorothy or Mary. Ernest de Selincourt identified her with Dorothy; Helen Darbishire with Mary, Darbishire maintaining that the manuscript statement that "her years ran parallel with mine" points to Mary, and furthermore, "the description of her placid character fits Mary and not Dorothy," the woman in question being termed by Wordsworth a "gentle Visitant" (Prelude, 11:202). I do not want to cast a vote on this disputed and, I suspect, insoluble issue, but it is worth noting that the woman who appears in the closing book of The Prelude and is unquestionably Dorothy--"Child of my Parents! Sister of my Soul!" (Prelude, 13:211)--also has nothing of the wildness
of the Dorothy of "Tintern Abbey" but is instead also given "a placid character" in book 13 of _The Prelude_. And this "placid character" derives not just from "the early tenderness" that the poet tells his sister "I from thee imbibed" (_Prelude_, 13:213-14) but from the temperament of an older Dorothy, gentle enough herself in adulthood to help "soften down" (_Prelude_, 13:226) the poet's too exclusive "esteem" for "that beauty, which, as Milton sings, / Hath terror in it" (_Prelude_, 13:225-26.) And she helped effect that softening of his "soul," making nature again "[f]oremost" in her brother's "affections" (_Prelude_, 13:238), because "thy breath, / Dear Sister, was a kind of gentler spring / That went before my steps" (_Prelude_, 13:244-46). No "enemy of nature" is the sister described here.

But I would not infer too much from this recasting of Dorothy into more stereotypical terms. Even if the woman Wordsworth wrote about in 1805 seems "gentler" than the woman he wrote of in 1798, this need not be understood as insinuating a diminished mental capacity in her, her innately female intellectual inferiority to men. William's inclusion of Dorothy's poetry in the collections of his own work and his acknowledgment of his great intellectual indebtedness to her occur quite late in his own career, as does his advocacy of a history of poetry by female writers from Sappho to the present. Moreover, in his account in book 11 of _The Prelude_ of the woman who is either Dorothy
or Mary, he praises that woman for being free of a disability that he then labored under, "thraldom" (Prelude, 11:198) to the eye, "wholly free" (Prelude, 11:203), he tells us, from such spiritually disabling "Appetites like these" (Prelude, 11:201):

   wise as Women are
   When genial circumstances hath favored them,
   She welcom'd what was given, and craved no more.
   Whatever scene was present to her eyes
   That was the best.

   (Prelude, 11:205-8)

At this point the reader susceptible to adversarial temptations might wish to say that in his new, gendered representations of wisdom, he offers up a specifically female wisdom that he does not really believe to be true wisdom, that is wisdom of the kind men have. But even this 1804 account of the wisdom women seem specially to possess, seeing things as they are and taking nature at face value without an undue concern for its picturesqueness, seems, at bottom, uniformitarian and gender free, for it is a wisdom that, even during his "thraldom" to the eye, he desires to have for himself and, released from that "thraldom," finally does have after undergoing that cure effected by female gentleness. Any account of Wordsworth's attitudes and beliefs is plainly complicated by his intellectual
restlessness and philosophic and political changes, but that restlessness and those changes do not entitle us to think the worst of him, for the record almost never bears that out.
Chapter 4

The “Poetesses” of Great Britain

Perhaps no figure has done more to shape our understanding of the woman writer in earlier periods than that "wonderfully gifted sister" of Shakespeare so movingly imagined by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*.\(^{169}\) Denied even the grammar school education with its "small Latine, and lesse Greeke" that her brother could take for granted, forced by her well-meaning but conventional parents into a "hateful" marriage with a neighboring wool stapler, from which she finally escaped by running away to London, where, after being mocked and derided for her efforts to become an actor like her brother, she eventually found herself pregnant and desperate and finally committed suicide, the fictitious Judith Shakespeare probably still epitomizes the plight of the gifted female of earlier times more effectively for us than do many of the newly recovered histories of women who actually lived. The victim of overwhelming social forces, a patriarchal masculine opposition to which the gifted female must inevitably and necessarily subjugate herself or perish in resistance, Shakespeare's sister could hardly be expected to have read
the books her brother read, let alone to have written those he wrote.

That "wonderfully gifted sister" of William Shakespeare, Judith Shakespeare is wholly imaginary, an invention by Virginia Woolf, though an invention certainly consistent with the actual facts of women's lives in an older time. But one truly major English writer, William Wordsworth, did have a real and indisputably "wonderfully gifted sister," and for today's feminist critic it must be tempting, I suspect, to analogize that real life to the imagined life of the unhappy Judith Shakespeare, the very type of the would-be female writer in earlier periods; for Dorothy Wordsworth, too, was unquestionably a victim of the most oppressive of patriarchally constructed social forces, denied the education that her brothers received—three of them attended Cambridge—shunted off almost casually and, it would appear, callously by her father to a parentally neglectful upbringing in her cousin's house, and then, after her father's death, sent by seemingly indifferent relatives to live with her grandparents, with little thought given to what she would do with her life, little certainly by comparison with the planning that obviously went into her brothers' futures. If Woolf could scathingly conclude from her invented but, nonetheless, historically
faithful record of Judith Shakespeare that "it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare, in the age of Shakespeare"\textsuperscript{170}--an ironized condemnation not of the women who fell short of that lofty goal because of some innately female deficiency but of the male-imposed constraints that rendered such female aspirations impermissible and therefore impossible--can we not, in light of the parallels between Judith Shakespeare and Dorothy Wordsworth, socially victimized sisters of brothers who were the most famous of writers, say much the same thing about Dorothy Wordsworth?--that "it would have been impossible for her to have written the poems of Wordsworth in the age of Wordsworth," impossible not because she lacked the talent to do so but because of the obstacles that a patriarchal society put in her way.

But our parallels hold only to a point and then require substantial modification. Dorothy Wordsworth was not shunted off to a "hateful" marriage with a wool-stapler but was instead granted her seemingly consuming wish for a life of sisterhood and friendship with one of those brothers from whom she must have thought she had been forever separated by her mother's death. And unlike Judith Shakespeare, who was discouraged by her parents from
virtually all reading, even from reading the works of her brother, Dorothy Wordsworth, with the encouragement of and, in fact, often together with her brother, did read many of the classics of English literature (including the poems of her brother), as her own journals attest, and read them deeply (though perhaps haphazardly), as one of the most bookish of her contemporaries, Thomas De Quincey, tells us. Above all, Dorothy Wordsworth was not denied the opportunity to write. She was a writer, indeed a published writer, and a writer good enough to belong to the ages, so that almost two hundred years later her writings are frequently anthologized and, for teachers of the British Romantic period, have become virtually canonical.

Still, this counternarrative is not the whole story either, and most of us, William's adversaries and admirers alike, find in the history of Dorothy Wordsworth something analogous at the deepest level to the imagined history of Judith Shakespeare. If Dorothy Wordsworth was not finally "mute" and "inglorious," she was still rendered more "mute" and "inglorious" than should ever have been the case, her career frustrated by her condition and her circumstances. While some of her work was published in her own lifetime, that amounted to only a few poems. Moreover, given her obvious gifts, the achievement for which posterity
recognizes her is in what many still see as a minor genre, the diary and journal, while in the genre that most clearly defines the British Romantic achievement, poetry, her few poems scattered over a lifetime are never viewed, even by Dorothy Wordsworth's most sympathetic critics, as an accomplishment comparable either to that of her brother William or to that of any of Romanticism's canonical male six. Even in her own lifetime, De Quincey regretted that a too narrowly self-educated Dorothy Wordsworth never finally became the writer her gifts entitled her to be, and in our time Homans has thrown down the gauntlet in behalf of Dorothy Wordsworth by raising with uncompromising directness the question of why she never achieved what we would think she should have: because Dorothy's "potential for language and vision appears to be as great as her brother's, as far as such faculties can be measured" (though any claim of equivalent "potential for language and vision" in light of such disparity in achievement between Dorothy Wordsworth and the greatest English poet of the past three centuries is itself surely a debatable proposition), Homans feels we must assume that "at every point Dorothy causes her reader to wonder why she never became a competent or ready poet, at the very least, if not a great poet."
For most modern readers who share Homan's regret at Dorothy Wordsworth's unfulfilled potential as a poet, the general disadvantages of being a woman in the early nineteenth century must figure prominently in explaining why "she never became a competent or ready poet, at the very least, if not a great poet." But when we look more closely for possible reasons for Dorothy's achieving less than she might have, we must bear in mind a reluctance for authorship that was, to a considerable extent, Dorothy's choice, that private, and perhaps even idiosyncratic, motives kept her from attempting what other women of her own time did with considerable success. This seems to have been the conclusion of Thomas De Quincey, whose lavish praise for her person and talents is nonetheless qualified by the judgment that it would have been "better for" Dorothy Wordsworth's "own happiness if she had been a bluestocking," and who reminds his readers that other women writers of similarly "admirable genius," Joanna Baillie and Mary Russell Mitford are those he names, had "cultivated the profession of authorship"--"the noblest profession, and the only one open to both sexes alike"--with "absolutely no sacrifice or loss of feminine dignity." And when Dorothy tells Catherine Clarkson, "I should detest the idea of setting myself up as an Author" (MY, 1:214) her highly
sympathetic biographers, Robert Gittings and Jo Manton, find it necessary to remind us that "[e]ven by early nineteenth-century standards of decorum, this seems a case of wilful, exaggerated self-denial," since "[a]t any level of literature women writers were beginning to come into their own."\(^{176}\)

Thus the question put to us by Homans--why did Dorothy Wordsworth not became a competent or ready or even great poet?--seems to require a complicated answer, one that takes into account both the great disadvantages that women historically have labored under and certainly continued to labor under even in the early years of the nineteenth century and the more narrowly personal particulars of Dorothy Wordsworth’s own uniquely individual life. But for many adversarial critics (including Homans herself) there is an alternative answer, simpler and closer at hand, one that personalizes blame and holds a predictable male someone culpable. In \textit{To the Lighthouse}, Virginia Woolf gives us another seminally defining moment by which to understand the plight of the woman who would engage in the endeavors of art when Charles Tansley brutally derogates the aspirations of the author's own painter-surrogate, Lily Briscoe, with the dismissively encompassing assertion that "women can't paint, can't write,"\(^{177}\) for Woolf doubtlessly
that patriarchal reproach by which women as writers have always been haunted. And for many of the adversarial critics who write on our subject, a prejudice against women very close to Charles Tansley's (despite all we have seen of his respect for his sister's intellect and his encouragement of her efforts as a writer) can be abstracted from William Wordsworth's utterances and, if not from his utterances, then from his poetic practice, and from this encompassing prejudice not even his sister, at least in her capacity as poet, is finally exempt.

Sometimes the charge against Wordsworth derives from the undeniable fact that he is a poet and a male poet or, more narrowly, a male Romantic poet and hence exhibits tendencies common to all male poets or to all male Romantic poets, tendencies that are necessarily inimical to the interests of women and especially discouraging to women who would be writers like himself. Moreover, because he is a male poet of such high standing generally and so seminal a figure in the making of British Romanticism, Wordsworth is often held up for particular censure by adversarial critics as the poet probably most responsible for giving currency to the perniciously sexist tendencies of Romanticism. Thus, in Anne Mellor's influential collection *Romanticism and Feminism*, the first three essays on the male canonical
poets are grouped together by a title derived from what are perceived as the baneful consequences of their writings, "Silencing the Female." Predictably, in the essays themselves, Wordsworth is the Romantic poet most frequently singled out for discussion and most frequently rebuked as a silencer of females. So Alan Richardson (following Jacobus) contends in one of the most adversarial of all the accounts of the Romantics and women that, when the Romantic writers—with their aggrandizing imaginations—"privileged femininity," they "by the same token debased it," valuing women for the same "natural intuitive feeling" for which they valued "children and idiots"; and Marlon Ross describes Romanticism as a wholly "masculine phenomenon" written "from a position and perspective that would be impossible for a woman to take." (Only Kurt Heinzelman, author of the most meticulously scholarly of the three essays, while still basically adversarial in outlook, does not finally see the female writer as truly silenced and interestingly treats the Grasmere Journal of Dorothy Wordsworth as "a piece of georgic writing.")

The ongoing attack on a canonically masculine Romanticism as a callous and at times brutal subjugation and silencing of the female, and especially of the female who would write, takes much of its theoretical rationale
from the arguments of Margaret Homans, made first in *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* and again in *Bearing the Word*, where earlier arguments are expanded and refined and intellectually buttressed by the psychological theories of Jacques Lacan and Nancy Chodorow. For Homans, too, it is Wordsworth, time and time again, who is chosen to exemplify the masculine poet, initially as constructor of a Romantic "powerful self" that "is inextricable from the use of efficacious language,"\(^{181}\) and, in her later and still more essentialist writings, Wordsworth is presented as the quintessential male poet, whose symbolizing activities, the virtually inevitable consequence of the male child's developmental distancing from his mother, invariably result in the devaluing of a contrastingly feminine poetic of literalization, a daughter's language. The inevitable consequence of the long-standing dominance of these male practices is that those who take the writing of poetry seriously, by and large males themselves, are psychologically and socially conditioned to regard poetry in its serious evocations as man's work and hence only to be judged consequential when it is expressive of the symbolic, that is, written in ways that are abstract or figurative, in ways, not coincidentally, that Wordsworth typifies. So Homans concludes that for Dorothy Wordsworth,
her brother's presence, by what he represents to her as a poet, must necessarily be profoundly inhibiting, that the masculine tradition, "the phallogocentric community in writing," must effectively "occlude her view of the possibilities for writing" (36).

In Romanticism and the Contours of Masculine Desire, a second major study that would provide us with a general theoretical explanation for the relationship between the canonical male Romantics and women writers of the time, Marlon Ross, while careful to assure us that he is building on Homans, nonetheless, in keeping with our current historicizing (and antiessentializing) disposition, assures us that he will go beyond her "to situate romanticism in history." Unsurprisingly, the history of "romantic ideology" that Ross proposes is one grounded in male hostility toward and prejudice against women, in "the fear of emasculation implied by the emergence of influential literary women" at the end of the eighteenth century, and in a reaction to that fear that leads the threatened male poet to seek "victory over popular women poets" (12). In a chapter entitled "Romantic Quest and Conquest" and devoted to two poets acknowledged by even Ross to be unlikely soul mates, Wordsworth and Byron, Ross identifies as the major strategy employed by these poets to secure that victory the
"exploit[ing]" of "masculine metaphors of power" (23). Thus, even as the canonical Romantic poets produced a masculine ideology in which the poet and the poetic imagination were conceived of in terms of "quest and conquest," as assertively appropriating and aggrandizing, because of the triumph of these male norms that came to define what poetry should be, the woman writer was effectively hobbled by their ascendancy, forced to "find ways to be feminine while engaging in an activity that is marked by ideology as masculine" (11).

Views like those so successfully propagated by Homans and Ross have become, more and more, the conventional wisdom about Romantic poetry, and especially about the poetry of Wordsworth, with his detractors (an ever expanding proportion of those who write on Wordsworth) almost always minimizing or ignoring or dismissing those numerous instances in his poetry (especially in the great poetry written before 1802) where gentleness or quietude or passivity is praised or preached or celebrated. This is certainly the case with "Nutting" (as I have tried to show in an earlier chapter), the poem that for Wordsworth's adversarial critics most typifies Wordsworth as a male poet, the poem in which he is most an aggressor against and
an appropriator of the feminized to the extent of his being its metaphoric rapist. And these same critics invariably minimize or ignore or dismiss as well those instances in which Wordsworth himself, in contradiction to what might be expected of him as a male poet, literalizes the concrete world about him, asserts our connections with the things of the earth, and thereby writes as the feminized and indeed maternally restorative poet many readers in his own lifetime believed him to be, the poet whose—"soothing voice,"

in the words of the most famous of the elegies written at the time of his death, Arnold's "Memorial Verses"—"laid us as we lay at birth / On the cool flowery lap of earth."\textsuperscript{183}

But our principal concern in this chapter will not be with the charge that Wordsworth was, in some abstrusely theoretical way, a poet of power—almost by definition a masculine power subjugating the feminine (the addressing of that concern will have to wait until the next chapter)—but with a corollary and sometimes more personally directed accusation repeatedly voiced by feminist critics: that is, out of masculine fear ("fear of emasculation" is the way Ross puts it) or masculine hostility (differing motives that are often regarded as two sides of the same coin), Wordsworth was, in fact, intentionally dismissive or
disparaging of female writers as a class, relegating them to a separate and lesser tradition than the real tradition represented by male writers like himself. Thus, Page tells us that Wordsworth implicitly "denigrates popular women writers," while Levin contends that he regards them with, at best, "amused tolerance." And if this were truly the case, if he were truly disapproving of the efforts of women to be poets, then we could certainly understand and sympathize with the allegation directed against William as brother that, as Levin puts it, he would probably have "intimidated Dorothy and inhibited her efforts at poetry" (155).

Yet we do know, as I have noted earlier, that, in important respects, William was supportive of Dorothy's efforts at poetry. He did publish five of her poems in collections of his own poetry, though Meena Alexander--putting her own adversarial spin on this act of apparent supportiveness by William of his sister as writer--believes it to be, in reality, an effacing of Dorothy's individuality, by making sure that her poems would be published "within the corpus of her brother's work." We do, however, learn from a letter by Lady Beaumont to Dorothy that even when Dorothy was not present William would recite her poems aloud with apparent pride, though in
this particular case, we learn from Dorothy’s reply to Lady Beaumont, the recitation prompted her, apparently modest to a fault, to declare her inaptitude for "molding words into regular metre" (MY, 2:25). That, however, was clearly not the opinion of her brother. Indeed, as Dorothy well knew, Lady Beaumont had only became aware of these apparent first attempts at poetry because “William in his fondness read them to you” (MY, 2:24). In fact, the story of Dorothy Wordsworth’s poetic career in its very earliest stage is one in which William seems unstintingly laudatory and supportive, while Dorothy is doubtful and resistant at every turn: “After showing him one of her first poems, he was very much pleased,” Dorothy tells Lady Beaumont, but then adds the characteristically self-deprecating qualification, “but this I attributed to his partiality (MY, 2:24).” Even Dorothy’s account of what should have been a high point in her career as a writer, her first publication as a poet (albeit in a collection of her brother’s own writings), displays this same pattern of brotherly supportiveness and sisterly diffidence: “As to those two little things which I did write, I was very unwilling to place them beside my Brother’s poems, but he insisted upon it, and I was obliged to submit” (MY, 2:26). Perhaps no episode more movingly conveys William's deep
affection for his sister and his apparent high regard for her poetry (at least if a word-by-word familiarity with it can be taken as an indication of regard) than the account by Herbert Hill (Southey's son-in-law) of his visits to Rydal Mount during the years of Dorothy's "sad Illness," when she would recite aloud her fine poem "The Floating Island": "I have heard her repeat it often. There was one Stanza which she habitually forgot, & W. used to prompt her. The exquisite tenderness of his tones & his whole manner struck me very forcibly."^{187}

Yet in one important respect, by virtue of his facility, talent, or genius (I leave the reader to choose for himself or herself which term is most applicable, though my own preference, as one might expect, is for the last), we must concede that William Wordsworth was very possibly an intimidating and therefore inhibiting presence for any one closely associated with him who aspired to be a poet. As confirmation of that we need only to set the example of Coleridge before us. Writing to Godwin about that golden time with himself, William, and Dorothy so often together, Coleridge sought to capture the complexly united and yet divided nature of that relationship in a now famous formulation: "[t]ho' we were three persons, it was but one God."^{188} It is a statement illuminating both in
what it tells us about their companionate relationship, an assertion of an assumed equality among the three that certainly runs counter to our usual assumptions about the kinds of relationships that might exist between men and women in that time, and for what it tells us about Coleridge's acutely unhappy awareness of their ultimate inequality in the one area that must have mattered most to him, his sense that William possessed a poetic genius so superior to Coleridge's own and so great in any ultimate scale that it rendered Wordsworth virtually worthy of worship. To us this admission of ultimate inequality seems especially poignant because it is offered by one who, unlike Dorothy, had already written what in our canonical rankings (flawed as they may be) is commonly considered great poetry. About Wordsworth, Coleridge, at that time, almost always spoke worshipfully and, as early as 1801 (long before Wordsworth had achieved any measure of true fame), Coleridge did not "hesitate in saying, that since Milton no man has manifested himself equal to him" (2:582). It was just this extraordinarily high valuation of Wordsworth that led Poole to complain to Coleridge of "prostration in regard to Wordsworth," and Lamb and the Wedgwoods to express similar sentiments. For Coleridge, Wordsworth was plainly an inhibiting presence, and it is
not unreasonable to ascribe the brevity of Coleridge's poetic career as owing, in some measure, to his proximity to the intimidating example of Wordsworth—with the inevitably unfavorable self-judgment by Coleridge of his own capabilities that such proximity must have evoked.

Thus Coleridge tells Godwin in 1801 that Wordsworth had "descended on him, like the Nosce Teipsum from heaven; by shewing him what true Poesy was, he made him know that he himself was no poet" (2:390). But if proximity to William was inhibiting enough to the author of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" to persuade himself that he was no poet, how much more inhibiting must her far greater proximity to William have been to Dorothy, his sister and most intimate companion, if in 1798 she nursed unrealized and perhaps unspoken ambitions to become a poet, like the men.

Yet we would hardly seem obliged to hold Wordsworth culpable for the problems of others, even others to whom he was deeply attached, if these problems were simply the natural and unintended consequences of his very great talent. But if, as Judith Page suggests, Wordsworth was disdainful of women as writers and, more narrowly, as poets, then we can agree that such disdain would almost surely have inhibited Dorothy's development as a poet on grounds for which he certainly should be held culpable.
Such an allegation, though, will seem surprising to anyone familiar not just with Wordsworth's treatment of Dorothy as a poet but, more generally, with his own words on women poets and his own friendship with women poets. But just as in so much current criticism, Page's allegation derives, predictably, not from Wordsworth's actual criticisms of women poets but from that absent signifier that points to the hidden signified and thereby sanctions our adversarial findings. In this case the signifier implicitly present by its absence is to be found in the most important piece of critical writing of all, the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in the fact that, as Page rightly points out, no woman poet is ever mentioned there, let alone praised, though a substantial number of prominent women poets were writing at or very close to the time of its composition in 1800 and 1802.¹⁹⁰

Of course, as an exercise in canon formation, the Preface and its companion appendix are of limited utility, the only poets plainly proposed for admiration and imitation being Shakespeare, Milton, "the earliest poets of all nations" (*PrW*, 1:160) (though which of these Wordsworth might have meant other than probably Homer we cannot say with any assurance), and the anonymous author of the "justly-admired stanzas of the 'Babes in the Woods'" (*PrW*,
1:155), from which Wordsworth quotes. But apart from these, all of Wordsworth's contemporaries or very recent predecessors who are mentioned in the Preface and appendix are cited only to be either criticized or condemned: Gray, whose "Sonnet on the Death of Richard West" is said by Wordsworth to contain only five lines of any value; Cowper, whose verses supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk are held up as a no less bad example except for the last stanza; and Dr. Johnson, whose two specimens of poetry—one called a misguided parody and the other a misbegotten exercise in biblical translation—are simply excoriated. That Wordsworth should not include a writer like Charlotte Smith in a list that, apart from the reference to the "Babes in the Woods," is simply limited to the most hallowed of canonical poets should hardly be grounds for accusing him of sexual bias any more than his failure, conversely, to include her in that alternative list of rebuked poets should be taken as evidence of a preference for the poetry of women when he came to judge the poetry of his own age.

The other argument offered by Page for judging Wordsworth to be hostile in the Preface to writing by women comes from his outburst against the dangers of current tendencies in literary taste, his stated concern that
"[t]he invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" (PrW, 1:129). In a particularly blatant example of the relatively arbitrary gendering of genres and concepts as a means of charging sexual bias against the writer of whom the adversarial critic would have us disapprove, Page singles out Wordsworth's complaint against "frantic novels" from this list (saying nothing about the other two, particularly "sickly and stupid German tragedies," a fad in 1800 invariably identified with the male dramatist August von Kotzebue) as evidence that, since the novel is a genre associated with women, Wordsworth's stated dislike of it must express some otherwise unspoken misogynistic predilection. But the problem in treating Wordsworth's strictures against the novel is that Wordsworth is not alone in holding such a view of the novel at this historical moment. As Page herself is forced to admit, his opinion is not so very different from that of Mary Wollstonecraft, who is, if anything, an even severer critic than Wordsworth of novel reading on the part of those whose rights she seeks to vindicate, harshly castigating those "women who are amused by the reveries of the stupid
novelists, who, knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales and describe meretricious scenes, all retained in a sentimental jargon, which equally tend to corrupt the taste and draw the heart aside from its daily duties." And the reason she advises her "sex not to read such flimsy works" is not from some prejudiced aversion that would lead her to wish to have her readers avoid familiarity with the writings of women; but that she wants "to induce them to read something superior" (315), and in the category of writings superior to novels, poetry is plainly regarded highly by Wollstonecraft. In what would surely be treated as a sexist complaint coming from a male writer, Wollstonecraft scathingly illustrates the failure of true taste in the undereducated woman of good society by telling of the "languid yawn" with which she has "seen an admirable poem thrown down, that a man of true taste returns to again and again with rapture" (291). But the preference of Wordsworth and Wollstonecraft for poetry as opposed to fiction has nothing to do with the establishing or maintaining of gender distinctions and hierarchies, with asserting or establishing an innate male superiority—-even that of "the man of true taste," the poetry reader—-to the woman "amused by the reveries of the stupid novelists." Instead, that preference is part of that larger
Enlightenment—and democratic—project in which both were engaged: furthering equality through education, leveling up. Both would raise up the excluded, female and male alike, by granting them access and inducement to a type of reading that, since time out of mind, had been deemed suitable to the educated male alone, but which, more important, both Wordsworth and Wollstonecraft regarded as having been essential to their own intellectual development. For both Wordsworth and Wollstonecraft in their political imaginings, the supplanting of the novel by poetry would help bring about that general cultivation of taste by which the good society might be produced and, indeed, the triumph of poetry could be taken as evidence of the good society’s attainment.

To understand Wordsworth's attitude toward women writers, the best place to go, though, is probably not the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, where no women writers are ever mentioned, but a letter to Dionysius Lardner in 1829 in which Wordsworth takes up and recommends the compilation and publication of an anthology of women authors on the very grounds (in concept if not quite in vocabulary) by which a contemporary feminist critic might be expected to justify such an enterprise today, the underrepresentation of women in the anthologies of English literature currently
available. Lardner had apparently sounded Wordsworth out about contributing (as Scott and Southey had already done) to Lardner's *The Cabinet Cyclopaedia of Eminent Literary and Scientific Men*, and Wordsworth's answer has such obvious bearing on the matter in question, his attitude toward women writers, that it deserves quotation in full:

I should have written to you immediately on my return from the Continent, but I was obliged to hurry through London, and since that time I have been without your address—

The subject which I had thought of is much more limited than you suppose—being nothing more than an Account of the Deceased Poetesses of Great Britain—with an Estimate of their Works—but upon mature Reflection I cannot persuade myself that it is sufficiently interesting for a separate subject, were I able to do it justice. The Dramatic and other imaginative female Writers might be added—the interest would therefore be increased, but unity of subject would be sacrificed. It remains therefore for me to regret that I should have held out the least hope that I might undertake anything of the Kind—
which I have no excuse but what you I hope will be satisfied with, that I was taken by surprize.  

I am still of the opinion that something is wanted upon the subject—neither Dr Johnson, nor Dr Anderson, nor Chalmers, nor the Editor I believe of any other Corpus of English Poetry takes the least notice of female Writers—this, to say nothing harsher, is very un gallant. The best way of giving a comprehensive interest to the subject would be to begin with Sappho and proceed downwards through Italy antient and Modern, Spain, Germany France and England—but, for myself, I could not venture to undertake the employment, two requisites being wanting—Books (I mean access to Libraries) and industry to use them.  

Wishing you success in your [ver]y promising 

underta[king]. (LY, 2:4-5)  

There is obviously a mixture of motives at work here, though none, I should add, could be even remotely regarded as hostility to women writers. It is a letter by a very busy poet approaching sixty and now famous enough to be called on regularly for all kinds of undertakings and responding to such requests with all kinds of suggestions; and it is a letter trying gracefully to turn down a
proposal that he had once indicated he might actually undertake. Wordsworth never did compile an account of "The Deceased Poetesses of Great Britain," presumably one that would quote liberally from their work, nor did he ever undertake that even more ambitious comparative venture he talks about, an account of the female writers of Europe beginning with Sappho; he never did become the nineteenth-century Gilbert and Gubar, the critic who would publicly give neglected female writers their due. But in this case we are concerned primarily with attitude, with state of mind and state of heart. In these respects it is difficult to conclude anything other than that Wordsworth deserves credit and indeed praise for what the letter to Lardner tells us about him. The "Deceased Poetesses of Great Britain" was a "subject" apparently originally "thought of" by Wordsworth and proposed because he wanted to remedy what he apparently perceived to be an unjustified and biased neglect of women--simply because they were women; and he proposed that subject, to put it in presentist terminology, because he wanted to expand the canon, remedy its apparently biased exclusion of women by calling attention to their poetic abilities through the compiling of an account or anthology of women's writing. One probable reason that Wordsworth never carried out the project is
that the need for such a volume was soon met by Alexander Dyce. Writing to Dyce only nine months after the letter to Lardner, Wordsworth commends Dyce for fulfilling that need and expresses his own ongoing interest in seeing the project continued: “By accident, I learned lately that you had made a Book of Extracts, which I had long wished for opportunity and industry to execute myself. I am happy it has fallen into so much better hands. I allude to your Selections from the Poetry of English Ladies. I had but a glance at your work; but I will take the opportunity of saying should a second Edition be called for, I should be pleased with the opportunity of being consulted by you about it.” (LY, 2:157). Three years later Wordsworth voluntarily revived his offer to Dyce in case there would be “a future edition,” providing him with two lists: one of “elder Poetesses, such as the Duchess of Newcastle, Mrs. Behn, Orinda” (Kathleen Philips), which he would like to assist Dyce with “[i]f I could get at the original works”; and the other of the works of more recent writers such as “Helen Maria Williams’s Works, Mrs. Smith’s Sonnets, and Lady Winchelsea’s Poems,” works, that he explains, “I possess for assisting such a production” (LY, 3:664). Thus it is clear that Wordsworth knew the poetry of women, liked it, and wished to see it more widely disseminated.
To be sure, he never did carry out that project he spoke of with so much enthusiasm, and perhaps, in addition to having an insufficient library and books, he may have lacked industry as well. Still, I know of no similar suggestion coming from any other major nineteenth-century male poet, and Wordsworth's proposal is surely a far cry from those condemnations of women writers that are usually and justifiably pointed out by contemporary critics in illustration of the prejudices of older male writers--Hawthorne's railings against that "d--d mob of scribbling women" he had to compete against in the literary marketplace being perhaps the prime example. Yet Wordsworth is given little credit or praise by the few adversarially inclined feminist critics willing to take up the letter to Lardner--most do not--and those few apparently view as their primary task the need to minimize the significance of the sentiments of that letter or better yet to explain them away altogether.

Homans, Mellor, Ross, Jacobus, and Alexander never mention it, while Levin unenthusiastically summarizes it in a brief paragraph, referring to it, strangely enough, only as part of a section designed to show how "William's attitude towards women poets, combined with his genius, must have intimidated Dorothy and inhibited her efforts to
write poetry." Of those who write on Wordsworth and women, Page alone takes up the letter to Lardner in anything approaching even modest detail, and even then her discussion of it is conditioned by her anxiousness that we not think that what it obviously implies about Wordsworth's attitudes toward women writers be deemed sufficiently supportive of women writers to mitigate the alleged sexist prejudice that Page claims Wordsworth demonstrates by his failure to include women in the list of certifiably approved writers in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Moreover, in a mild swipe at Wordsworth's possible motivation for adopting a position toward women poets that Page later concedes is in some sense "generous," she notes that "in 1829 Wordsworth sees his mission as a kind of gallantry." That, however, is not what Wordsworth appears to say in his letter to Lardner: there he explains that the omission of women poets from anthologies by their editors can be criticized on the grounds of its being "ungallant," "to say nothing harsher," that harsher judgment being what he presumably would have said about the exclusion of women poets from the anthologies if courtesy did not prevent it, and what he probably believed to be the real reason for their omission: that the men who edited the anthologies were blinded by prejudice to the real merits of women
writers. But Page exercises commendable restraint in saying little more about Wordsworth's reference to "gallantry" and instead goes on to make what is at least the most minimal of concessions by acknowledging that this 1829 letter shows that "he is nonetheless quite familiar with female poets and he has a sense of female tradition that begins with Sappho."\(^{196}\).

I have called Page's restraint here "commendable" because the word "gallantry" has proved to be something of a red flag in setting off the indignation of the adversarially inclined critic and thus in vitiating arguments that an ordinary progressively minded reader, in his or her literalist naïveté, might otherwise have taken as admirable. It is a point illuminating enough to be worth a digression. In seeking to move the new historicism ahead by wedding gender to class, David Simpson characterizes as "exemplary" a 1981 essay by Gayatri Spivak, which, he tells us, "we are fortunate to be able to build upon" in what he astonishingly calls "the limited field of Wordsworth criticism."\(^{197}\) (I say “astonishingly” because characterizing “Wordsworth criticism” as “limited” would certainly sound astonishing to any Wordsworth specialist who would try to keep up with it and still perform other academic duties.) In that essay deemed by
Simpson as exemplary, Spivak provides us with an
adversarially grounded explication of Wordsworth's account
of his hero and mentor in revolutionary France, Michel
Beaupuy, the point of implosion for her being a passage in
which Wordsworth speaks of Beaupuy's seeming air of
"gallantry" in the manner in which he deals with the "mean
and the obscure" (Prelude, 9:313). It was Beaupuy from
whom Wordsworth had learned what he understood and
announced to be the goal of the French Revolution, the
raising up of the wretched of the earth, the truly
marginalized, in this case epitomized for them by one who
is both desperately poor and female. Chancing "One day to
meet a hunger-bitten Girl, / Who crept along, fitting her
lanquid self / Unto a Heifer's motion" (Prelude, 9:512-14),
Beaupuy, "[i]n agitation" (Prelude, 9:518) is provoked to
an outburst that makes clear to his companion, Wordsworth,
the meaning of those events in France that the young poet--
by the accident of residence there in 1791 and 1792--had
witnessed. "'Tis against that / Which we are fighting'"
(Prelude, 9:518-19), Beaupuy asserts in idealistic anger;
and, to let us know that the young Wordsworth shared these
same social and economic goals and uncynically saw them as
the aim of the Revolution, the poet, looking back on that
day, says of himself in lines that immediately follow:
I with him believed
Devoutly that a spirit was abroad
Which could not be withstood, that poverty
At least like this, would in a little time
Be found no more

(Prelude, 9:519-24).

But two hundred lines earlier Wordsworth had sought to
delineate the natural courtesy of this nobleman by birth to
all men--"Man he lov'd / As Man" (Prelude, 9:312-13), the
poet tells us in a phrase that surely provides a generic
rather than a gendered notion of man as Beaupuy's later
indignation on behalf of the girl tethered to the heifer
would indicate. For our purposes, it is a passage that is
worth setting down not as it is written but exactly as
Spivak herself reproduces it in a piece of adversarially
motivated editing:

"He thro' the events
Of this great change wandr'd in perfect faith,
As through a Book, an old Romance or Tale
Of Fairy, or some dream of actions. . .
. . . Man he lov'd
As Man; and to the mean and the obscure . . .
Transferr'd a courtesy which had no air
Of condescension, but did rather seem
A passion and a gallantry, like that
Which he, a Soldier, in his idler day
Had pay'd to Woman [!]

(IX, 303-06, 311-12, 313-18: italics mine)" (Spivak 340)

Predictably omitted from Spivak's rendering of the passage is any reference to "the poor / Among mankind," to whom, Wordsworth tells us, Beaupuy "was in service bound / As by some tie invisible, oaths professed / To a religious Order" (Prelude, 9:309-13), and any reference to "all the homely in their homely works" to whom, in addition "to the mean and the obscure," he also "Transferred a courtesy which had no air / Of condescension" (Prelude, 9:315-317). Added to the lines she selectively quotes are an italicization of "in his idler day" and a bracketed exclamation point, both of them devices of ironizing emphasis added presumably to remind us as adversarial readers of our superiority to the ideologically deluded poet and his equally deluded and self-servingly disingenuous aristocratic friend. And just
in case we need further instruction in how to read this passage with the necessary undermining irony, Spivak provides a prefatory sentence making all too explicit how we are to understand Beaupuy's behavior to "the mean and the obscure": "One is reminded that Beaupuy, the only good angel on the Revolutionary side, is himself a deviation, 'of other mold,' and that his own retranslation of the events into art and sexual courtesy (in an unwitting display of class and sex prejudice) serves as it were, to excuse his Revolutionary sentiments." Earlier Spivak had belittled even Beaupuy's claims (apparently by her asking us to view them as mere impotent figuration) that it is against the conditions exemplified by "the hunger-bitten Girl" that the Revolution is fighting: "Beaupuy in the written text is able to produce a summary of his argument only by metaphorizing the object of the French Revolution as 'a hunger-bitten girl' . . . "'Tis against that / Which we are fighting' (IX, 510, 517-18)" (340). I myself though am simply mystified as to why we should dismiss this ostensive definition of revolutionary goals as "metaphorizing" and hence self-negating just because a hungry girl is taken as the living illustration of what needs to be remedied.
Just how avidly such disparaging assessments of motive are seized upon by the practitioners of adversarial criticism is strikingly illustrated in a subsequent study of the *Prelude* by Mary Jacobus. Citing the "provocative analysis" by Spivak as authority and accepting as proven Spivak's claim that Beaupuy's courtesy "constitutes 'an unwitting display of class and sex prejudice,'" Jacobus goes on from there to make her own charges of sexism against Wordsworth and Beaupuy: "This embodiment of the people as an unhappy female thrall in need of rescue suggests that their role (like that of the beauty surrounded by satyrs) is to mediate relations between men. Both politics (the people) and romance (woman) go under, leaving the philosophic dialogue addressed by one man to another." Of course, given this sardonic and condemnatory valuation of any dialogue between men, we would obviously find it extremely difficult to adjudicate the moral worth and ramifications of any such dialogue, whether it be between Beaupuy and Wordsworth, Marx and Engels, Hitler and Himmler, or Jesus and any of his disciples, since all of these are to be understood as essentially alike, words "addressed by one man to another," the gendered sameness of the participants overriding all consideration of possible differences in content.
Yet despite the quotations Spivak italicizes, her bracketed exclamation point, the heavy-handed irony that runs throughout her analysis, and the support and tribute of like-minded colleagues—even colleagues in Wordsworth studies of such eminence, such as Simpson and Jacobus—I for one find in the "gallantry" with which Wordsworth credits Beaupuy no evidence of what seems all too apparent to these other critics, "class and sex prejudices" (whether witting or "unwitting") on the part of the young Wordsworth (and the older poet as well who actually writes the words of apparent praise of his friend) and Beaupuy. Hence it follows that I also find no grounds for condemnation of either, especially Beaupuy, who deserves far better from those of us who regard ourselves as of the left and would ourselves wish to be advocates for the marginalized, the poor, and the wretched—male and female alike. When Wordsworth tells us that "to the mean and the obscure / And all the homely in their homely works" Beaupuy had

Transferr'd a courtesy which had no air
Of condescension, but did rather seem
A passion and a gallantry, like that
Which he, a Soldier, in his idler day
Had pay'd to Woman
the poet does not mean that either he or Beaupuy thought that days spent with women were inherently idle and thus of no worth, while only days spent in the company of men had meaning and value, as the italicizing of "in his idler day" by Spivak and the bracketed exclamation point that concludes her quotation and her accusation of "sex prejudice" both imply. By that distinction between "his idler day" and subsequent days without idleness in which he showed "courtesy"—"gallantry" if one prefers—to all, whatever their station, but especially to the poor, I believe that Wordsworth was, in fact, doing no more than drawing attention to the difference between the prerevolutionary and revolutionary behavior of Beaupuy and others like him in revolutionary France. Prior to the revolution there had been frivolity, luxury, dalliance, words of "gallantry" spoken to women to whom men were then attentive. But these words had been spoken, as the context makes clear, by Beaupuy only to women of his own class in utter disregard of the profoundly suffering poor. It was the fact that such narrowness of interest not only did not ameliorate the hardships of the poor (for Beaupuy there was no trickling down) but actually caused them to worsen that
led those who after 1789 supported the Revolution to look back upon prerevolutionary leisured life as "idleness" and therefore as contemptible. But after the French Revolution began, and certainly by 1792, one no longer lived as one had done in an "idler day"; life took on a seriousness of purpose for those who sought to change the world, particularly that soldier who, renouncing his aristocratic ways, believed he and France were fighting for a "hunger-bitten girl."

It would be a grave mistake on our part to underestimate the momentous significance of that transfer of uncondescending gallantry by Beaupuy from females of his own class alone to "mankind" in general, and especially "to the mean and the obscure." In his marvelous study of the radicalism of the American Revolution, Gordon Wood singles out as perhaps the most important change produced by the emergence of the revolutionary spirit in the late eighteenth century the changed perception of ordinary people toward themselves. In America, it was a change induced, in considerable measure, by the alteration in attitude toward ordinary people of a radicalized gentry who, with the coming of the Revolution, began to hold views of and behave toward "the mean and the obscure" very much as Wordsworth later describes Beaupuy believing and doing.
Prior to that Revolution, Wood informs us, gentlemen were
looked upon as different in kind from “[o]rdinary people”
who— in the words of John Adams in a 1760 letter to
Jonathan Sewell—had been "made only," "'to be born and eat
and sleep and die, and be forgotten’”201 and who were
therefore usually thought of by the aristocracy as "having
only appetites and as being little more than
'cattle.'"(27). Furthermore, it was widely assumed that
"'it is only hunger which can spur and goad them on to
labour.'"202 But such attitudes and beliefs, however
prevalent in America before its Revolution, were still more
widespread and more firmly held in England and France,
certainly prior to the passage of The Declaration of the
Rights of Man, when "patriots" like Beaupuy sought to do
away by legislative fiat with these hitherto governing
hereditary distinctions among men. For Beaupuy to transfer
a courtesy to the common people that had not long before
been bestowed on fellow aristocrats alone and to express a
wish to alleviate that hunger that was regarded as the only
incentive of the poor to labor represents a seismic shift
in ways of looking at the world by an old order in
transformation, a shift that Wordsworth would therefore
understandably wish to record. To make such points might
seem to belabor the obvious, but the obvious no longer
seems so obvious in a critical climate in which the adversarial critic searches out (and, if need be, fabricates) every possible ambiguity that might provide an opening for our presentist disapproval and thereby enable us to open the floodgates of invective by which our hermeneutics of disparagement is practiced, denying the credit due men like Wordsworth and, more appallingly, a man like Michel Beaupuy, who not only fought and died for the French Revolution but knowingly fought and died for--and we have no reason to think otherwise--"a hunger-bitten Girl, / Who crept along, fitting her languid self / Unto a Heifer's motion." From the critic who positions himself or herself on the left, I would think that Beaupuy deserves nothing but praise, but if in this age of adversarialness we find ourselves unwilling or unable to utter that praise, he surely deserves at least the benefit of the doubt.

In seeing how Wordsworth's casual use of a term like "gallantry" and the ideas associated with it can set off critics like Spivak and Jacobus and allow them to derail the patently transparent endorsement by Wordsworth of straightforwardly radical principles--the relief of poverty being the ultimate aim of revolutionary politics--we can see why (returning to the letter to Lardner) Page's restraint in not making more of Wordsworth's charging those
who omit women from their anthologies of poetry with ungallantry might be deemed, by comparison, "commendable."

But in the end, even Page, a self-professed moderate in the gender wars against Wordsworth, while conceding that Wordsworth was familiar with a tradition of female poets that "begins with Sappho" and even using the term "generous" in her assessment of the attitudes toward female poets expressed in that letter, seems herself something less than generous in her evaluation of--indeed in her impugning of--Wordsworth's motives as they emerge from that document. In contrast to the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* where, according to Page, Wordsworth held that "only male writers may be heirs to the tradition," a verdict of implied sexist bias based on the poets he omitted, Wordsworth might speak generously about female poets in the circumscribed privacy of the letter to Lardner of 1829, Page suggests, because by that time and on that occasion Wordsworth could afford to: "Perhaps Wordsworth was more generous and less defensive in his correspondence because there he was not considering his own reputation and readership--or perhaps he was feeling secure enough in 1829 to be generous."²⁰³ For Wordsworth, fear of competition from popular women poets of the day is quite likely a primary reason, or so Page suggests, for his exclusion of
them from that "male tradition" he sets forth in the Preface, a tradition that, as I have noted, consists only of Shakespeare, Milton, "the earliest poets of all nations," and the anonymous author of "The Babes in the Woods." But if that is the case, if fear of rivals led him to omit women from the tradition, why should he not have savaged the female poets as he savaged his potential male rivals of more recent vintage, Gray and Johnson and Cowper?

With Wordsworth, though, we seem to have a case that comes very close to confirming Harold Bloom's theory of influence, at least insofar as that theory proposes that the strong poet looks for true mentors and rivals only in other strong poets. After all, Wordsworth is a poet who, even early in his career, can think of his own most ambitious work as being already in competition with Paradise Lost, who can face without terror Milton's "Jehovah—-with his thunder, and the choir / Of shouting Angels," telling us "I pass them unalarmed" (Prospectus to The Excursion, 33-35). Nor should such exalted self-regard seem surprising for a poet who, at the peak of his relationship with Coleridge, was in almost daily contact with a collaborator of the most unquestioned powers of intellect, a collaborator who would say to others of Wordsworth that "since Milton no man has manifested himself
equal to him." Thus at a much later date, Wordsworth, reflecting on his beginnings as a poet, would matter-of-factly tell Crabb Robinson, "When I began to give myself up to the profession of a poet for life, I was impressed with a conviction that there were four English poets whom I must have continually before me as examples--Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton." And Crabb Robinson himself, in what is among the most revealing of statements on the strong poet's sense of himself, discussing Goethe, "beyond all competition the supreme genius of his age and country," notes how the German writer acknowledged "his obligations only to Shakespeare, Spinoza, and Linnaeus," just "as Wordsworth, when he resolved to be a poet, feared competition only with Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton." To have narrowed one's sense of one's real competitors to such a rarefied few, in apparent indifference to one's leading contemporaries, male or female, may seem to the adversarial critic further confirmation of Wordsworth's vast and arrogant egotism, but looking over those lofty names listed by Robinson, I cannot help recalling that threadbare sports cliché, "It ain't bragging, if you do it."

That Wordsworth may have believed his true competition came from the canonical greats does not mean however that
he did not respect, admire, praise, and even at times exhibit the influence of many recent poets and contemporaries. He greatly admired James Beattie, who is described by Moorman as "the strongest contemporary influence on the young Wordsworth." His sister, Dorothy, tells of his admiration for Robert Burns as early as 1787, and almost thirty years later in "To a Friend of Robert Burns," Wordsworth chose to defend the author of "Tam o'Shanter" against his moralistic critics by asking, "Who, but some impentrable dunce or narrow-minded puritan in works of art, ever read without delight the picture which he has drawn of the convivial exaltation of the rustic adventurer, Tam o’ Shanter?" (PrW, 3:124). He speaks highly of Mark Akenside and in a later essay calls James Thomson's The Seasons "a work of inspiration" (PrW, 3:72).

(It is worth mentioning in connection with Page's insinuation that Wordsworth would perhaps speak generously of women poets only in the privacy of his correspondence that, in the section of the “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface” (1815) containing his praise of Thomson, Wordsworth also states that, "excepting the nocturnal Reverie of Lady Winchelsea, and a passage or two in the Windsor Forest of Pope, the poetry of the period intervening between the publication of Paradise Lost and
The Seasons does not contain a single new image of external nature" (PrW, 3:73). Yet if Wordsworth respected, admired, and praised Beattie, Burns, Akenside, and Thomson, he still did not see fit to add their names to those of Shakespeare, Milton, "the earliest poets of all nations," and the anonymous author of the "Babe in the Woods" in constructing that tradition of male poets that Page contends we can extrapolate from the Preface to Lyrical Ballads.

If Wordsworth saw fit to extol and defend, both publicly and privately, a number of male poets of his own age and the age immediately preceding his whom he did not mention in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, it is worth noting, in answer to Page, that in his similarly scattered comments on female poets outside the Preface he shows just that sympathy and respect for them that we would expect from the author of the letter to Dionysius Lardner. If Thomson, a male poet, "was a crucial influence on his poetry leading up to 'An Evening Walk' we should remember that Wordsworth's first published poem, and his first public statement of admiration and influence, was the schoolboy "Sonnet, on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress," a poem written and published by Wordsworth soon after the publication of her collected works in 1786 and clear testimony to how much he could and
did admire the writing of a female poet. When Judith Page contends that Wordsworth "deliberately constructs a view of literary history without women writers," the female poet she singles out as one "he completely omits" "by his silence" (a silence we are to knowingly regard as "deliberate") is Charlotte Smith. But Page at no time tells us how much Wordsworth in other writings championed her poetry. Writing in 1830 to Alexander Dyce, from whom Wordsworth had received a copy of Dyce's edition of Specimens of British Poetesses, Wordsworth suggests that "[i]f a 2nd edition of your Specimens should be called for, you might add. . . a few more from Charlotte Smith" (LY, 2:260). (He also suggests two poems he would like to see added by Helen Maria Williams, this recommendation coming forty-four years after his initial outburst of enthusiasm for her poetry.) Moreover, in a letter written five years later, in which Wordsworth thanks Alaric Watts for sending him an anthology of sonnets--this time a collection that is obviously not limited to "poetesses"--Wordsworth chides Watt because the collection "does not contain a single specimen from my old friend Charlotte Smith, who was the first Modern distinguished in that Composition," a statement certainly indicating a willingness to give a female poet her due (LY, 3:149-50).
But the statement by Wordsworth that best expresses (and publicly expresses) not only his admiration for Charlotte Smith but his sympathetic understanding of the difficulties the woman who would be a poet labored under occurs in a note to his poem "St. Bees' Head." Beginning by acknowledging his formal indebtedness to her poetry, that "[t]he form of stanza in this Poem, and something in the style of versification, are adopted from the 'St. Monica,' a poem of much beauty upon a monastic subject, by Charlotte Smith," Wordsworth then goes on to a more general statement not just in praise of Charlotte Smith but with regret at the critical neglect of so deserving a poet: Smith, he tells us, is "a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered. She wrote little, and that little unambitiously, but with true feeling for rural nature, at a time when nature was not much regarded by English Poets; for in point of time her earlier writings preceded, I believe, those of Cowper and Burns" (PW, 4:403). Nor should anyone think that Wordsworth's admiration for Smith only began late in his career, as the dates of these letters might suggest. Duncan Wu points out that Wordsworth "is said to have read" Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets by 1784, that he clearly draws upon a line from one
of these sonnets for "The Vale of Esthwaite" in 1787, and that he copies two poems that appeared in 1791 in her novel *Celestina* onto the rear flyleaf of his copy of *Elegiac Sonnets*. Wu also takes note of Bishop Hunt's suggestion that, since the sonnets on the flyleaf differ from those published in *Celestina*, Wordsworth may have seen the poems in manuscript when he went to pay Smith a fan's visit at Brighton in 1791.\textsuperscript{210} It is clear from the record that Wordsworth did read with pleasure and admire female poets, some more than others: Helen Maria Williams and Charlotte Smith undoubtedly most of all; but also Elizabeth Carter, whose "Poem on Spring" he described as "[t]he first verses from which he remembered to have received great pleasure"\textsuperscript{211} and Anne Finch, countess of Winchelsea, "to whose writings" Wordsworth described himself "especially partial" (LV, 2:157)—nor do these four names exhaust our list of those female poets of whom Wordsworth spoke well.

And nothing in that record should lead us to conclude, as Levin does, that out of hostility toward or disdain for female poets Wordsworth would have discouraged his sister from becoming a poet, a Charlotte Smith or a Helen Maria Williams, if she were so inclined, or even a competitor of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, or Milton if her talents led to so lofty a self-conception. What is most interesting
and, to me, most gratifying about Wordsworth's discussion of female writers is that, despite his suggestion that "an account of Deceased Poetesses of Great Britain" or "of the female writers of Europe beginning with Sappho" be compiled, he does not treat women writers as curiosities nor show any intention of ultimately relegating them to a separate poetic sphere and thus ghettoizing them. Along with Pope, only Anne Finch, among the poets between Milton and Thomson, provides any "new image of external nature"; and Smith, as sonneteer, is spoken of by Wordsworth both as the first "Modern distinguished in that Composition," and, in more general terms, as "a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered." They are writers Wordsworth would like to see given their rightful place in the larger literary history and, perhaps to the surprise and even consternation of fellow male writers and critics--at least if the omission of women from the anthologies they produced accurately indicates what the male writers and critics of Wordsworth's day thought--poets who, he asserts, have played a significant role in the making of the poetic tradition.

It might seem that no episode in Wordsworth's literary career would better illustrate his sympathy for and
supportiveness of women writers than the warm, personal relationship that the famous poet and his family established with Maria Jane Jewsbury in 1825. Without ever having met Wordsworth, Jewsbury, an ardent enthusiast of his poetry, had dedicated her first book, *Phantasmagoria: Sketches of Life and Literature*, to W. W. and taken the liberty of sending him a copy in May 1825 accompanied by a letter of “respectful admiration” (*LY*, 1:342 n. 2). In a more innocent time, one could simply sum up the surprisingly cordial response by the poet and his family to that offering as Mary Moorman did over thirty years ago: “Both her letter and book were kindly received by Wordsworth, and she was at once invited to Rydal Mount, where she became the beloved friend of Dora. In July she spent a holiday with them all at Kent’s Bank on Morecambe Bay.”²¹² Even beyond that vacation stay at Morecambe Bay, it should be noted, their literary and personal relationships persisted: Wordsworth and Jewsbury continued to correspond and exchange their writings; the Wordsworths and then Dorothy by herself visited Jewsbury in Manchester; and Jewsbury returned to Rydal Mount in 1829 for a second stay of over three weeks shortly before her marriage and her journey to India, where she died in 1833. True, Wordsworth’s response to *Phantasmagoria* was something less
than Emerson’s greeting to Whitman, hailing the writer “at
the beginning of a great career”\(^{213}\); still it was
encouraging enough. The famous poet hastened to assure the
young writer that in her volume he found “so much to admire
that it would have afforded me great pleasure to thank you
for it under ordinary circumstances” (LY 1:342); that is,
he would have thanked and praised her even without the
tributes to him contained in the dedication and in the
letter accompanying the gift. He offered some criticisms
of individual lines of poetry {though not quite as severe
as his public criticisms of the male poets Gray and Cowper—
to say nothing of Dr. Johnson—-in the Preface to \textit{Lyrical
Ballads}}; and he expressed a general preference for her
prose over her poetry (Jewsbury herself told Dora
Wordsworth that “I only write verse to improve my
prose”).\(^{214}\) while still singling out one poem, “To Love,” as
“so excellent that you need not be discouraged” (LY,
1:343), an obvious signal that he did mean for her to carry
on with her poetry.

Nor was this all that the Wordsworths did in behalf of
Jewsbury. Wordsworth himself praised \textit{Phantasmagoria} in a
letter to her publisher in which he predicted an
exceptionally bright future for her as a writer, certainly
in prose depictions of “life and manners” and even possibly
in poetry (LY, 1:377), and he tried, though unsuccessfully, to persuade Southey to review Phantasmagoria. Moreover, other members of the Wordsworth household took up the Jewsbury cause. In a letter to Edward Quillinan, Sara Hutchinson tells him that “we” had tried to induce De Quincey to review Jewsbury’s book, but because his habits make it unlikely he would or could do so, Sara, clearly speaking for the Wordsworths, asks Quillinan himself if he might fill in for De Quincey, and “in your ingenious way, try to find out some way or other to help her.”

Dorothy Wordsworth too takes an active part in the project of advancing Jewsbury’s reputation, describing Jewsbury in a letter to Crabb Robinson as “a young woman of extraordinary talents” and suggesting that “if you have leisure you may glance an eye over the Book, and, as you are sometimes a Dabbler in Reviews, you may have the opportunity of serving the Authoress, or perhaps Charles Lamb could slip a favorable notice into one of the Magazines. I cannot ask either of you to review the volumes, though if you would do so and could in conscience speak favorably it would be a great kindness done to a deserving person and gratefully received” (LY, 1:405). Such support plainly continued during the rest of her brief career as a writer: when Jane Jewsbury expressed to William Wordsworth a wish to be
published in the *Keepsake*, “[t]he aristocrat” and highest paying “of the annuals,”216 he replied by explaining that he had, in fact, “mentioned your name in such terms as I am accustomed to use in speaking of you” (*LY*, 2:26-27) to its editor, Frederic Reynolds, when he came to visit Wordsworth” but was unsuccessful in this endeavor because the *Keepsake* sought “[a]uthors of prime celebrity--and persons distinguished by rank or fashion, or station or anything else that might have as little to do with good writing” (*LY*, 2:27).

For Jewsbury, the beginning writer and fervent admirer of Wordsworth, all of this must have been a dream come true: to be admitted at the very outset of her career on terms of intimacy to the family of the writer she admired most and to have her writing praised and promoted by Dorothy and by the great poet himself. On the face of it, I find it difficult not to see in Wordsworth’s reaching out to this young woman writer in a way so likely to advance her career anything other than an act of remarkable and essentially well-meant generosity, a truly good deed. But to the critic predisposed to find fault and assign blame, the practitioner of the hermeneutics of disparagement in our present adversarial discourse, no good deed by the white male canonical writer is likely to go unpunished, and
Wordsworth’s seeming act of kindness to Jewsbury is no exception, becoming in the master narrative of feminist criticism of Wordsworth simply another chapter in the annals of Wordsworth’s ill-treatment of female writers. In the first place, there are always motives to be impugned by the sharp-eyed adversarial critic. Indeed, in a scathingly denunciatory critique of Wordsworth’s treatment of Jewsbury, Norma Clarke assumes that in their relationship the benefits flowed essentially just one way, to Wordsworth. Despite appearances to the contrary, Wordsworth is accused of having befriended Jewsbury, as he plainly appeared to have done, not with her welfare in mind but, in reality, to serve his own selfish ends, a predictable Wordsworthian motive, since, as Clarke explains, “William Wordsworth’s self-absorption was great even by the standards set by male poets.” Sending Phantasgamoria with its dedication and her accompanying letter of “respectful admiration” to Wordsworth at a time when he seemed especially downcast about the ultimate reception and effect of his work, perhaps that judgment of posterity on which he so much depended, fearful indeed that, as he states it in his response to Jewsbury, he had “lived and laboured to little purpose” (LY, 1:343), Jewsbury, according to Clarke, by “[h]er worship of him,”
and “her eloquent appreciation of his writings” essentially “lifted his despondency and restored his confidence in himself. They enabled him, in other words, not to see her more clearly, but to see himself in a better light.” But there allegedly is another and still more contemptible motive at work in Wordsworth’s seductive attentiveness to Jewsbury, that is, to gain another conscript for that corps of willing female drudges in his own family whose life’s work had became the furthering of the male poet’s career, with “Maria Jane,” in the end, simply taking “her place among a household of working women who all worked directly for William Wordsworth.” What form Jewsbury’s working for Wordsworth might have taken is not easy to discern, as Jewsbury offers no corroboration of this harsh and certainly devastating—if true—accusation. But Clarke is quick to advance the least flattering of speculations as to why Wordsworth would have made this highly assertive young writer into an intimate of his household and a companion on his family holiday: he did so we are told so that he could turn Jewsbury into not merely a literary but a domestic drudge: “Without a doubt, her willing and practical efficiency in the domestic sphere played a part in her rapid acceptance at Rydal Mount equal in importance to (and possibly more important than) the brilliance of her
writing” (62). Here again, Clarke, of course, provides no real corroboration for what is obviously an impugning of Wordsworth’s motives for a seeming kindness, and the tone of her explanation again clearly bears no resemblance to what we find in Jewsbury’s own account and in accounts by others of how Jewsbury was treated during her stay with the Wordsworths: for Moorman, the Wordsworths simply and understandably took to “[t]his enthusiastic, clever, and charming girl,” who, during her holiday stay with them, with “her witty pen produced a small newspaper—the Kent’s Bank Mercury—recording the jokes and merrymaking, the expeditions, arrivals and departures of ‘Queen Dora’s Court’” (219) (this last a playful reference to the woman who became Jewsbury’s special friend, the poet’s daughter, Dora); the single revealing detail we find in de Selincourt of Jewsbury’s stay at Kent’s Bank with the Wordsworths is not her performing some act of domestic or even literary drudgery but her “taking long rides through the country whilst the poet walked by the side of her pony.” (220)

Jewsbury’s own memoirist, Eric Gillett, sums up the visit to Kent’s Bank as “the perfect holiday that one is lucky to experience once in a lifetime,” concluding that “Jane Jewsbury was never so happy before, and it is doubtful whether she was ever so happy afterwards.” (221) (Such an
account can hardly be considered a biographer’s exaggeration, since in her own poetic account of life with the Wordsworths, “The Poet’s House,” Jewsbury herself calls Rydal Mount “a Paradise.” Nor did Jewsbury believe herself to be a drudge discouraged from literary activity on that wondrous vacation at Kent’s Bank. In her comic Kent’s Bank Mercury, Jewsbury describes herself as having been “the Poet Laureate” of Kent’s Bank appointed by Queen Dora, and in a poem in the Mercury entitled “Poet’s Corner: Fragments of Rhymes on Kent’s Bank,” she plainly describes her stay there as a carefree time of writing verse, particularly to Dora:

Indeed dear madam ’twere a treat,
Either for Men or Muses meet,
To sit and scribble through
Pages and hours, if they, like me,
Could sit and every trouble free
And scribble unto you.

At one point in her brief against Wordsworth, Clarke does seem willing to concede a modicum of good will to Wordsworth in his dealings with Jewsbury, but even here the good deed still does not go unpunished, the possibly well-
meaning male only exacerbating by his good intentions the suffering of the insecure female writer, trapped in her conflict between living out the life of a woman, at least as Wordsworth conceived of that life, and being a writer. In a letter to Dora Wordsworth, Jewsbury tells of reflecting “often” and “fondly” on her conversations with Wordsworth during her visit to Kent’s Bank and of repeating his “opinions on the pains and penalties of female authorship” to Mrs. Hemans, who “agreed to them, in the sober sadness I do.” One comment by Wordsworth is particularly well remembered, “a simile about women and flowers—growing in their native bed, and transplanted to a drawing room chimney place,” a simile Jewsbury obviously finds so painfully applicable to her own circumstances that she immediately adds, “I wish I could forget it.”

For Clarke, this is clearly just more fuel for the adversarial fire, the seemingly kindly-intended if somber observation offered during a conversation Jewsbury remembers “fondly” providing us with “a good example of the sympathetic male as the woman’s worst enemy. Wordsworth’s sympathy forces the choice: woman or author,” with Wordsworth himself making plain his ostensibly unstated preference in this case where he views “writing and femaleness” as “a regrettable combination.”
Yet the dilemma posed by Wordsworth about the sacrifices required of women by a life of authorship in the simile remembered by Jewsbury is not so very different from the dilemma he had warned her against in his very first letter to her, written two months before the conversation at Kent’s Bank. But there the dangers engendered by choosing a life of writing are not really restricted to one sex or the other, even if how one may experience these dangers finally does take on a specifically gendered character. Put simply, the life cost of being a writer that Wordsworth lays out in that first letter, a sacrifice presumably illustrated by the writers he has known, was that “even of successful Authors how few have become happier Men—how few I am afraid have become better by their labours” (LY, 1:344). That a life of writing should be apparently inimical to a life of happiness or goodness (and in this perhaps Wordsworth is merely restating the perennial artist’s conflict between “Perfection of the life, or of the work,,” as Yeats would later write of it) is a conclusion that Wordsworth tells us he “cannot but be persuaded . . . is so with our sex” (LY, 1:344). Still, he assumes that problem he has observed among male writers must hold true for female writers as well, so that, as Wordsworth goes on to tell Jewsbury, “your’s”—that is,
your sex—"is full as much exposed to evils that beset the condition" (LY, 1:344), the last word I imagine overriding sexual differences and referring in an ungendered sense to the "human condition." With surprising assurance, for this is a letter to a woman he has never met and knows only by her writing, Wordsworth goes on to tell her that he can only assume that she too must be acutely aware of this problem that seems to inhere in life as an author, female and male alike, because she is clearly possessed of what appears to be "a just sense of what female merit consists in" (LY, 1:344). But what is clear and most relevant to the issues I would address here is that at no point does Wordsworth ever intimate that having "a just sense of what female merit consists in" is incompatible with being a writer, since Wordsworth’s confidence that this woman he has never met does possess "a just sense" of this seemingly indispensable female quality must obviously come from what she conveys about herself through her writing alone. Nor does Wordsworth at any time in this intended letter of praise and encouragement insinuate that, for the sake of preserving her perhaps endangered “female merit,” Jewsbury should choose not to risk making the sacrifice, should choose not to write so that she might evade the humanly withering transplantation that would turn her from a flower
that blooms in the garden to one whose resting place is to be a drawing-room chimney place. Instead, he unmistakably tells her that she should go on, that the “just sense of what female merit consists in” she has disclosed already in *Phantasmagoria* is, in fact, indispensable to his encouraging her to do so: “I hope for you in a degree which I could not venture to do without this evidence of the depth of your feelings and the loftiness of your conception” (LY, 1:344).

Moreover, at no point that I am able to detect in his correspondence with Maria Jane Jewsbury does Wordsworth ever suggest that she is to do anything other than pursue the precarious calling that her gifts attest she is suited to and become a writer. Perhaps nothing better indicates Wordsworth’s high regard for Jewsbury’s talent than that final judgment he offers on it at the time of her death: “The opinion she entertained on her own performances, given to the world under her maiden name Jewsbury, was modest and humble, and, indeed, far below their merits, as is often the case with those who are making trials of their powers, with a hope to discover what they are best fitted for. In one quality, viz. quickness in the motions of her mind, she had within the range of the Author’s acquaintance, no equal” (PW, 4:157), high praise indeed from a poet who
would dismiss the “Hymn to Pan” in Keats’s *Endymion* as a “pretty piece of paganism” and about whose “critical mind” Sara Coleridge would say in “Her Marginalia in Henry Crabb Robinson’s Copy of Wordsworth’s Memoirs,” “[I]t was his habit to censure & analyse with severity the works of many of his popular contemporaries,” citing as examples of contemporaries with whom Wordsworth dealt severely the male writers “Byron, Campbell, Scott, Carlyle.”\(^{227}\) (Nor should we need any reminding that the quality singled out by Wordsworth and for which he declares Jewsbury unequaled by male or female alike—“quickness in the motions of her mind”—is not one of those conventionally stereotypical female virtues that are customarily pointed to to damn with, at best, faint praise by those males who take for granted their innate mental superiority to the weaker and lesser sex.)

The oppressive presence of Wordsworth himself was not the only reason, according to Clarke, that Jewsbury’s acquaintance with the Wordsworths inhibited and hampered her development as an author. Compounding her difficulties was the stultifying atmosphere that prevailed among the women of the house with their repressive female literary culture “of passivity or hostility toward female self-projection.”\(^{228}\) (Still, one can scarcely describe the way
in which Jewsbury put herself forward and gained entry into the Wordsworth household as anything other than “female self-projection,” and the fact that her efforts were so successful readily suggests that the “hostility toward female self-projection” of the Wordsworths was not as great as Clarke alleges.\(^{229}\) Clarke’s principal illustration of how that literary culture of the women in the Wordsworth household worked against female literary ambition is the apparent family resistance to the publication in 1846 of Dora Wordsworth’s journal of her travels to Portugal, a resistance apparently expressed with particular vehemence by her mother. According to Sara Coleridge ("a published author herself" and, therefore, someone "who did not share the female literary values espoused in the Wordsworth household,"\(^{230}\) and thus for Clarke an especially trustworthy witness), Mary Wordsworth had insisted that "the only motive for publishing the tour was pecuniary gain," because "Mrs Wordsworth has all her life wished her daughter to be above both marriage & authorship."\(^{231}\)

But the attitudes toward female publication in the Wordsworth household appear to be considerably more ambiguous and, in some crucial respects, supportive than Clarke maintains. To be sure, William Wordsworth does seem to concur in his wife’s misgivings about Dora’s publishing,
flatly telling his publisher Edward Moxon that “her mother and I don’t like it, and she”—that is, Dora—“would shrink from notoriety” (LY, 4:805). But Dora Wordsworth’s Journal of a Few Months Residence in Portugal and Glimpses of the South of Spain, was published (albeit anonymously) by Moxon, who, according to her father, “behaved very liberally to Dora”—and published by him, one can only assume, at his celebrated author’s behest (LY, 4:825). Moreover, writing to Moxon in its behalf, Wordsworth not only claims a special value for the work but a special value for it because it was written by a woman, since “[w]omen observe many particulars of manners and opinions which are apt to escape the Lords of Creation” (LY, 4:804).

Still more intriguing though, if we would understand the literary culture of the Wordsworth household (both in what was professed and what actually was done there), is that the real vice that that reliable observer, Sara Coleridge, finally accuses the Wordsworths of in connection with the publication of Dora’s journal is not the frustrating of their daughter’s wish to be a published writer but the “something approaching to hypocrisy” they display in trying to conceal the lengths to which they would go in order to make publication by those connected with them possible. In some notes for Henry Reed written
in the margins of the Memoirs of Wordsworth published by his nephew, Sara Coleridge told how Wordsworth complained that a cousin of his, Emmeline Fisher, "some time ago was introduced, improperly, I think, she being then a child, to the notice of the public, as one of the English poetesses, in an article in the Quarterly so entitled."233 (To Isabel Fenwick, Wordsworth had described the smaller poems of Emmeline Fisher as "really wonderful" and Fisher herself as "the greatest Prodigy I have ever read or heard of" [LY, 4:203]). It is the word "improperly" (underscored by Sara Coleridge in the annotated copy of the Memoir) that sets her off in obvious anger at the Wordsworths--usually treated by her with respect and even affection--because of their unfairness to the reviewer: "That notice courted in every way, both before & after the publication of the article, cited at the same time when it was seen the great man disapproved, an appearance put on of shrinking from it and annoyance at it. In an unpleasant letter I was told of the pain that had been given. Yet after this, fresh manuscripts were sent and renewal of the 'pain' invited! Mr & Mrs W's way on this and kindred subjects was calculated to produce a sort of semi-pretense[,] something approaching to hypocrisy." Having set down "semi-pretense" and "hypocrisy" as a general rule in assessing the
sincerity of the protestations of the Wordsworths about publication by someone closely connected to them, Sara Coleridge immediately extends her point to the matter of “Dora’s book” and repeats those sentiments voiced by Mrs. Wordsworth about its publication that Clarke had quoted earlier: “Mrs W. exclaimed when Mr W spoke of Dora’s book as if she could not bear such publicity. D. would never have published but for the money. I am sure I would not have a daughter of mine publish for money, what she would not have published for the Public’s sake.” But after taking Mary Wordsworth to task for apparently placing material gain ahead of moral principle by allowing her daughter to publish just for the money, despite Mrs. Wordsworth’s own abhorrence of publicity and publication, Sara Coleridge asks (surely rhetorically) if that professed abhorrence is itself not simply another expression of the same “semi-pretense” and “hypocrisy” displayed in the case of Fisher, since the history of the Wordsworth household is one in which the desire by its members for publicity and publication was not thwarted but promoted, presumably in most instances by Wordsworth himself: “After all, has not every talent possessed by any near relative of Mr. W. been proclaimed--every composition worth reading been published?--even to Mrs. H’s lines on the Redbreast?”--and
then Sara Coleridge hits upon at least one exception to her otherwise general rule: “No—not the Scotch tour.”234 (But, in fact, at Samuel Roger’s suggestion, and with her brother’s encouragement and active participation as a go-between with Rogers, Dorothy Wordsworth did briefly negotiate to have her journal of the Scotch tour published.235) That contradictory mixture of attitudes that Sara Coleridge finds in the Wordsworths’ dealings with the poems of Fisher and the literary talents of their “near relatives” does not seem so very different from what we find in the poet’s behavior toward Jewsbury: warnings against the perils of published authorship and perhaps even strictures against its impropriety, while at the same time proclaiming her talent and making every effort deemed necessary to make her success as a published author possible.

The female author, though, who has figured most prominently in the efforts by Wordsworth’s adversaries to establish his hostility to women writers is unquestionably Felicia Hemans, a choice of considerable consequence in our judging of Wordsworth’s attitudes toward women who would write poetry. For it is Hemans, more than any other woman poet, whom the most influential of our adversarial critics (McGann and Wolfson, for example) would promote to
something approaching major status in their newly revised Romantic canon, and whose presumed merit, therefore, makes any hostility toward her on the part of Wordsworth even more blameworthy than hostility toward a less significant writer might be. Hemans’s relationship with Wordsworth and with the Wordsworths is really framed by two events: a two-weeks’ visit to Rydal Mount with her son in 1830, when she was already a popular and famous poet, and her inclusion among the poets Wordsworth paid tribute to in one of the best of his late poems, his “Extempore Effusions upon the Death of James Hogg.”

Unlike their earlier visitor, Maria Jane Jewsbury, with whom, according to Sara Hutchinson, the Wordsworths “all seem enchanted,” Felicia Hemans did not enchant the Wordsworths during her stay at Rydal Mount, and Hutchinson in her account of this visit makes clear that “we” do not like her: “[S]he tho’ a good-natured person is so spoilt by the adulation of ‘the world’ that her affectation is perfectly unendurable” (370). So unwelcome is the company of Hemans that Hutchinson expresses the most inhospitable of wishes, that the “vain” (375) Mrs. Hemans, who “is always, or would be, brilliant but never natural” (372), not take up residence in the Lake District, as she is thinking of doing, but “change her mind & go to Edinburgh
whither she has been invited to take a second draught of the flattery which was so agreeable to her there last summer--& of which she has found a scanty supply here” (371). It is, of course, always possible that Deborah Kennedy is right in saying that the “response” by Hutchinson to Hemans “represents a double standard by which the conversation and manner of a female writer would have been judged more harshly than that of a male writer.”

Yet in terms of the issues that I am addressing, Wordsworth’s attitude toward women writers, what is most important for us to keep in mind is that the one member of the household who did not share in that dislike of Hemans--apparently expressed by everyone else during their visitor’s stay at Rydal Mount--was William Wordsworth himself. Indeed, his professed liking for Hemans seems so inexplicable to his sister-in-law that she can only conclude that “Mr. W pretends to like her very much--but I believe it is only because we do not” (370). But Wordsworth himself plainly disavows any suggestion that he only pretended to like Hemans, explaining in the Fenwick note to the “Extempore Effusions” that “there was much sympathy between us” (as a defender of Wordsworth, I am tempted to suggest that perhaps this sympathy was predicated on the deeper intuition that he felt them both
to be poets of considerable talent), so that he “felt most kindly disposed towards her, and took her part on all occasions” (PW, 4:461).

But it is in this same Fenwick note to the “Extempore Effusions” that the charge that Wordsworth was a sexist calumniator of Hemans’s poetry, and poetry by women in general, is really rooted. The note itself is an extremely peculiar piece of annotation that one might assume, in keeping with the other notes dictated to Isabel Fenwick, was intended to enlarge on and perhaps clarify a poem that was unquestionably conceived as a tribute to a group of writers admired by Wordsworth: James Hogg, Sir Walter Scott, Coleridge, Charles Lamb, George Crabbe, and Hemans, all of whom had died between 1832 and 1835, the date the “Extempore Effusions” was composed. Yet the note reads as if its purpose was to reverse the sentiments of the work it annotated and flout the convention that one is not to speak ill of the dead, especially, we might imagine, the dead whom the author had recently eulogized. About James Hogg, whose death prompted the “Extempore Effusion,” that ostensibly spontaneous outpouring of grief for the dead, Wordsworth writes, “He was undoubtedly a man of genius, but coarse manners and low and offensive opinions” (PW, 4:459), while Crabbe’s “talk” is described by Wordsworth as “so
much below what might have been expected from a man so deservedly celebrated, that to me it seemed trifling”; and as a poet Wordsworth complains Crabbe was lazy, not “a zealous and diligent labourer,” because unwilling to take the “pains” with his poetry “necessary to produce merit of a certain kind which I highly valued” (PW, 4:460).

On the other hand, Wordsworth’s affection for Hemans in the Fenwick note comes through clearly; he “remember[s] her with true affection for her amiable qualities” (PW, 4:461), while his criticisms seem comparatively mild: “Mrs. Hemans was unfortunate as a Poetess in being obliged by circumstances to write for money, and that so frequently and so much, that she was compelled to look for subjects wherever she could find them, and to write as expeditiously as possible” (PW, 4:461). But here he merely reiterates a judgment that Hemans had made upon herself and that he might have heard from her: “It has ever been one of my regrets that the constant necessity of providing sums of money to meet the exigencies of the boys’ education has obliged me to waste my mind in what I consider mere desultory effusions.”

But it is his recounting in the Fenwick note of another complaint against Hemans tied in to an anecdote from her 1830 visit to Rydal Mount that has come to be
regarded as a principal piece of evidence for Wordsworth’s alleged sexism and, more particularly, his alleged animus against women writers:

She was totally ignorant of housewifery, and could as easily have managed the spear of Minerva as her needle. It was from observing these deficiencies that, one day while she was under my roof, I purposely directed her attention to household economy, and told her I had purchased Scales, which I intended to present to a young lady as a wedding present; pointed out their utility (for her special benefit) and said that no menage ought to be without them. Mrs. Hemans, not in the least suspecting my drift, reported this saying, in a letter to a friend at the time, as a proof of my simplicity. (PW, 4:461)

It is an anecdote that Wordsworth’s feminist detractors understandably avidly seize upon, while his defenders can only deplore it. Wordsworth’s manner of conveying instruction—the pointed jibe through the device of the wedding present—is certainly tasteless, overbearing, and insulting. Nor can it be denied that it is an
understandably tempting, even natural inference to draw from this anecdote (especially by those predisposed to find fault with and assign blame to Wordsworth for his tacitly assumed sexist prejudices) that what Wordsworth is implicitly saying by complaining about Hemans’s “deficiencies” in “housewifery”—her “ignorance” of the housewife’s basic tool, the knitting needle—is that she should have taken up the needle and not picked up the pen, thereby, in effect, saying by indirection about Hemans what Southey said to Charlotte Brontë: “[L]iterature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and ought not to be.”

But nothing in the Fenwick note and nothing I am aware of in Wordsworth’s comments before or afterward about Hemans really justifies our drawing any such inference. The one genuine complaint Wordsworth makes about Hemans “as a Poetess” in the Fenwick note is that “in being obliged by circumstances to write for money” she wrote too much, a complaint that does not in any way imply that she should have put down the pen and not written at all; it only implies that if financial considerations had not been uppermost she would have written better poetry, come closer to fulfilling her true potential as a poet, achieved what she should have. It is this very point that Wordsworth, in fact, makes in a letter of 1837 to his cousin, Elizabeth
Fisher, in which he finds himself, as one of the “friends,” of Hemans, compelled to “acknowledge with regret that her circumstances, tho’ honorably to herself, put her upon writing too often and too much—she is consequently diffuse; and felt herself under the necessity of expanding the thoughts of others, and hovering over their feelings, which has prevented her own genius doing justice to itself, and diminished the value of her productions accordingly” (LY, 3:491). Clearly, the conclusion to be drawn from this is not that Hemans, as a woman, should not have written poetry but should have given herself over to domestic pursuits instead; rather, it is that if money had not been her principal aim—though Wordsworth sympathetically understands why that was the case—her poetry would have been less “diffuse,” more expressive of her own “thoughts” and “feelings,” and her “genius” would therefore have done “justice to itself,” an assessment that can hardly be taken as evidence that Wordsworth believed women incapable of writing good poetry or believed that they would be acting contrary to their nature if they should attempt to do so.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the absence of evidence in the Fenwick note nor the availability of evidence elsewhere to the contrary, Susan Wolfson draws precisely this inference from Wordsworth’s recounting of the anecdote
of the scales and his allusion to the “spear” “of Minerva,” that he identifies with the “needle” of Hemans. That is, Wolfson quite straightforwardly says that, sneering at Hemans, Wordsworth “wish[ed] her to put down her pen and take up her needle.” To reinforce that claim, Wolfson adds that it is “not only” Wordsworth who wants Hemans “to put down her pen and take up her needle” and submits into evidence one of “Byron’s nasty puns of gender” directed against Hemans, in which he is said to be making the very same “point”: in a letter to his publisher, John Murray, Byron had mockingly written, “I do not despise Mrs. Hemans—but if [she] knit blue stockings instead of wearing them it would be better.”

Following Wolfson’s lead, Carol Shiner Wilson goes even further, not only quoting Byron’s wish that Hemans would “knit blue stockings instead of wearing them,” but also adding a remark by “an anonymous reviewer for the Quarterly Review (June 1812) (probably John Wilson Croker),” in which he “blasted Anna Barbauld for daring to throw down her knitting needles (appropriate to a writer of stories for the nursery) in order to take up the pen to write Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, which boldly criticized the nation.” Having shown that knitting is used to cast aspersions on the writing of women by both the reviewer in
the Quarterly and by Byron, Wilson, too, turns finally to Wordsworth but, without actually quoting the Fenwick note, says only that “Wordsworth’s remarks were similar in trope and tone” (170). At no point, though, does Wilson think it necessary, in fairness to Wordsworth, to tell us how his reference to the “spear of Minerva in his Fenwick note differs in substance from the undeniably sexist gibes of the reviewer in the Quarterly Review or of Byron, since at no point in what is after all a note to a poem that pays tribute to Hemans as a poet does Wordsworth ever suggest what the others expressly say, that the female author should have kept to her knitting and not been a writer at all.

Of course, it is that tribute, the “Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg,” that should in the end exonerate Wordsworth from the accusation that he held a low opinion of Hemans as a poet, no doubt in keeping with his low opinion of women poets generally because of his sexist bias. (It should be noted that McGann himself, in his advocacy for Hemans, simply quotes these lines of tribute by Wordsworth without comment, the clear implication being that that is all he need do in order to refute the charge that Hemans is no more than “a debased Wordsworth,” offering only “accomplishment without genius, and
amiability without passion.”) In what McGann terms “these famous lines” (186), we are told by Wordsworth that in addition to those older poets who had recently died, “ripe fruit, seasonably gathered” (35), whom Wordsworth would lament—Hogg, Scott, Coleridge, Lamb, and Crabbe—we are to

Mourn rather for that holy Spirit,
Sweet as the spring, as ocean deep;
For Her who, ere her summer faded,
Has sunk into a breathless sleep.

(37-40)

But here again words of praise and the inclusion of Hemans in that canon of contemporaries whom Wordsworth would honor prompt a predictable reaction, the calling forth of that almost conditioned adversarial response that I noted in my introduction, the need by the adversarial critic “to set the bar ever higher, indeed, to make it virtually insurmountable, if the writer under adversarial surveillance should somehow unexpectedly utter or imply some sentiment that the progressively inclined reader might find politically acceptable,” in this case an expression of admiration for a woman poet that, taken at face value,
would seem comparable in kind to his expressions of admiration for the men memorialized in the same work. Characterizing the lines on Hemans in the most perfunctory fashion as “some tender memorial verses.”\(^{244}\), Wolfson makes clear in a note that she does not believe that Wordsworth gives Hemans equal treatment in the “Extempore Effusion,” or that he holds her in the same esteem as the males in his list, or that he really regards her as a poet at all: “Wordsworth cites Hemans not for her art, but for her “Holy Spirit, / Sweet as the spring, as ocean deep.” Of the five writers mourned . . . that only she is unnamed reports the breach of modesty posed by female fame” (165 n 16). In fact, Hemans gets more space than either Crabbe or Lamb, about whose art Wordsworth says virtually nothing; moreover, he does identify Hemans as a poet in at least one manuscript where he writes, “She too, a Muse whose holy Spirit / Was sweet as Spring, as Ocean deep” (\(PW\), 4:277).

But what finally counts—and is all that need count in establishing Wordsworth’s esteem for Hemans as a poet—is that he thought highly enough of Hemans to include her in an elegy in which those to be mourned were selected on one principle, and one principle only, that they were recently dead writers of whom Wordsworth thought highly. As corroboration of this principle, we need only note that
Wordsworth himself invokes it to assure Elizabeth Fisher—whose daughter, a precocious poet herself, has been reading the poems of Hemans—that he too admires the poetry of Felicia Hemans: “[T]owards the close of my 6th Vol; will be found a poem occasioned by the death of the Ettrick Shepherd, which shews that I think highly of that Lady’s Genius” (LY, 3:491). Why Wordsworth should feel it necessary to assure Fisher that he “think[s] highly of” Hemans’s “genius” is in itself instructive, for during the course of that letter, he expresses “regret that Mrs. Hemans’s Poems have been put in” the “way” (LY, 3:491) of Elizabeth Fisher’s daughter, the aspiring poet Emmie. But the advice he gives Emmie Fisher’s mother is not that she should replace Hemans with some sturdier male contemporary who would provide a more suitable role model (and certainly not that she put aside thoughts of becoming a poet), but rather that the precociously gifted child be induced to turn for poetic instruction from the writers of the present to those of the past: “This is not said with a view to the withdrawing of Mrs. H’s works, but with a hope that it may be a caution for you to place those of the elder Writers in your daughter’s way, in preference to modern poets, however great their merits” (LY, 3:491). Moreover, as evidence for the soundness of this advice, Wordsworth points to his own
literary experience: "Wherever I have written better than others, as far as style is concerned, it has been mainly owing to my familiarity with the Works of the truly great Authors of past times" (LY, 3:491). In stating such a preference and ascribing so much of his own success to heeding this advice, Wordsworth, of course, remains consistent with the views he had expressed at the beginning of his career, thirty-seven years earlier, in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, where the only writers singled out for commendation are Shakespeare, Milton, and "the earliest poets of all nations," while all the contemporary or near contemporary poets are named only because they exemplify one poetic fault or another. But while the poets praised in the preface are admittedly all male, so too are the poets faulted; and there seems no reason for us to believe that Wordsworth thought of Hemans in any way as a lesser poet than his tribute to her or the letter to Elizabeth Fisher suggests: she is a lesser poet than Shakespeare or Milton or "the earliest poets of all nations" certainly; but, nonetheless, she is still a poet whose genius, which is to be admired and honored, places her among the very best of her contemporaries.

What conclusions then are we entitled to draw about Wordsworth's attitude and behavior toward women writers on
the basis of the evidence I have brought forward here? One conclusion that we are surely not entitled to draw is that Wordsworth was constitutionally ill disposed to women poets (whether for sociohistorical or merely idiosyncratically personal prejudices), as so many practitioners of the hermeneutics of disparagement believe him to have been, that, like Charles Tansley, Wordsworth believed that “women can’t write” and, it follows, that “women shouldn’t write.” Indeed, one might more plausibly argue that, surrounded by a household of supportive and admiring women whose writings, according to Sara Coleridge, he overvalued and continually sought to put forward whenever the opportunity permitted, his bias, if it lay in any direction, was in favor of women poets, as his encouragement and support of Jewsbury suggests. After all, when the astonishingly precocious John Keats recited his “Hymn to Pan” to Wordsworth—who for Keats was the poet whose Excursion was to be regarded as one of the “three things to rejoice at in this Age”245—Wordsworth extended no invitation to visit Rydal Mount or to share a family vacation, nor did he solicit friends to review a protégé’s publication, as he did for the surely less gifted Jewsbury, but he responded only, at least according to Benjamin Robert Haydon, with the coldly dismissive “‘A Very pretty piece of Paganism,’
crushing the ‘young Worshipper,’ who ‘felt it deeply’ and never forgave the slight.” But hypothesizing a gendered Wordsworthian bias against male writers seems a no less dubious inference, since there were any number of other male writers whose works Wordsworth admired, praised, and promoted, and whose acquaintance and friendship he solicited. Undoubtedly, the most plausible inference to draw from all of this is that Wordsworth, for all “his habit to censure & analyse with severity” (as Sara Coleridge put it), was, as a fellow-poet, generous with both word and deed to those writers whose writings he liked, with these likings apparently unaffected by differences in gender, though, it must be added, his preferences, as in the case of Keats, do not always coincide with what a later critical consensus has come to regard as true merit.

The question of how we judge Wordsworth’s relations with women writers is, nonetheless, an important one, perhaps less important for what it tells us about Wordsworth, since he seems to act in a commendably egalitarian way in this regard, than for what it says about us. In An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Other, Edith Wyshograd speaks of “[t]he historian” as “bound by a responsibility for the dead for
whom she claims to speak.” Such a historian, Wyshograd tells us, “assumes a liability for the other” and “feels the pressure of an ethics that is prior to historical judgment.” To my mind, the carrying out of that responsibility to the dead is the single most profoundly pressing obligation for our historical literary scholarship at the present moment, and one which we rarely meet. It is not enough merely to avoid saying things that are libelous or slanderous or even false about the long dead writers we take up, but, beyond that, we are obliged to approach the dead with that Kantian imperative in mind that we are to apply to all persons, that imperative that mandates that we regard the Other intrinsically rather than instrumentally as an end in himself or herself, rather than as a means to an end, however politically and socially and even morally alluring that instrumental usage of our older writers in behalf of some other, doubtlessly well-intended (and usually presentist) end would seem to be.

One can, of course, tease out arguments for a Wordsworthian bias against women writers without ever examining his behavior toward any particular women writer. By simply turning to some area of Wordsworth’s poetic theory or practice that seemingly has nothing to do with women writers, the adversarial critic can show how that
Wordsworthian theory or practice (one that the normally unsuspecting reader might otherwise be likely to judge politically or morally praiseworthy) is in reality a mere covert strategy for projecting a virtually constitutional animus against women writers. Nowhere is this tendency—the propensity of the adversarial critic to look to the absent or displaced, in short, to grasp at straws—more in evidence than in the efforts by Page to prove that what Wordsworth advocates in his statements about the ballad in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is antithetical to the interests of women. After contending that "Wordsworth's stance against popular gothic fiction is that he seems to be drawing the line between high (masculine) and low (feminine) culture," she admits that "the core of the Preface and of his program for poetry explodes hierarchies, lifting and ennobling the simple, the lowly, and the rustic," an aim that "Wordsworth accomplishes" "through experimentation with a popular form, the ballad." But, as with almost everything else in the preface, according to Page, the final effect of his apparent championing of the lowly, at least in terms of its consequences for women, is just the opposite of what a superficially uncensorious reading might have led us mistakenly to believe had apparently been intended. Thus "by emptying the ballad of
its folk heritage and lifting it up to the level of literary genre," Page charges, "Wordsworth in effect erases a part of women's literary tradition." As authority for this contention, Page cites Virginia Woolf's conjecture in *A Room of One's Own* that "the Anon who wrote so many poems without signing them was often a woman," a suggestion that, in its turn, rests on an earlier and equally offhanded, though certainly intriguing, supposition: "It was a woman Edward Fitzgerald, I think, suggested who made the ballads and folk songs, crooning them to her children, beguiling her spinning with them, for the length of the winter's night." So on the basis of this casually rendered speculation of Woolf's, Page, probing for Wordsworthian bias and error, concludes that in "Wordsworth's invention of literary history women are neither authors nor transmitters of folk culture."

In the preface though, Wordsworth plainly did not empty the ballad of its folk heritage but defended that heritage against its classical-minded, elitist despisers. While Wordsworth's own ballads were unavoidably literary ballads, since they were poems written not by "Anon" but by Wordsworth himself, a professional poet who usually claimed authorship of his work, the one poem he praises that is not by a poet of presumed canonicity is itself a ballad
authored by "Anon," the "justly-admired stanzas of the 'Babes in the Wood.'" By his praise of that work, Wordsworth is unequivocally taking sides in a major literary debate against what we might be inclined to call in presentist terms the canon, attacking Johnson for his sense-denying parody of a poem that Addison had praised as "one of the Darling Songs of the Common People"\textsuperscript{251} in the Spectator's "Chevy Chase" papers, essays often credited with a founding role in inaugurating the revival of the popular ballad and in championing the admission into the traditional canon of a clearly nontraditional form. To parody "Babes in the Wood," as Johnson did, was to mock popular culture in the interests of an elitist culture that had pleased many, at least an educated consensus gentium, and pleased long—though, to be sure, "Babe in the Woods" in its own right had a publicly listed provenance that went back as far as a 1595 entry in the Stationers' Register and doubtlessly maintained a presence in folk literature well before that.\textsuperscript{252} Thus for Wordsworth to characterize the stanzas quoted in the preface from "Babes in the Wood" as "justly-admired" and to denounce Johnson's parody as "a fair example of the superbly contemptible" (PrW, 1:154) was to publicly declare his loyalties to the popular side in
the culture wars that raged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Moreover, to turn Page's own logic upon her, if Virginia Woolf was right, as Page seems to believe, in saying that the "Anon" who wrote the ballads "was often a woman," then we may reasonably surmise that the unknown author of the poem that Wordsworth so much admired and in the preface praised, "Babes in the Wood," was more than likely a woman too, especially in light of that ballad's essentially domestic preoccupation with children and family. Obviously we can never determine with certainty whether any balladeering "Anon" is male or female and, therefore, whether any ballad Wordsworth may have admired was written by a man or a woman, but in connection with the writing of ballads we may, nonetheless, still doubt the accuracy of Page's bald assertion about Wordsworth's sexist impact on the construction of the ballad tradition, her contention that "in Wordsworth's invention of literary history women are neither authors nor transmitters of folk culture." Offering to assist Dyce in 1833 in a new edition of his Specimens of British Poetesses, Wordsworth displays what seems to me an impressive and certainly sexually unprejudiced familiarity with folk culture, at least in its poetic manifestation, suggesting to Dyce two additional
poems that might go into a future collection of the Specimens: "It is a remarkable thing that the two best Ballads, perhaps, of modern times, viz. Auld Robin Grey, and the Lament for the Defeat of Scots at Floddenfield, are both from the pens of females" (LY, 2:664). After surveying what I believe to be a fair sampling of the relevant evidence, I do not see how we can in any way acquiesce in the charges of Wordsworth's adversarial detractors that he is guilty of sexual prejudice in his literary judgments. But if they still cannot shake the need to pursue some grievance against Wordsworth, we can perhaps revive the hoary staple of his being an egotist, especially if we are willing to take an 1841 entry in Caroline Norton's Old Friends at face value. But then his adversarial critics will have to concede him capable of holding a woman poet in esteem, something that they have, for the most part, seemed unwilling to do; for, in her memoir, Norton, the source of this anecdote of local reminiscence, reports that, according to his Lakeland neighbors, Wordsworth was "[never heard to] praise any poetry but his own, except a piece of Jane Crewdson's."
Chapter 5
Constructing the Adversarial Subject: The Yale School and its Legacy

The canonical poets are not the only objects of that hermeneutics of disparagement practiced by our current new historicist and feminist adversarial critics. Like most emergent critical movements, new historicism and feminist criticism had as a major goal the supplanting of the critical movement understood to be dominant at the time they set their own adversarial projects in motion. In Romanticism, and in Wordsworth studies especially, in the early and mid-1980s when McGann and Levinson and Homans first mounted their challenges, the dominant movement was not hard to pick out, with Bloom, Hartman, and de Man in their heyday among Romanticists and the great vogue of the Yale school at its peak. Moreover, Yale criticism in its key claims and assumptions fortuitously proved remarkably suited to serve as an adversarial target for critics who sought not just to win out over it in one of those intramural contests for supremacy that have always gone on within the confines of the supposedly self-limitingly autonomous institution of literary study but, beyond that, to put in question the very reason for being of the institution of literary study itself and, ultimately, the literature or kinds of literature it championed. For even while focusing on traditional literary texts, new
historicists and feminists conceived of themselves and their projects as advancing other, more socially beneficial ends than the literary, and to the achievement of these ends, the canonical Romantic literature that their critical predecessors not only studied but promoted was perceived to be an especial impediment.

In a twist of irony worth noting, the Yale school too, particularly in its later, deconstructionist phase, certainly conceived of itself as radically challenging the literary establishment that it, in its turn, had sought to displace. Yet if deconstructionist arguments for semantic indeterminacy had shaken an earlier critical faith in the attainability and even desirability of arriving at some ultimate closural meaning, the Yale critics had never doubted that their place was within the literary, nor that the poems of Wordsworth and Rilke and Keats and Stevens were to be regarded as anything other than appropriate and valued objects of study, even study for deconstructionist ends. The topics the Yale critics wrote on--poetic influence, symbol versus allegory, the critic versus the poet--were the familiar staples of literary criticism, even if the Yale critics often put their own seemingly counter-to-the-then-reigning-establishment spin on their treatments of these topics. That the major Romantic poem was essentially constituted by an oedipal struggle with some identifiable strong precursor, with any other informing material to be viewed as mere accident; or that allegory,
in its implicit acknowledgement of the mind's unbreachable distancing from the world, was to be preferred over the heretofore mistakenly privileged symbol, an error resting on a misguided belief in the possibility of participation by consciousness in the objective world; that literary criticism of the kind practiced by the Yale school and its increasingly important ally and mentor, Jacques Derrida, was itself "crossing over into literature"—these were the kinds of intrinsically literary claims made by the major figures in the Yale school. Indeed, in many ways the Yale critics seemed, if anything, even more literary than Abrams, Earl Wasserman, Walter Jackson Bate, and Northrop Frye, their very literary-minded Romanticist predecessors of the previous generation, with the Yale critics invariably choosing the claims of consciousness and language and the literary over any explanations dependent on history and the world and offering us less a radical revisionism than a kind of end game to a played-out belletristic New Criticism, at least according to politically minded metacritics like Frank Lentricchia.

But what especially made Yale criticism grist for the new historicist and feminist mills was the primacy it gave consciousness to the virtual exclusion of the things of the external world. Where René Wellek had identified the characteristic criteria of Romanticism as "imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, myth and symbol and myth for poetic style," three decades
later, Bloom, in his preface to his "landmark collection Romanticism and Consciousness," had reduced the criteria that should command the advanced critic's attention to just one, eliminating myth and, most especially, nature, declaring "Romantic self-consciousness" alone as "the area" that "advanced criticism of Romanticism has identified as" being "the most central in our attempt to define our own relation to these poets." To make his point, he included in his collection a number of essays by Yale colleagues, essays clearly to be numbered among the most advanced, that eventually provided major dogmas for what would become the program of the Yale school. In his own contribution to the collection, "The Internalization of Quest Romance," Bloom explained how the making of myth was internalized by the Romantic poets into a projection of consciousness, how the "Romantic poet turned away, not from society to nature, but from nature to what was more integral than nature, within himself": in "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness,'" Geoffrey Hartman had located the Romantic antidote to an overly self-conscious analytic faculty, "the meddling intellect" that "murder[s] to dissect," not where the Romantic poet who coined that phrase did, in the "lore which Nature brings" (Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned" 25) but in "consciousness itself"; and finally, and most significantly, de Man in "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" dazzlingly attempted to show that words could never originate as flowers do and that the Romantic
imagination, as we find it in book 6 of *The Prelude*, "marks instead a possibility for consciousness to exist entirely by and for itself, independently of all relationship with the outside world, without being moved by an intent aimed at a part of this world." To this mix, Bloom added an extremely important essay by Abrams, a critic who often would differ with the Yale school, but whose conclusions in this case seemed both to fortify the claims of the Yale school for the essentially inward-turning character of the major Romantics and eventually to lend ammunition to those adversarial critics who would charge the poets and their modern-day critical advocates with a shirking of their political responsibilities. At a moment of comparative innocence, the English Institute meeting of 1962, with Yale criticism, deconstruction, new historicism and feminist criticism not as yet having made their way onto the critical scene, Abrams lent his enormous prestige to an essential depoliticizing of the British Romantics. Disillusioned by the Terror and the rise of Napoleon, these poets had, according to Abrams, in the late 1790s given up on the radical politics immediately at hand, that of an atheistic French Revolution, and turned instead to the historically more remote radicalism of seventeenth-century British Protestantism, a radicalism most powerfully expressed, in literary terms, by Milton. To their readers, the Romantic poets—the fact that they had been placed under surveillance, tried for sedition, and driven into
exile abroad notwithstanding—offered something akin to the French Revolution by other and less messily violent means, an essentially British reformulation of revolution that transformed "the militancy of overt political action" into "the paradox of spiritual quietism."263

In a field as unscientific as British Romanticism and Wordsworth studies, no critic or school of criticism can ever finally effect a paradigm shift of the comprehensiveness seen in science—at least as Thomas Kuhn describes it—one in which the verifiable persuasiveness of its major premises finally leads all working in the field eventually to adopt it. So at the time Bloom was claiming "consciousness" to be the foremost concern of advanced critics of Romanticism, Jonathan Wordsworth was putting forward the doctrine of a "One Life" to be found in nature as a primary explanatory principle for understanding Wordsworth.264 And only a few years after Abrams had made his case that what Wordsworth offered was a Protestantized, wholly spiritual radicalism, the eminent radical historian E. P. Thompson, in what was in its own right a highly influential essay, would maintain that even in the desperate last three years of the eighteenth century—a time of government repression in Britain and betrayal in France of the Revolution's ideals, first by the Republic itself and then by Napoleon—Wordsworth and Coleridge had persisted in their earlier Jacobinism, disenchanted perhaps but never in default. Still, by the mid-1980s, a Yale
criticism of consciousness, abetted by the depoliticizing arguments of Abrams and making increasing use of deconstructive strategies, had become the dominant trend in Wordsworth scholarship, especially for those just entering the field.

So, just as there was to be no unknowing of Derrida in the mid-1980s, as Levinson stated, there was to be no unknowing of the Yale school generally. At the very inception of Romanticist new historicism and its repudiation of Yale, Marjorie Levinson explained, with the seemingly requisite humility, that "the generation of Americans writing about Wordsworth today"-- and she would certainly include herself in that number--"learned to think its subject from Bloom and Hartman," with Hartman, in particular, held up as "[t]he great precursor." But what the new historicists had finally "learned to think" from those from whom they had "learned to think" their "subject" was how accommodating the poetry of Wordsworth was to the ostensibly apolitical (but, by new historicists lights, essentially reactionary) predilections of the critically gifted Yale critics, a fit so perfect that Levinson, putting it "polemically," would assert a virtual identity between poet and commentator, declaring, "Romanticism's ideology of writing is deconstruction's ideology of reading" (7). And on the first page of The Romantic Ideology, McGann forgoes even this seemingly obligatory gesture of respect, while asserting a similar identity
between Romantic poetry and those critics of it he would have us reject: "The ground thesis of this study is that the scholarship and criticism of Romanticism and its works are dominated by a Romantic ideology, by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's self-representations."²⁶⁶ (McGann 1). And nowhere was that "uncritical absorption" in Romantic poetic practice more strikingly represented than in what in 1983 was "the contemporary academic consensus about Romantic literature" represented by the formulations of Geoffrey Hartman, for as McGann explains, "The strength of the position lies in the accuracy with which it reflects, or translates, the original materials" (41).

In constructing their adversarial subject, the Wordsworth to be disparaged, the new historicists essentially assumed that the Yale critics had gotten it right, that the texts they examined had, after the critical dark ages that had preceded their triumph, become virtually transparent, at least to discerningly skilled readers like Hartman, Bloom, and de Man. To be sure, the interpretation of Wordsworth put forward by the Yale critics, and especially by Hartman, seemed to many at the time of its own emergence nothing less than a Copernican revolution in Wordsworth scholarship, one that, like our first Copernican revolution, defied the common sense judgment of what had seemed only too evidently true on the issue in question. Just as virtually all laymen, and virtually all astronomers
before Copernicus, believed that the sun revolved around the earth, so too did almost all common readers, and many scholars before (and even during) the ascendancy of the Yale school, believe that Wordsworth was a poet—and transparently so—not of consciousness but of nature and, at least on those grounds, would have held him to be guiltless in his self-representations of the ideological malfeasance that McGann would impute to him as a poet of consciousness. But lacking the advantages of those celestial observations by which real Copernicans can and do test and verify their hypothesis, we in criticism can never truly know if the adversarial subject that the new historicists, following the lead of the Yale critics, put forward as Wordsworth is the real Wordsworth or simply the wishful construct of a group of highly skilled deconstructive interpreters with their own implicitly depoliticized and depoliticizing agendas to advance.

To equate the real Wordsworth with the inward-turning poet of consciousness described by the Yale critics has, of course, proven a great convenience to critics like McGann and Levinson, for whom Wordsworth's inward turn to consciousness provides prima facie proof of his indifference to the needs of those who must live in an oppressive society and, therefore, proof of his political irresponsibility at a time of crisis. Moreover, the critics could charge by a kind of irresistible logic that the indifference implied by that focus on consciousness had
had the most dire consequences in that larger social world in which the poets dwelt, turning our attention away from the intolerable social conditions in which most men lived and, in the process, abetting an established order and ruling class who did take their politics seriously in perpetuating their hegemony. Nowhere is the depth of McGann's animus toward a poetry that looks inward instead of out upon the world (and, by extension, his animus toward those critics who would value such a poetry) more strikingly evident than when he dismissively assigns Wordsworth to "the Consciousness Industry," "a light industry" he calls it in a pun that makes only too clear his contempt for a poetry that to his Yale predecessors epitomized what a true poetry should be. But wherever our sympathies lie in this matter, with consciousness or with politics, we do well to bear in mind that the Wordsworth thus quarreled over is himself no more than an interpretive construct, merely one in a long line of Wordsworths over the course of an interpretive history whose vicissitudes should teach us to construe any particular construction of Wordsworth as unavoidably provisional, so that even, if our taste is for politics, it may well be, if we wait long enough, that some future construct of Wordsworth, perhaps one even more consonant with the evidence, shall satisfy it.

To feminist critics too, the Wordsworth given us by Yale criticism, and especially by Hartman, has proven no
less attractive and useful, given their own adversarial aims. If Wordsworth is basically and throughout the period of his greatest poetry essentially always a poet of consciousness and holds an idea of consciousness as autonomous, self-contained, superior, and, at moments, even independent of sense, then that nature for which he so often seemingly makes such high claims must, nonetheless, be ultimately looked upon as secondary and subordinate, the Other in an epistemological relationship in which mind is always "lord and master" (Prelude, 11:272), to use the gender-charged phrase with which Wordsworth introduced the spots of time in the 1805 Prelude. And as the Other, nature in Wordsworth is almost always converted by his feminist critics into that Other with which they are most concerned, nature becoming in the process a surrogate for woman, so that the charge against Wordsworth ascribed by Judith Page to his feminist critics that he "is an exploiter of nature" is in effect not at all an ecological complaint but an accusation deeply marked by suspicions that the exploitation of a nature, seen by these critics as implicitly feminized, only masks a more insidiously domineering hostility to women.

That nature may be not the dominated Other but the controlling agent in the individual's fashioning, as Wordsworth frequently asserts in The Prelude, that it may not be substantially different from but might be, in essence, identical with consciousness—an external imposing
itself upon the internal, nature becoming, for example, the "soul of all my moral being"—though a point of view of long standing in Wordsworth studies, seems a possibility never really taken seriously by most feminist critics. Consequently, the same logic that genders an ostensibly epistemologically dominated nature as feminine, when applied to the consciousness that dominates, is also almost invariably assigned a sharply differentiated gendered character. That is, consciousness is to be deemed masculine for its assertive epistemological reaching out to transform the material otherness "out there" into the content of consciousness or, as we shall see, reaching out, in some cases apocalyptically, to do away with nature altogether. Here too, the potential alternative—the possibility that, in its relations with the external world, the perceiving mind might be "wisely passive," a tabula rasa fundamentally receptive in its relationship with an "active universe" that determines the course of its development—is similarly a possible interpretive choice rarely contemplated by a feminist criticism that has insistently gendered the epistemological process in Wordsworth in accordance with its own adversarial presuppositions.\textsuperscript{268} Of course, the basis for this adversarially motivated gendering resides, as I have suggested, in an essentially uncritical acceptance by feminist critics of Wordsworth of the Yale school's analysis of his poetry—in equating what Wordsworth says
with what Hartman says he says. The extent to which this is, in fact, our critical genealogy becomes clear in the formula for interpreting Wordsworth as a subject for feminist criticism set down by Anne Mellor in her influential *Romanticism and Gender*: "Recasting Hartman in terms of gender, we might say that Wordsworth finally replaces (feminine) nature with the productions of the (masculine) imagination, inevitably substituting for his felt experiences of the physical world a linguistically mediated memory of them, mediations which confine his consciousness to a solipsistic subjectivity, one that is troped as male."²⁶⁹

By this formulation Mellor, too, assumes the final triumph of the Yale school as interpreters of Wordsworth, doubtlessly such a construal understood as the necessary precondition for no longer viewing him approvingly and thus enabling the critic to move on to other and more politically rewarding matters and authors. But where earlier critics had usually thought themselves required to assess competing interpretations of poems and passages whose meanings were in dispute before arriving at their own, rather than feeling obliged to consider what might by now seem overwhelmingly vast amounts of once significant commentary, the adversarial critic simplifies things for himself or herself by taking it for granted that these questions have been settled, interpretive victory invariably being awarded to Hartman and his allies. Thus,
with the adversarial subject, the Wordsworth to be explained and judged, finally and firmly construed, all that remains for the critic is to tease out the presumably distastefully reactionary implications and significance of that construal, to identify that in the constructed subject to which the adversarial critic can assign blame.

A perfect example of the way in which adversarial critics can put behind them once contested questions about Wordsworth's poetry, taking the Yale solution as definitive, is to be found in the analysis of that passage from the second book of *The Prelude* that Homans makes the starting point, in *Bearing the Word*, for her Lacanian argument that "language and culture depend on the death or absence of the mother, and on the quest for substitutes for her, substitutes that transfer her power to something that men's minds can more easily control,"\(^270\) a proposition central to that basic distinction between the writing of men and the writing of women in her very influential work. Only ten lines after completing his account of how "a Babe, by intercourse of touch / I held mute dialogues with my Mother's heart" (*Prelude*, 2:267-68), Wordsworth tells us that

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now a trouble came into my mind
From unknown causes. I was left alone,
Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.
The props of my affection were removed,
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And yet the building stood, as if sustain'd
By its own spirit! (Prelude, 2:291-96)

It is a “trouble,” according to Homans, that "can be interpreted in two ways, which Wordsworth conflates here. The trouble is the acquisition of language; it is also the death of Wordsworth's mother when he was eight years old."271

While claiming to be able to "locate in virtually all of the founding texts of our culture a version of" this "myth, that the death or absence of the mother sorrowfully but fortunately makes possible the construction of language or culture,"272 it is this particular passage from The Prelude that Homans does, in fact, choose as the prime example of her thesis. No doubt she assumes that the passage in question can be used in this way, that from it she can make the leap from the death of the mother to the construction of language, because she is certain that the unnamed source of the trouble that came into the poet's mind was, in fact, the death of his mother, since that had become, by the time Homans wrote, the established interpretation of the passage, at least established insofar as it was the interpretation of those Wordsworthians from whom (in Levinson's words) Homans and her generation "learned to think its subject" at the scene of her own instruction at Yale. It was, after all, the interpretation proposed by Hartman first in Wordsworth's
Poetry, 1787-1814 and later, in even more extended form, in his important psychoanalytic essay "A Touching Compulsion, Wordsworth and the Problem of Literary Representation," the two works by Hartman that Homans had specifically cited in her earlier book, Women Writers and Poetic Identity.

But in 1993 W. J. B. Owen, the general editor of the fourteen-book Prelude in the Cornell Wordsworth, went out of his way in a brief article in The Wordsworth Circle to take exception to this frequent identification of "the props of my affection" with the mother, flatly terming it a "misreading" and urging that we return to that once essentially authoritative interpretation proposed by R. D. Havens over fifty years ago and restated by Moorman a decade later. In what was long accepted as the most trustworthy commentary on The Prelude, Havens had argued that Wordsworth refers not to the death of his mother here but to a time in adolescence when "The props of my affections [sports] were removed, / And yet the building [love of nature] stood"; or as Owen himself puts it, drawing upon parallel passages in The Prelude: "In short, 'the props of my affections' are not Wordsworth's mother, or mother and father, but 'the incidental charms which first attach'd / My heart to rural objects" (II. 203-4), and 'my own pursuits / And animal activities' (VIII. 477-8)."

As read by Havens and Owen, the passage in question marks a crucial turn in the autobiographical narrative, the
shift from childhood to youth recounted in the early books of *The Prelude*, they themselves a reiteration and elaboration of the autobiographical narrative recounted only a few months earlier in "Tintern Abbey." Before "[t]he props of my affections were removed," contact with nature by the child Wordsworth had been an accidental by-product of "sports," "incidental charms," that is, charms "incidental" to nature, and "my own pursuits," Wordsworth's way of explaining that as a young child he did not go to nature because it was either beautiful or good in itself. But now in youth, the stage in the poet's life entered into with the removal of these "props," that same "Nature" (*Prelude*, 2:206) "was sought / For her own sake," (*Prelude*, 2:207-8); or, in the still more familiar relating of what would seem to be the same pivotal mental event in "Tintern Abbey," nature had now become "all in all" (75). To be sure, the critic for whom the passage refers to the death of the mother might reasonably counter by asking why Wordsworth should tell us that in the wake of so beneficial a change, with nature becoming a disinterested object of value for its own sake, "a trouble came into my mind." But that "trouble which came into the adolescent Wordsworth's mind," according to Owen, "arose from his failure to understand ('unknown causes . . . nor knowing why') why he sought 'the visible world' without the supportive accompaniment of 'incidental charms . . . my own pursuits / And animal activities'" (179). Moreover, I would add, in
"Tintern Abbey" too, the change that made "nature" "all in all" for the adolescent Wordsworth also induced trouble in the mind, since his response to that nature now "sought for her own sake" is, strangely, to become "more like a man / Flying from something that he dreads than one / Who sought the thing he loved" (70-72).

In order to follow Owens and restore the older and what I believe to be more plausible interpretation, we would, however, also have to rehabilitate for Wordsworth studies an empiricist line of discourse that has almost disappeared from it—a road not taken—since once-disputed questions are presumed by our increasingly dominant adversarial critics to be finally settled, and settled in favor of Hartman and the "academic consensus" that emerged around his work. For as Owen concludes, "The only psychology involved in these explications, as Arthur Beatty saw seventy years ago, is the associationist theories of Hartley and his predecessors."276 Thus, if we read this passage written by Wordsworth in 1799, not in a psychoanalytical and regressive way as the cathartically compelled telling of a traumatic episode within the context of the family romance, but in a Hartleian and empiricist way, then we would understand it as part of that developmentally progressive personal history that once was assumed to be fundamental in Wordsworth studies, a stage in "The Growth of a Poet's Mind," a private theodicy in which the poet's very troubles—"[t]he terrors, all the early
miseries / Regrets, vexations, lassitudes" (**Prelude**, 1:356-57)--all ultimately contributed to "The calm existence that is mine when I / Am worthy of myself! (**Prelude**, 1:360-61). In this older interpretation, what the passage telling how in adolescence "The props of may affections were removed, / And yet the building stood," really recounts is how the morally concerned nature he had originally come into contact with only as the accidental by-product of "extrinsic passion" (**Prelude**, 1:572), that is, his boyhood sports and games--fishing, and nutting, and gathering birds' eggs--had become "now," in adolescence, "sought / For her own sake" (**Prelude**, 2:207-8), an event of crucial moral import for Wordsworth, since by it he would turn at last from the pure self-interestedness of childhood to a disinterested concern for some other, a "love of nature" that is the necessary precursor to the "love of man" that is the true goal of Wordsworth's benevolistic narrative. It is to this crucial stage in Wordsworth's development that the last two hundred and thirty lines of the second book of **The Prelude** (apart from the brief digression on the "infant babe" [**Prelude**, 2:237] are devoted, and it is in that portion of the poem that the passage in question appears.

What I would thus abstract from Wordsworth's recounting of that time when "the props of my affections were removed," so that, as Wordsworth describes it, "a trouble came into my mind," is not the basis for a feminist
myth of "the death or absence of the mother" and a "quest for substitutes for her, substitutes that transfer her power to something that men's minds can more readily control," but an alternative and essentially opposing Enlightenment myth of the straightforward progressive development, empirically conceived, of an implicitly exemplary life that is offered us as the basis, when properly replicated, of a general human advancement. Moreover, it is a life conceived of as replicable by male and female alike, as the example of Dorothy in "Tintern Abbey" following the developmental course already outlined by the history of her brother so clearly indicates.

Of course, the psychoanalytically disposed critic might still understandably wish to ask why Wordsworth should speak of this supposedly morally productive time as a time of "trouble," a term not easily assimilated into so confidently optimistic a myth, and might therefore argue that the proximity of the word "trouble" to the passage on the babe at the breast of its mother points to a latent psychoanalytic suggestiveness (perhaps to an oedipal resonance) at variance with the developmental implications that the passage seems manifestly to express. But that kind of interpretation, so at variance with the plain sense of the text in question, must be argued and earned rather than simply assumed, as it is by Homans and, reading back from her assertions, by Hartman. And even if we admit the interpretive possibilities of such an apparently repressed
latent, we must also acknowledge the need to incorporate the interpretation of the manifest content of the passage that seems most probable, that is, the passage as recording the change from childhood to youth, and thus of an ethical transformation from self-interestedness to disinterestedness, into our overall account of Wordsworthian self-construction in *The Prelude*.

If the characterization by the Yale school of Wordsworth, once understood as primarily a poet of nature, as a poet of consciousness has gained such wide acceptance that McGann can assume that he shall find little disagreement when he dismissively assigns him to "the Consciousness Industry," I am not sure, however, given all that has transpired in Romantic criticism in the twelve years since *The Romantic Ideology*, that he we can any longer think of that industry as "a light industry," as McGann called it in 1983. The operations of that consciousness that Wordsworth is assumed to champion are no longer understood merely to distract or divert from our real political obligations. Consciousness itself, actualized mainly through the Wordsworthian imagination, is now seen to assert, usurp, exploit, conquer, colonize, the Wordsworthian imagination being perhaps the first and leading phalanx in what seems more and more a kind of poetic military-industrial complex that would overcome and oppress all with which a socially responsible criticism should align itself.
Perhaps most revealingly, it is in terms of the Yale critics' aggrandizing imagination that the newest branch of adversarial criticism in Romantic studies--anticolonial, anti-imperialist and antiracist--often manages to condemn Wordsworth as colonizer, imperialist, and racist, even though, admittedly, he seemingly gives us little in the way of manifest grounds for offense and, indeed, "eschews Eastern shores" and, more generally, the conventional subject matter of a racially prejudiced imperialism, the "hermeneutical relation between colonizer and colonized" as it is customarily enacted "on distant shores." In fact, the sympathetically inclined reader of Wordsworth might well argue that the few poems by him that do direct our attention to the colonial relationship as it takes place "on distant shores" or between different races, the sonnets to Toussaint L'Ouverture, to Thomas Clarkson, and "September, 1, 1802" ("The Banished Negroes"), would seem to give us a Wordsworth who, taken at face value, clearly is opposed to slavery, a supporter of colonial liberation and a believer in a human equality that transcends race--or at least so the tribute to the unjustly imprisoned black revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture suggests. But in an essay that appears in the groundbreaking (and largely adversarial) collection on race and imperialism in Romanticism edited by Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh, *Romanticism, Race and Imperial Culture, 1780-1834*, Alison Hickey ignores these inconveniently manifest expressions of
Wordsworth's exasperatingly commendable views on these issues to make the adversarial argument that can be teased out of the displaced matter of the aggressively appropriating Wordsworthian "imperial imagination," a theme that "threads its way through Abrams, de Man, Hartman, and Bloom, and recent historicist and feminist readings."²⁸⁰ If we have a rhetorically "imperial imagination," in Hartman's sense, the imperial here defined as "infusing different meanings with the unity of a single term whose own laws are thus extended beyond 'proper borders'" (284), is it not eminently reasonable, the adversarial critic asks, to conclude by such adversarial logic that the principal literary promoter of that seemingly purely aesthetic or, at most, epistemological notion is, from a political perspective, an imperialist himself or at least has laid the groundwork for "imperial practice" in the accepted political sense of that term? Indeed at the very outset of her essay, Hickey announces as one of its purported aims persuading us to reject any attempt to draw a substantive distinction between a seemingly innocent "linguistic" imperialism derived from Romantic poetic practice and the oppressor's empire-building we normally have in mind when we speak of "imperialism." "To contend that there is a definitive border separating, for example, a political or economic sense of 'imperialism' from a linguistic one would be false. It is not that political or economic imperialism is 'literal,' while linguistic imperialism is 'figurative';
rather the categories overlap, and each can operate as figure for the other" (284). Thus a historicist criticism that started out chastising the Romantic poets for their indifference to political and social concerns in seeking to achieve "a transcendental displacement of human desires" and condemning its critics for insisting that the poems the poets wrote and the critics wrote about were "innocent of moral and doctrinal commitments" has increasingly come to view Romanticism as the vanguard of an army on the march, the literary corps of the advancing forces of nineteenth-century racial and sexual exploitation and oppression.

But nowhere is that tendency to identify the Wordsworthian model of consciousness as given us by the Yale school--in this case, consciousness in the guise of imagination--more clearly seen as an active form of implicitly political agency than in that celebrated new historicist tour de force put forth by Alan Liu in _Wordsworth: The Sense of History_, the analysis of the Simplon Pass episode in book 6 of _The Prelude_, especially that section of the episode in which Wordsworth offers his tribute to imagination following the crossing of the Alps. From what had previously been reckoned the most apolitical of accounts of an apolitical and idealizing activity, the imaginative faculty and its processes, Liu, by a remarkable piece of new historicist decoding, has for the first time lifted the obscuring semantic veil that concealed the
essentially Napoleonic character of that faculty. It is certainly not surprising that Liu would begin his massive new historicist undertaking there, since analysis of these lines is the starting point of Hartman's famous work and the place in which his great argument— the imagination’s usurpation of and apocalyptic vanquishing of nature—is most powerfully set forth. And, of course, if new historicism is to displace the Yale school, it is Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* that must be challenged, opposed and, in the end, superseded.\(^{282}\)

The governing premise of Liu's own reading of that section of book 6 of *The Prelude* dealing with Wordsworth and Robert Jones's continental tour during their Cambridge vacation in the summer of 1790 is that while the ostensible motive of that tour was to observe nature on a grand scale, "'nature' is precipitated in book 6 only as a denial of the history behind any tour."\(^{283}\) Thus if we lift away the nature that Wordsworth writes about or lift away the self that is precipitated from that encounter with nature, we would find a history concealed or devalued as part of a larger Wordsworthian strategy of historical denial. We might well wonder exactly what the history is that Wordsworth thus consciously or even unconsciously conceals or devalues and why he leaves it out. Liu does seem to provide some guidance by pointing to those lines from Book 8 of *The Prelude*, when, entering London after leaving Cambridge, Wordsworth tells how, at least for a moment, he
felt that "A Weight of ages did at once descend / Upon my heart" (Prelude, 8:703-4). One might reasonably speculate that what we have here is a moment of true historical awareness, formed perhaps out of the scattered recollections of events heard or read about so unquestionably temporally distant--and therefore unquestionably historical--as the extending and dismissals of Parliament, the raising of heads on Traitor's Gate, coronations and depositions and dynastic marriages, births, and successions. But the history that Liu implies Wordsworth denies in Book 6, while certainly history to us, would have been, from Wordsworth's perspective, something more like current events, those political developments in France contemporaneous to the time about which Wordsworth is writing, whose alleged poetic occlusion by Wordsworth has become one of the primary grounds for new historicist judgment against him. That is, the history that Liu claims is denied is what we in our normal usage would probably speak of us as politics, and it is in charging Wordsworth with a denial of the politically consequential that should concern the socially responsible poet, its displacement by an ostensibly apolitical nature or an apolitical subjectivity, that Liu here as elsewhere in his study is able to engage in that ideological condemnation we are increasingly prone to pass off as doing literary criticism at our current critical moment.
Liu begins his analysis of Wordsworth's summer vacation in 1790, the tour that culminates in the crossing of the Alps, by laying down a law of touring, apparently according to some critical a priori principle that "tours require the ornament of historical synopses in order to provide visible marks for an immense historical, rather than cosmic, order in the background," meaning by the term "historical," as it is to be applied to book 6 of *The Prelude*, nothing more than the currently political, that is, events in revolutionary France. That interpretation is reinforced by the fact that his analysis of the Wordsworth and Jones's 1790 tour includes not only the retrospective description of it by Wordsworth some fourteen years later in *The Prelude* but William's 1790 letter from Switzerland to Dorothy, a letter "whose perspective," according to Liu, "should be read in reverse" (12). That is, despite Wordsworth's own statement that "Among the more awful scenes of the Alps, I had not a single thought of man" (*EY*, 34), Liu, nevertheless, insists that "it is history that in 1790 is the sufficient motive and nature the real supplement or mark" (12). But while Liu's assessment of Wordsworth's motivational priorities in 1790 may express which motive the adult Liu with his politically sensitive antennae might himself have found most compelling if he had then made such a tour, one can only wonder, on the basis of evidence drawn from Wordsworth's own actions and writings, if the young Wordsworth would really have shared those
priorities. In addition to the letter to Dorothy, there is his later statement, in book 9 of *The Prelude*, that even on returning to France in 1792 he still remained detached from the pull of immediate political events, looking "for something that I could not find, / Affecting more emotion than I felt" (*Prelude*, 9:70-71). Moreover, the fact that I think most simply but most tellingly controverts Liu's assessment of Wordsworth's motivation for that tour of the Continent in 1790 is its itinerary, the decision of the travelers to spend two of their three months abroad in Switzerland and Italy and just one in France, the only nation in Europe that one could then honestly describe as "standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again" (*Prelude*, 6:353-54).

The real frontal assault by Liu on Hartman though is to be found in Liu's Napoleonizing of the Wordsworthian imagination as it is described in book 6 of *The Prelude*, a remarkably virtuoso piece of new historicist decoding that is undoubtedly the basis of that chapter's immense current critical celebrity. By a happy combination of what must surely be serendipitous observation and archival resourcefulness, Liu manages to present a case for parallels between the language with which Wordsworth describes that imagination that rose up "Before the eye and progress of my Song / Like an unfather'd vapour" (*Prelude*, 6:526-27) and accounts in *The Annual Register* of Napoleon's coup d'état of 18 Brumaire and his famous battles at
Marengo and Aboukir. Just as the Wordsworthian imagination displays its "strength / Of usurpation" (Prelude, 6:532-33) over the natural images that Wordsworth is so preoccupied with at that recollected instant when he remembers the Swiss peasant unhappily deflating the young travelers' expectations as they learn from him "that we had cross'd the Alps" (Prelude, 6:524), so too was Napoleon, "a simple sub-lieutenant of artillery," generally characterized, at least in England, as a usurper who, according to The Annual Register of 1800, had achieved what he had achieved "in defiance of reason." Furthermore, the coup that brought Napoleon to power had taken place on Brumaire, "the month of mists in the vividly imagined Revolutionary calendar," thus suggesting, according to Liu, a significant likeness between the Napoleonic coup that Wordsworth had read about and that Wordsworthian imagination that some five years after that November coup, lifted itself up "Like an unfather'd vapour."

The battle materials are similarly analogized to Wordsworth's account of imagination, the 1804 rising up of imagination being likened by Liu to Napoleon's tactics in his passage through the Swiss Alps preceding the 1800 battle of Marengo, "a march widely reported as a series of halts followed by breakthroughs," a passage that followed Wordsworth and Jones's own transit through Switzerland (though not exactly, Liu is forced to concede, since Napoleon crossed the Alps not at Simplon but at Great St.
Bernard Pass, "about fifty miles southwest"). Finally, there is the destruction "of the French fleet at Akoubir on the mouth of the Nile" (29), the conclusion to an Egyptian campaign that immediately followed the Swiss campaign, so that Wordsworth's own tactics in the passage on the imagination which concludes in that "access of joy / Which hides" the mind "like the overflowing Nile" (Prelude, 6:547-48) can be read as a "Layering of the Nile into the Alps," thereby following the Napoleonic military precedent.

I must confess that I find the parallels Liu offers to link Napoleonic warfare and the Wordsworthian imagination scarcely more compelling than Fluellen's famous likening of the rivers in Macedon to those in Monmouth--both have salmon--in his tracing of parallels between Alexander the Great and Henry V. Admittedly, the Liu essay, though widely regarded as "canonical," thus explaining its inclusion by Duncan Wu as one of two scholarly essays on Wordsworth in his recent anthology of contemporary Romantic criticism, nonetheless, surely falls far short of the standards of proof that we required of what was thought of as source study fifty years ago, offering far less evidences for its proposed analogues than we find, say, in Lowes's The Road to Xanadu, a similarly famed historicizing study from a now almost forgotten era of criticism. Moreover, to accept Liu's argument, I believe, places us in the uncomfortable position of having to look upon
Wordsworth as a sort of Uncle Toby among the fortifications, a man consumed to the apparent point of obsession by military tactics, and this despite the almost exclusively nonmilitary character of the topics treated in the books of The Prelude written in 1804 and 1805. Beyond that, we are also required to regard Wordsworth as either endowed with virtually total recall of newspaper accounts of battles of four and five years earlier, or else engaged in something like systematic archival study of the military events reported in The Annual Register as preparation for writing the 1804 passage on imagination. Liu cites accounts of the Battle of Marengo by Hazlitt and Scott as evidence of a Romantic poeticizing of these battles, but these writers mentioned the Battle of Marengo, not as part of a meditation on the imagination, a surely random and unrelated context, but as a part of their biographies of Napoleon, an undertaking for which presumably they did engage in something like systematic archival study. But nowhere does Liu ever cite any evidence of comparable interest in these battles elsewhere in the writings of Wordsworth, and yet he would have us believe them to provide a determining historicizing subtext for the famous passage on imagination.

Finally, there are such patent dissimilarities between the Napoleonic speeches and strategies that are analogized to Wordsworth's account of imagination that even Liu himself is forced to acknowledge difference in the midst of
what he otherwise would convince us is likeness. Thus he speaks of several lines from the passage on imagination as nothing less than "a double of Napoleon's widely publicized rallying speeches to his armies" (29): but is Napoleon's exhortation to his soldiers in 1796, "you have done much, but does there remain nothing more to be done?" really the "double" of Wordsworth's 1804 assertion that "Our destiny, our nature, and our home / Is with infinitude" (Prelude 538-39) and with "something evermore about to be" (Prelude 542). And yet immediately after asserting this allegedly self-evident doubling by Wordsworth of Napoleon's rallying speeches, Liu is forced to concede that the two passages differ in the most striking ways. For while Napoleon's words incite his troops to march and do battle by the promise of "profit" from "our victories," the imagination which Wordsworth here celebrates "Thinks not of spoils or trophies" (Prelude 544) but is instead "blest in thoughts / That are their own perfection and reward" (Prelude 545-46). Rather than regarding the fact of indisputable difference as putting into question this whole scenario of intertextual likeness, thereby running the risk that this fragilely constructed interpretive house of cards put together on a principle of supposed resemblance might have to be pulled down, Liu simply moves to modify and extend that scenario so that it can include not just resemblance but also difference, framing that difference
narrowly as the rejection of "Napoleon's famed spoliations" (29).

But more to the point from the perspective of the present analysis than the question of whether Liu succeeds in establishing his case for the resemblance of Napoleon to the Wordsworthian imagination to our satisfaction is the question of what it is that we are to infer if he has done so. Liu's concluding inference, like much of the new historicism devised in opposition to the Yale school, is that the point of imagination's thrusting out against its "imaginary antagonist" "Wordsworthian nature" is "to divert attention from the real battle to be joined between history and the self" (31). But this is so abstractly conceived, we must wonder why that history covertly hinted at in these lines denying history by a roundabout praising of imagination must be about not just any historical episode but about Napoleon, and, even more narrowly, about Napoleon as military conqueror both in Paris and abroad. Liu himself, I think, explains why the Wordsworthian imagination should be like Napoleon only a few paragraphs before this by indicating, how in a common British characterization of Napoleon, "one species of reaction was constant, if officially inadmissible: admiration of the 'genius,' 'sublimity,' and 'imagination' represented by Napoleon" (30).

Such a poeticizing of the exercise of Napoleonic power, must surely be reversible: that is, if Napoleon as
conqueror is like the poet in possessing imaginative powers superior to those of other men, then the poet and his powers of imagination are conversely like Napoleon in their aggrandizingly militaristic impulse, a way in which adversarial criticism of Wordsworth has frequently represented his poetic powers. Thus, in this seemingly spontaneous heralding of the imagination’s eruption and intrusion into the literal recounting of a long-ago summer tour, an eruption and intrusion apprehended at the very moment of recounting and apprehended then as virtually atemporal and undifferentiated “flashes” (Prelude, 6:535), we find embedded a historical narrative of the young Napoleon’s politic and military exploits that is in actuality our primary signified, though rendered more palatable for us by being sanitized, divested of its least savory political aspects. So the discerning reader will understand that “if” the passage in question “begins with coup d’état, such illegality becomes progressively transformed until, by the end, Wordsworth has purged tyranny from Imagination in the flow of the Nile.”

But the Napoleonizing of the imagination does not conclude with the apocalyptic emergence of imagination in book 6 of The Prelude. For Liu, the stages of Napoleonic success are also the key to Wordsworth’s larger project in The Prelude as a whole, its delineation of “the Growth of a Poet’s Mind,” for even in that larger project the Wordsworthian imagination does not even seem to be purged
of Napoleonic tyranny. Turning to the later books of *The Prelude* and “Wordsworth’s post-Revolutionary argument of originality,” Liu prepares us for his explanation of how “the full individuation of the poetic self” will be carried out by Wordsworth by once more adopting a Napoleonic terminology and history: initially controlling the operations of “the poetic self”—as the analogized agent controlled the destiny of France—is what Liu identifies as “its triumvirate Directory of memory, affection, and imagination.” Then pursuing that analogy to its next historic phase, Liu writes, “From this Directory, the First Consul of the mind, Imagination, at last usurps power” (215). Hence that “Imagination” (now restored from its earlier impairment) which all along with “intellectual love” (*Prelude*, 13:186) has been, or at least so Wordsworth tells us, his “theme” (*Prelude*, 13:185)—“For they are each in each, and cannot stand / Dividually” (*Prelude*, 13:187-88)—is divested of that love and likened to the most aggrandizing, conquering, and, in the end, dictatorial of men.

Of course, when Wordsworth himself speaks directly of Napoleon and his militaristic successes and rise to power, the poet’s judgments are invariably highly critical. At the very height of Napoleon’s military successes and his ascent to absolute power, Wordsworth in his own words, unencrypted by any reference to imagination (that supposed interpretive key to the truly initiated), tells us that he
“grieved for Buonaparté,” (“1801,” 1), having rather atypically concerned himself in his thoughts of Napoleon only with, "the tenderest mood / Of that man's mind--what can it be?" (2-3), an understandable concern given what Wordsworth pacifistically sets forth here as his principal article of political faith: "'Tis not in battles that from youth we train / The governor who must be great and good" (“5-6). Instead, “the stalk” upon which “true Power doth grow” (13-14) has its origins in “[t]houghts motherly, and meek as womanhood” (8), a Wordsworthian assertion that his feminist critics might perhaps wish to ponder. And contemplating those Englishmen who have rushed off to France to see Napoleon installed as first consul (that exalted, self-appointed position Liu would have us regard as the Napoleonic equivalent of the Wordsworthian imagination), Wordsworth, writing from Calais during the brief armistice after the Treaty of Amiens, can only speak with contempt and derision of those who would “bend the knee” (“Calais, August 1802,,” 6) in deference to such an unmerited claim for “reverence” (9): “Shame on you, feeble Heads, to slavery prone!” (14). (It is perhaps no less worth mentioning that Napoleon’s final elevation, his installation by the pope in 1804 as emperor of France, is an event characterized even more scathingly by Wordsworth, who likens it to “the dog / Returning to his vomit” [Prelude, 10:935-36].)
The tendency of adversarial criticism to present the Wordsworthian imagination as essentially aggrandizing is particularly prominent in feminist criticism, where such aggrandizement is often taken to epitomize the masculine poet. Thus Ross, a leading feminist critic and criticizer of Romanticism, identifies another military leader who is to be likened to Wordsworth in the exercise of imagination, although in fairness to Ross I must tell you that this general has the advantage of having been likened to the type of the poet by Wordsworth himself in a relatively late critical essay. In the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface of 1815," Wordsworth, speaking of the poet, says of the "original Genius of a high order" that "for what is peculiarly his own, he will be called upon to clear and often to shape his own road:--he will be in the condition of Hannibal among the Alps" (PrW, 3:80). This certainly appears to be, as Ross contends, "the poet as man of action, as masculine quester, as ruler of visionary empires."²⁹² But Ross would also read the poet as "masculine quester" back into Wordsworth's more familiar and ultimately more consequential earlier critical writings as well, back into that Preface we customarily think of as the Preface. (Indeed, for Ross, what transpires from the time of the earlier critical writings is simply that the image of the poet as man of action, as warrior and conqueror--as Hannibal--that was already "the governing paradigm of the poetic vocation in the preface and its
appendix becomes blatant in the ‘Essay, Supplementary to the Preface of 1815’” [36].

In that earlier Preface, though, the poet would seem most basically defined by Wordsworth’s famous egalitarian formulation as "a man speaking to men" (PrW, 1:138) and seems nowhere explicitly likened to any such commandingly aggressive presence as Hannibal or Napoleon or any other military leader. But Ross does spy one point in the Preface—the extended comparison of the poet and the scientist—where Ross believes that the poet’s activity can be ideologically criticized, shown to share the impulses and attitudes of that masculinist military-industrial-scientific complex that operates to our detriment in other human spheres. In fact, Ross himself connects these three enterprises by placing them together in a grouping that would perhaps seem neither necessary or natural to any but the already ideologically committed, when he describes the poet, in performing his acts of “internal conquest,” employing means that are analogous to those practiced by “the scientist, the industrialist, the conqueror.” Indeed, in Ross’s account, the poet goes beyond even “the scientist, the industrialist, the conqueror” in the extent of his aggrandizing, since each of these three apparently engages only “in the external conquest of material possessions,” while the poet in his efforts seeks to establish “not simply an external kingdom of things, but also the internal kingdom of ideas and feelings,” hence
asserting his rule not only over men's bodies but over their minds as well. It is again with the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface of 1815" that Ross begins his linkage of poetry, science, and conquest as connected forms of masculine aggrandizement for Wordsworth. Just after having made the seemingly purely aesthetic claim that the "appropriate business of poetry is to treat of things not as they are, but as they appear" (63), Wordsworth parenthetically and rather inexplicably adds an otherwise unelaborated likening of the apparently disparate vocations of poetry and science—telling us that the "business of poetry (. . . if genuine, is as permanent as pure science)" (PrW, 3:63)—a brief noting of likeness that Ross is quick to seize upon as grist for the adversarial mill. Though Wordsworth might be thought of as doing little more here than tooting his own horn as poet in the face of the growing prestige of the scientist, Ross would ask us to place this remark within that network of masculinist interconnections and affiliations that he maintains ideologically govern the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface": "As Wordsworth re-empowers the poetic vocation and capitalizes on its capacity to cultivate the province of feeling for the manly action of conquest, he also stresses poetry's alliance with science, the discipline that seems to threaten it most." Yet it is difficult to see why we should take this assertion made in passing by Wordsworth that there is some attribute common to both "the
business of poetry” and to “science” (an attribute designated as permanence) to amount to a claim for an “alliance” between them, with those implications of commonness of purpose and action in concert that the term “alliance” customarily implies.

In the earlier Preface with its far more fully elaborated comparison of poetry and science, Wordsworth offers even less ground for any claim of alliance between the two activities. Even at what might seem to us the comparatively late date of 1802, Wordsworth still does not seem to believe that “the labours of the men of science” have been able to “create any material revolution, direct or indirect in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive” (PrW, 1:141). But even if the scientist should at some later time create “any material revolution in our condition” or in our “impressions,” the poet, Wordsworth maintains, would still take precedence over the scientist since the poet’s activities have influence over an incomparably larger sphere. Indeed, Ross himself concedes that this is the position of Wordsworth, telling us that in the Preface the poet is given “priority” over the scientist: it is “the poet who leads the way, and not the scientist,” and “serves as the source of authority, not the scientist” (41). The reason the poet is granted that right of leadership, that “authority,” that “priority” over the scientist is that he attempts to do and does so much more: according to Wordsworth's own words in
the preface, words Ross himself quotes, the poet “binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it spread over the whole earth, and over all time” (PrW, 1:141). But, according to Ross, the comparison in the preface of the poet to the scientist (to the poet’s seeming advantage) is merely the circuitous and secretive route by which Wordsworth is able to metaphorically return to the place where he has wished to be from the very beginning. It is simply a forerunner, an earlier iteration, of that rhetoric of male aggrandizement and imperial enterprise to which Wordsworth is so naturally given that we had already seen him employ it unequivocally—indeed “blatantly”—in the “Essay: Supplementary to the Preface.” So in the Preface too, as we might anticipate, Ross will find a rhetoric "of masculine conquest, of empire building, that suggests a spiritual Hannibal conquering Alps both of the soul and of the physical world.”

(Why Wordsworth should revert to such rhetoric in the Preface only after comparing the poet and the scientist is not really explained by Ross but is perhaps at least hinted at in the suggestion on the preceding page of The Contours of Masculine Desire that the scientist (and ultimately the poet) share deep underlying affiliations in their common drive for “external conquest of material possessions” [40].)

In taking inventory of the weapons the poet employs in his acts of “manly conquest, of empire building,” Ross very
noticeably omits from Wordsworth’s account of how the poet carries out his imperial pursuits those very un-Hannibalesque and doubtlessly unmanly binding agents of "relationship and love" that the poet as a “rock of defence for human nature, an upholder and preserver,” is to be found “carrying everywhere with him” (PrW, 1:141), according to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. (In fact, the description of the poet as carrier of “relationship and love” appears in one of the only two sentences omitted by Ross from an otherwise quite lengthy quotation from the comparison of the poet to the scientist in the preface.) That seemingly cryptic description in the Preface of the poet “carrying everywhere with him relationship and love” is certainly not elaborated upon by Wordsworth there, but even in its bare utterance, it provides a sense of the poet that hardly seems to comport with the idea of the poet as manly conqueror that Ross would have us believe Wordsworth was advancing in the preface. Fortunately, for our present purposes, in book 2 of The Prelude, written prior to the comparison of the poet and the man of science in the preface, Wordsworth had already offered a far more detailed account (neither Hannibalesque nor masculine) of the mutually supportive way in which “relationship and love” foster the youthful poet’s development and assist him in gaining a true understanding of the world.

While the brief description in the Preface of the poet “carrying with him relationship and love” may be regarded
as essentially a statement of Wordsworth’s poetics, the account in The Prelude of the way in which “relationship and love” mutually contribute to the mind’s development is more broadly epistemological, though, to be sure, the poet as “a man speaking to men” (PrW, 1:138) also finds the interacting workings of “relationship and love” the real and indispensable basis for his own more specialized activities as a poet. Moreover, the epistemology that evolves as a joint enterprise of “relationship and love” is not some Kantian mind-determined shaping of the world out there to render it intelligible and meaningful, an epistemology of mastering and overcoming, an imposition of consciousness or imagination or spirit on the passive and hapless epistemological Other in what, from a feminist perspective, is frequently identified with Romanticism with its propensity toward masculine aggrandizement, toward what Ross takes to be a virtually ubiquitous Wordsworthian desire for conquest. It is rather another instance of Wordsworth’s empiricism, another instance of how the mind develops and improves through the environmentally determining influences of the external world upon it, becoming in that process of development more and more like that implicitly feminized nature that is “the nurse / The guide, the guardian of my heart,” more and more like that which truly is.

The history of how the mind and--more narrowly--the poet’s mind develops in accordance with the doctrine of
“relationship and love” begins for Wordsworth when as “a Babe, by intercourse of touch, / I held mute dialogues with my Mother's heart” (Prelude, 2:282-83), a crucially formative age in which “the infant sensibility, / Great birthright of our Being” (2:285-86) first emerges. That “sensibility,” known originally only by “touch,” is in reality the initial stirring for the poet of powers that will come to be exercised in more specialized and implicitly spiritualized ways, since he now retrospectively recognizes that “infant sensibility” to be nothing less than “the first / Poetic spirit of our human life” (2:273-74). Even after having moved beyond the immediate presence of the mother in his childhood growth, his crucial “infant sensibility” was neither lost nor diminished but has instead been “[a]ugmented and sustained”; and “the means” by which that augmentation and sustaining was carried out, the influence of natural objects on the mind of the growing boy, is the tale, Wordsworth informs us, he has already told, what he has “endeavor’d to display” (2:284) up to this point in the recollecting of the history of his own life that will become The Prelude. Having reached a stage in that personal history (presumably sometime in adolescence) when he found himself “[s]eeking the visible world, nor knowing why” (2:288), a surprising development since this occurred at a time when “[t]he props of my affection were remov’d” (2:294)—that is, the boyhood games and sports and excursions that had in childhood been the
primary motivation for the young Wordsworth to go out into nature had lost their predominant interest for him— Wordsworth began to look upon nature intrinsically, as a good in itself. Now to his attentively receptive mind, the “mind” that had reached that point in its development when it “lay open” “to nature’s finer influxes” (2:298–99), Wordsworth tells us, “All that I beheld / Was dear to me” (2:296–97). And to that lovingly inquisitive but nonetheless essentially receptive mind, nature brought not just happiness but the knowledge of what is genuinely there, nature's true relational connectedness:

The seasons came,
And every season to my notice brought
A store of transitory qualities
Which, but for this most watchful power of love,
Had been neglected, left a register
Of permanent relations, else unknown.

(2:307–13)

Thus, if we follow this preliminary exposition of the joining together of “relationship and love,” what the poet of the Preface does, in his role as “upholder and preserver,” is to give us a knowledge of what is already out there, training us (just as in “Lines Written in Early Spring”) to direct our attention to relational connections in nature that might then serve as models for the
constitution of our own human communities, communities, that by conforming to the true nature of things, will be relationally and lovingly bound together.

Moreover, that "most watchful power of love" that directs our attention to the "difference / Perceived in things" (2:318-19), that is, in the objects of nature, hardly seems like some fundamentally masculine capability, since the passage immediately preceding this in book 2 of The Prelude traces the origins of this "power" back to infancy when we are told, in some of the most strikingly empiricist language in The Prelude, of its ultimate derivation from the lovingness of the mother whose "feelings pass into" her male infant's "torpid life, / Like an awakening breeze" (2:244-45). Even while being "Nurs'd in his Mother's arms" and, more, even while he "sleeps / Upon his Mother's breast" (2:240-41), his capacity to recognize the relations that inhere in things (that same power that was "augmented and sustained" after "the props of" his "affections were remov'd") is stirred into activity, and the male infant begins, at the simplest epistemological level, to learn the world. What the male infant acquires from the maternal presence and that "discipline of love" to which she subjects him is an "apprehsive habitude" (2:255-56), that repeated perceptual going out by the infant that enables him to engage in the most fundamental of epistemological tasks, the recognition of objects as objects, that is, perceiving and
understanding those relations that really obtain within any individual object and distinguish it from all other objects, the power

to combine

        In one appearance, all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detach'd
And loath to coalesce.

(2:247-50)

Thus, it would appear that the most fundamental of activities of mind and those from which the making of poetry evolves are feminine both in origin and application.

        Yet to Wordsworth's feminist critics, even in this famous passage that would credit the feminine with a formative role in the making of the poet's mind, the male poet is suspect. The very assertion that would endow him with a maternally derived sensibility that Wordsworth designates as "the first / Poetic spirit of our human life" is in fact the grounds for the accusation made by Richardson that what we have here is not a giving credit where credit is due, thereby privileging the female, but rather "the male child's absorption of his mother's sympathetic faculty" and, thus, another instance of the aggrandizing male Romantic poet's "Colonization of the Feminine."²⁹⁷ It is the catch 22 of our current criticism with its hermeneutics of disparagement: wherever the male
Romantic poet implies the apparent androgynousness or perhaps even the femininity of the poetic faculty--its origins, for example, in a tabula rasa that at life's externally unconditioned beginning knows no gender--or, going further, ascribes to himself as poet what seemingly should be deemed positively represented female qualities--a sensibility maternally derived that enables him to "carry everywhere with him relationship and love"--he is accused of bad faith, of appropriating from or exercising power and dominance over that female whose feminine attributes, even when "privileged by the male Romantic poet," are "by the same token debased" (21).

Almost never mentioned by Wordsworth's adversarial critics are all of those qualities he attributes to himself that would call into question the claim that his fundamental self-representation is as a male aggrandizer, a Hannibal or Napoleon of the imagination. Generally absent--as if that absence is stipulated by the hermeneutics of disparagement--are those characteristics found in Wordsworth's frequent, unaggrandizing self-representations, his depictions of himself as calm, as uncompetitive, as peaceful, as gentle--self-representations especially frequent in the poetry written between 1797 and 1800. Having essentially no place in these adversarial characterizations, for example, is Wordsworth's crucial self-tribute to the "Calm existence that is mine when I / Am worthy of myself" (1:360-61), a state of being that is,
by some miracle of developmental fusion, compounded out of "all / The terrors, all the early miseries, / Regrets, vexations, lassitudes" (1:355-57), indeed out of "all / The thoughts and feelings which have been infus'd / Into my mind" (Prelude 1:358-59). Delineating the formula for attainment of that calm—and it has, at least at times, already been attained by him he indicates—is the aim of the project outlined, at least in the earliest written books of The Prelude, where the calm Wordsworth hopes to arrive at is the good and goal of nature's framing, teleologically directed "dark / Invisible workmanship" (1:352-53). In the very first lines of the poem, Wordsworth explicitly tells us that it is the aim of nature to make us in that way like itself, to inculcate in us its calm. So he remembers the sounds of the Derwent already working to that end, even in his infancy, making

ceaseless music through the night and day
Which with its steady cadence, tempering
Our human waywardness, compos'd my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me,
Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,
A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.
(1:279-85)
The aggrandizing self is fretful and wayward, while the person of achieved—or, more accurately, acquired—calm is morally praiseworthy and most like nature, doubtlessly most like nature because of what he has morally achieved.

One prominent factor in the poet’s evolution toward that “Calm existence that is mine when I am / Worthy of myself” (with its concomitant diminishing of the “waywardness” and fretfulness customary within the “dwellings of mankind”) is a lessening of a tendency toward a competitiveness that should presumably be a markedly masculine trait in our adversarial stereotyping. So a major feature of the story Wordsworth tells in the first two books of The Prelude is how in adolescence

the beauteous forms
Of Nature were collaterally attach’d
To every scheme of holiday delight,
And every boyish sport, less grateful else,
And languidly pursued.

(2:51-55)

Thus adolescent boat-races, the very epitome of masculine competitiveness, when having as their finish line some island in the waters of Windermere "musical with birds," some goal to which "the beauteous forms / Of Nature were collaterally attach'd," instead of becoming a vehicle for the socializing of middle-class youth into the competitive
acquisitiveness of adult male life became instead a vehicle for ameliorating self-interestedness, lessening feelings of rivalry through the shared experience at journey's end of those "beauteous forms."

In such a race,
So ended, disappointment could be none,
Uneasiness, or pain, or jealousy:
We rested in the shade, all pleased alike,
Conquer'd and conqueror.

(2:65-69)

Indeed, it is by just such paradoxically unlikely means, the competition in sports that makes men of boys and boys of men in the usual accounts of the construction of masculinity, that Wordsworth is able to explain how through the collateral-attached presence of nature he was made gentle, how—as he puts it most clearly in a manuscript variant to line 69 of the 1805 The Prelude—"selfishness / Was mellowed down" (Prelude, p. 46) in a process that will carry him eventually to a disinterested concern for others and ultimately to a truly universal benevolence.

But the place in the poetry written between 1797 and 1800 that best expresses the unaggrandizing Wordsworth, the gentle Wordsworth, and indeed, if one wishes to think in terms of gender, the feminized Wordsworth is a manuscript passage I have noted before because of its obvious
connections to “Nutting,” that was composed at Goslar sometime in the fall of 1798 and published in the Cornell Wordsworth. There Wordsworth begins by making a claim that he knows to be astonishing even for him: that "I would not strike a flower / As many a man will strike his horse” (“I would not strike a flower,” 1-2). He then goes on to say that

If, from the wantonness with which we play
With things we love, or from a freak of power,
Or from involuntary act of hand
Or foot unruly with excess of life,
It chanced that I ungently used a tuft
Of meadow-lillies, or had snapp’d the stem
Of fox-glove bending o'er his native rill,
I should be loth to pass along my way
With unreprov'd indifference,—I would stop
Self-questioned, asking wherefore that was done.

(3-12)

Wordsworth shows that he plainly understands the unusualness—indeed the seeming eccentricity, perhaps even the unmanliness—of such an extraordinarily fastidious concern by putting words designed to castigate the speaker in the mouth of an imagined interlocutor, the man, “who judging rashly,” (13) would "deem that / Such are idle
sympathies, the toys of one, / More curious than need is" (13-15).

Wordsworth's long and complex defense of himself against this accusation certainly gives us the ecological Wordsworth in spades, the friend of earth: for as Wordsworth tells us, in language iterative of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," that he who learns the lesson of respect for the things of nature finds "even the "meaniest object, else perhaps / Despis'd or loath'd or dreaded" (53-54) will "cleave / to his affections" and the earth therefore become "A temple--made for reverence and love" (61). But here, as in so many other places in Wordsworth, the benefits of the turn to nature are most significantly to be understood instrumentally, love of nature leading to love of man, so that a stated love of nature is not to be understood as the masking behind a veil of ecological piety of that history that is politics but as the very foundation of a moral, social, and political commitment whose end is the general welfare of all others.

Addressing the man who presumably errs in "judging rashly," Wordsworth at first seems to argue that, carefully considered, their principles are not so very different after all. Both would protect the flowers of nature with something akin to the fierce protectiveness with which a mother protects her child:

say, have ye not
Your gardens with their individual flowers
Which ye would spring to rescue from the hand
Of any rude destroyer with the same
Instinctive eagerness, as if a child,
Your own, were sleeping near a lion's mouth?

(15-20)

It is that pivotal modifier "your own," however, which
finally distinguishes Wordsworth from the man who judges
rashly. Unlike his critic's concern, Wordsworth's concern
for flowers is not confined to those of his garden but
extends also to flowers that are not his own but grow
freely in the meadow and by the river, an implied criticism
of the gardener very much like that directed against those
in "The Old Cumberland Beggar," who, Wordsworth tells us,
while "not negligent / In acts of love to those with whom
they dwell, / Their kindred and the children of their
blood" ("Old Cumberland Beggar," 138-40), perform by that
seeming kindness what can only be accounted in our moral
reckonings "inevitable charities" (145) that lack
"Wherewith to satisfy the human soul" (145-46) Though
careful to give the gardener his due, to wish him "a
recompense / The best which your devotion can bestow," ("I
would not strike a flower," 21-22), the poet immediately
turns to those whom he has known who are "[f]ar happier"
(24), presumably his superiors in the scale of moral
assessment, and "chiefly one beloved maid" (24), a woman
usually identified biographically as Mary Hutchinson, of whom Wordsworth apparently as early as 1799 was already willing to speak of as "beloved." That "beloved maid," Wordsworth tells us, does not merely care for her own, like the mother protecting her child "sleeping near the lion's mouth," but instead

    her heart
    Is everywhere: even the unnoticed heath
    That o'er the mountains spreads its prodigal bells
    Lives in her love.

(25-28)

Conditioned by feminist criticism, we may be inclined to see in this another instance of Wordsworthian gender politics in an age of sensibility, ascribing to the female qualities of feeling toward nature, which, while ostensibly virtues, are in actuality of little consequence in that man's world that is the only place in which things truly count. But that "beloved maid" whose love extends so far apparently differs in no way whatsoever from the male poet whose "sympathies" are judged by other males (though judged "rashly") as "idle" because he "would not strike a flower / As many a man would strike his horse."

What is the larger good, however, of such "idle sympathies," whether gendered or not, beyond providing us
with a vehicle for expressing our purely aestheticized and vaguely spiritual "reverence" for the "temple" of the earth, thus enabling Wordsworth to make that turn to nature that new historicists would have us see as merely a displacement of history, that continuing displacement that is itself a primary marker of Wordsworth's political irresponsibility? But the politics of this passage are not difficult to tease out nor do we need any displacements to do so. In addition to advocating an intrinsic reverence and love for nature, a reverence and love for the flowers of the earth as a good in themselves, and a reverence and love for the earth from which they bloom as a temple, what we have explicitly here is paradoxically--and astonishingly enough--a warning against gardens, a warning against gardens, moreover, that, by extension, is also a warning against attachment to property. Unlike that nature that belongs to no owner and "lives in" the "love" of such persons as the speaker and the "beloved maid," who "is Nature's inmate" (25), the garden, while prized "by a [ ] law" (32) (from the context we can only imagine the unreadable words to indicate that that law is something positive, something like "just"), is to be classified with those "things / Our hands have form'd" (32-33) and which conform to a "love of order" that is "a sentiment / Inherent in the mind" (34-35). Yet that self-concerned and ordering passion that directs our hands to the making of our garden, Wordsworth very surprisingly says, "is
productive evermore / Of littleness and pride (38-39). To love that nature then that belongs to no owner, that is not ours and is therefore not property, is, for the reader to whom these finally unpublished lines are addressed, to cultivate disinterestedness, to correct the morally destructive products of self-concern, "Deformities that steal by easy steps / Into our heart" (44-45), to raise up his thoughts

From that abasement into which perforce
The mind must sink that hangs on its own works
With an exclusive dotage.

(45-48)

All this, of course, is part of that crucial Wordsworthian project that would carry us from a narrow and spiritually stultifying self-interest to a universally directed benevolence through the mediating agency of nature and thereby change the world, the point that is so eloquently made in the patently rhetorical question that concludes this section:

Need I add
That while he fosters such regard for things,
In which he finds no traces of himself,
By this pure intercourse those bastard loves,
Those low and fickle yearnings of the heart,
The wayward brood of vanity, must die
Within him and benevolence be spread
Like the Sun's light upon the open sea? (83-90)

How that mediating agency of nature actually effects such humanly directed moral action is never quite spelled out here, but Wordsworth unquestionably does believe our conduct toward nature is the efficient and necessary cause of the most socially beneficial and hence politically productive of virtues. Mere forbearance in this case, it would seem, is itself indicative of something more active, more ethically meritorious, a moral faculty willing to act disinterestedly in behalf of another when the needs or interests of that other require it. He who "would not strike a flower" and thereby shows he "thus respects a mute insensate form" (73) without needing "the gross appeal / Of tears and of articulate sounds, can he," Wordsworth asks, "Be wanting in his duties to mankind / Or slight the pleadings of the human heart?" (72-77). The key principle here would seem to be that simple forbearance is itself an indicator of love: they who would reprove themselves for even a careless violation of nature do so because, like the "beloved maid" who is "Nature's inmate," the respect they possess for "the mute, insensate thing" that cannot speak in its own behalf is like that "love" he ascribes to her in which "even the unnoticed heath / That o'er the mountain spreads its prodigal bells / Lives" (26-28). What is truly
surprising here though is the rapidity with which Wordsworth turns this narrow claim for the possibility of some form of disinterested affection for the beauteous objects of nature not simply into the basis for a sympathetic responsiveness to concretely rendered individual demands upon us, "the pleadings of a human heart," but also into an all encompassing claim of obligations to humanity at large, "duties to mankind," the phraseology of a moral discourse of universal benevolence that in the 1790s in England was often understood as a touchstone of radical allegiance, of continuing loyalty to the principles of a political movement in France that claimed that its constituency was humankind per se, representing itself almost from its outset as a revolution without borders.

That Wordsworth has some such all encompassing claim in mind, that he is putting forward a politically charged discourse of universal benevolence, would seem evident from the last lines of this never published passage. Out of that seemingly modest forbearance he displays (or perhaps enacts) toward the things of nature, a forbearance that "fosters" his "regard for things / In which he finds no traces of himself," by following this formula, Wordsworth's ultimately virtuous person shall achieve nothing less than the eradication of self-interest from his moral actions. The "wayward brood of vanity," Wordsworth explains in the language of the ethical necessitarian to which he so often
adverts, "must die / Within him," an eradication of that selfish core of the self that is the inextricably intertwined concomitant of the attainment of true benevolence. And that, of course, is to be the end of the process, the emergence of a "benevolence" that shall "be spread / Like the Sun's light upon the open sea." In describing that benevolence in terms of the "Sun's light," Wordsworth, in fact, returns (as we have noted before) to an image he had used two years earlier in "The Old Cumberland Beggar" to characterize a similar shift from self-interest to disinterestedness, though in the earlier passage the object of concern that carried the virtuous out of vanity is the identifiably human, the old Cumberland beggar or "like wanderer" ("Old Cumberland Beggar," 111), rather than some "mute insensate thing" of nature. Among those who undergo this transformation "[t]o virtue and true goodness" are the true philanthropists, the real heroes of Wordsworth's discourse of virtue between 1797 and 1800, those

By their good works exalted, lofty minds,
And meditative, authors of delight
And happiness, which to the end of time
Will live, and spread, and kindle.

(106-9)
And, as Wordsworth adds, in a manuscript passage that connects these socially transformative heroes, who have out of childhood contact with those like the old Cumberland beggar "found their kindred with a world / Where want and sorrow were" (115-16), these philanthropically disposed persons of good will and good works are not only agents of universal benevolence but of that more specialized branch of universal benevolence associated with Godwin, rational benevolence. For from these "lofty minds / And meditative," Wordsworth tells us (in a manuscript variant of "The Old Cumberland Beggar)," "reason falls / Like a strong radiance of the setting sun" in much the same figurative way as he will later explain the seemingly universal benevolence of the man who "would not strike a flower" as being "spread / Like the Sun's light upon the open sea."

As the man who would not strike a flower and whose moral disposition was shaped by childhood kindness toward the old Cumberland beggar, Wordsworth would almost surely have been willing to number himself among that philanthropic company, his conduct in these matters having satisfied the moral preconditions for membership. But the Wordsworth we have here is clearly not the assertive poet of new historicism nor feminist criticism, not even the familiar Yale poet of the apocalyptic consciousness, itself an earlier variant on the Wordsworth of the egotistical sublime. He is instead the unaggrandizing man, the man of
forbearance and acquired gentleness, who perhaps is to be thought of as feminized, if the gender-oriented critic insists, but who, almost certainly, would have thought of himself in terms of ethical categories unmarked by considerations of gender in accordance with the universalizing presuppositions of the moral discourse of benevolence. From this discourse neither male nor female, as moral agent, is excluded, neither the poet himself who "would not strike a flower" nor that "beloved maid" in whose love the flowers of nature "live" and whose "heart is everywhere." Needless to say, for Wordsworth, it is just such a love in its outgoing inclusiveness that will be extended by poet and maid to humanity at large in accordance with that process by which love of nature leads to love of man and eventually to the transformation of society as a whole by the moral effects of a general benevolence that is to be "spread / Like the Sun's light upon the open sea."
Chapter 6
Wordsworth and the Politics of Consciousness

For most Wordsworthians of an earlier generation, the politics of the poet with its sharp periodization and transformations was a relatively uncomplicated matter, a phase before the major poetry when Wordsworth both in France and in England was “[a]n active partisan” (Prelude, 10:737) of the French Revolution and long years of apostasy following the golden decade in which a one-time leader of the party of humanity became finally and irretrievably lost. About the golden decade and its major poetry, there was a less clear-cut consensus, but still for most of us these years and its great poetry could be viewed as expressing in some significant sense the French Revolution by other means. To be sure, one could find intimations of apostasy as early as the political sonnets of 1802 with their patriotic and Francophobic biases, but surely in the years between 1797 and 1801, the years of Lyrical Ballads and its famous preface and the years of The Ruined Cottage and the first books of The Prelude, the
presence of Wordsworth’s leveling muse was plainly in evidence. In general, a “time / Of dereliction and dismay” for most British liberals when even “good men / On every side fall off,” still these years of deepening repression in Britain and a cynical Thermidorean and Napoleonic aftermath to “golden hours” in France were, for Wordsworth himself, a time when (in E. P. Thompson’s memorable terms) what was, at most, disenchantment had not yet turned into default, and when Wordsworth still professed “A more than Roman confidence, a faith / That fails not” (Prelude, 2:459–60) in what must surely in spirit have been something not so very different from the democratic ideals he had overtly espoused only five years earlier.

The claim that Wordsworth in some significant manner kept faith with those ideals is—as we have seen—one that has regularly been put in question by the new historicism, so that the critic who advances it risks not only accusations of error but imputations of datedness by reiterating it. Under new historicist scrutiny with its unflagging alertness to telltale signs of false consciousness and bad faith, what for many of us was a once crucial distinction between the beleaguered, troubled, but still persevering radicalism of Wordsworth in 1798—a “Jacobinism-of-doubt” as Thompson calls it—and the
emerging conservatism that probably began to set in after 1805 finds itself subsumed within the ideological uniformity of what McGann would have us regard as a necessarily self-betraying romantic ideology inherently “supportive of established power.” Indeed, much of the energy of the seminal works of new historicism in Wordsworth studies had, in fact, gone into just this enterprise of dissolving chronological distinctions within Wordsworth’s great period and rolling back the date when an antirevolutionary conservatism set in. Thus in The Romantic Ideology, McGann is careful to tell us that “Tintern Abbey” and “Peele Castle,” long read as affirmation and palinode, “are only separated from each other, ideologically and stylistically, by a difference in emphasis” (109). Similarly, in that landmark work of literary detection that even before publication served as an audacious model for new historicist theory and practice, Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems, Levinson discerns from the clue of the missing abbey, the will of the poet of “Tintern Abbey” to accommodate himself to “dominant social structures,” an act of ideological tampering with “the picture of the mind” (“Tintern Abbey,” 61) allegedly as revealing in its own way as, let us say, the excision of the purged comrade from the widely reprinted group photo of
the party leadership in Prague with which Milan Kundera begins *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Finally, in the most explicitly political of these seminal new historicist texts, James K. Chandler insists that by 1798 Wordsworth was already in ideological proximity to Burke, committed even then to those views for which Wordsworth would laud the ideological founder of conservatism in the celebration of Burke that was added in the 1820s to book 7 of *The Prelude*.303

Of course, it is the almost-by-definition socially derelict turn to the subject by the poet in 1798 that serves as the most fundamental grounds for this presumption by the new historicists of Wordsworth’s ideological guilt even then, his key role (especially in “Tintern Abbey”) in the founding of what McGann dismissively labels “the Consciousness industry.” Certainly, it is a temptation, with the hindsight acquired after two centuries of familiarity with the products of this industry, to believe that any turn to the subject is a kind of ideological malfeasance, a tacit acquiescence in the established social order that is tantamount to complicity with it. But I would submit that read historically, that is, from within the broad spectrum of feasible choices reasonably available to Wordsworth in the turbulent closing decade of the
eighteenth century, the turn to consciousness in 1798 by this industry pioneer is not prima facie evidence of dereliction but merely another form of adherence to that revolutionary faith in social betterment to which he even then held fast. Still attached to deeply uniformitarian and necessitarian beliefs, facets of a socially committed empiricism, Wordsworth at this time advanced a concept of consciousness that came to him already incorporated into that discourse of virtue by which proponents of radical change on both sides of the Channel gave expression to their politic ideas, expectations, and values. Self-representation, as Wordsworth then engaged in it, was an activity empirically grounded, outwardly directed, implicitly progressive, and, at moments, clearly utopian. In MS 1 of the “Prospectus” to The Recluse, Wordsworth in a key passage I discussed earlier, proposes in just these terms the clearest possible rationale for his subjective practice, for his having mingled “humbler matter” (Home at Grasmere, 1035), descriptions of “the mind and man / Contemplating” (1036-37), with the visionary social matter of his great argument. He has written so much about the “little realties of life” (1040) of one who is “In part, a Fellow citizen, in part / An outlaw, and a Borderer of his age” (1041-42), Wordsworth explains, in hopes that his life
may “Express the image of a better time / Desires more wise
and simpler manners” (41045-46). The turn to consciousness
then is not to be taken as a displacement and hence neglect
of social responsibilities, covertly undermining the
avowedly revolutionary aim of the “Prospectus” of making
“Paradise, & groves / Elysian” (1097-98), long held to be
only “A history, or but a dream” (999), into a lived
reality—indeed “the growth of common day” (1014)—at some
not very distant time. In his moral history, Wordsworth
tells us, he is to be regarded as a forerunner, a harbinger
of the general human betterment that awaits us, no doubt
hoping that by rendering those “better times” through the
life that prefigures them he shall hasten their
realization. Framed in the image of one who still deemed
himself in 1800 “in part / An outlaw and a Borderer of his
age,” the social arrangements of the future are presumably
not just to be amelioratively better but radically
different from those of the present. These are
arrangements we can only infer that Wordsworth assumed
would be condemned as lawlessness in the postrevolutionary
Britain of 1800—regarded as the imaginings of “An outlaw”—
because they would too closely resemble that vision of
society promised by the “golden hours” of a republican
France as yet untarnished by an aftermath of Jacobin excess, Thermidorean compromise, and Napoleonic betrayal.

But what most distinctively establishes the politics of these lines are the moral attributes he ascribes to himself and thus to those who are to dwell in that anticipated future he now exemplifies. "Desires more wise and simpler manners" are key terms and catchphrases in that discourse of virtue by which radicalism everywhere declared itself in the 1790s. We hear just such language, for example, with a not uncustomary limiting adjective in Crabb Robinson's complaint that Thelwall still lacked "that republican simplicity of Manners & Ideas which I wish to see universally spread." In 1794, when the clamor for virtue was at its loudest, when France presented itself as a republic of virtue--literally making virtue the order of the day by proclamation--in those days of rage when even the Reign of Terror was explained as an "emanation" of "virtue" by Robespierre the Incorruptible, the conception of public virtue took much of its character from moral notions like those put forward in Wordsworth's "Prospectus"; from the example of Rousseau with his claims of naturalness and moral purity; and from the precedent of an imagined America that in the words of R. R. Palmer was conceived of by the revolutionary leadership in France in
1794 as "thirteen small republics of simple manners and exemplary virtue." Though innocent-seeming in themselves as indicators of radical loyalty, wise desires and simple manners in those times of anger and retribution are not casually chosen moral attributes: they carry with them powerful oppositional resonance, signifying traces that recall despised traits that were on the verge of being supplanted, the paramount iniquities of the old regime, luxury and vice. The unpublished "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff" of 1794 provides the most explicit and detailed statement by the young Wordsworth of his revolutionary principles. There he clearly points to and denounces the radical social evils of display and depravity, evils that from Rousseau onward, such formulations as "more wise desires and simpler manners" were insinuatingly called upon to remind us of the wrongs of the old order, to condemn them and, beyond that, help eventually to extirpate them. Singled out in his general indictment of aristocratic behavior are just those failings that the upper classes are most liable to and that have had the most disastrous consequences for "the poor" below them: an appetite for luxury that leads the aristocracy "to snatching the bread from their mouths to eke out the 'necessary splendor' of nobility" (Pr W. 1:46), and a propensity to vice that
produces “the prostitution which miserably deluges our streets,” a social evil expressly attributed by Wordsworth to “aristocratical prejudices” (Pr W. 1:45).

Thus consciousness for Wordsworth in 1798 was a concept imbued with social purpose: to write about himself was to write of and for others. But it is not only by some imagined future community of the virtuous that Wordsworth assumes his mental and moral history will be reenacted. Even now, he tells us, there are certain contemporaries of his, kindred spirits—unnamed “philanthropists” as they were commonly designated by the radical discourse of the day—benefactors of humanity, whose course of development towards goodness, he believes, essentially parallels his own, so that in describing himself he indirectly speaks of others. Throughout the whole of the “golden decade” one relative constant in Wordsworth’s accounts of his mental history was a stated awareness that the various forms of intensity that occur in childhood, whether experienced as “glad animal movements” or as “celestial light,” diminish or even disappear in later years. Though ominously regarded from 1802 onwards as evidence of spiritual decline, between 1797 and 1800 such loss was readily assimilated to Wordsworth’s general social and psychological optimism and was taken as the regrettable but
necessary by-product of a developmental process by which he had reached a tranquillity that serves as a manifest psychological correlative to significant moral attainment, what he approvingly speaks of in the first book of The Prelude as “The calm existence that is mine when I / Am worthy of myself.” Episodes in his mental life that Wordsworth might well have considered possessions exclusively his own and appropriated as testimony to the poet’s uniqueness are, in fact, almost axiomatically assumed to have their resembling counterparts in the lives of others, who by virtue of the moral accomplishment and social concern they share with the poet can be expected to share an essentially similar history as well. So when at the beginning of Book 2 of the Prelude Wordsworth nostalgically reflects on childhood feelings now lost, it is easy for him to conjure up the image of another like himself who has undergone the same process of development, becoming nothing less than “the wisest and the best / Of all mankind” (Prelude, 2:22-23)—the philanthropist par excellence—and to wonder if he too, this moral and intellectual paragon, despite an obviously “abundant recompense” (“Tintern Abbey,” 88) for that lost childhood intensity, would still not wish to give “to duty and to truth / The eagerness of infantine desire” (Prelude, 2:25-
26). And after tracing his entry into the ethical life back to his childhood encounters with the old Cumberland beggar, Wordsworth is quick to assume that his own childhood experience has been no unique event, readily positing similar initiations for those whose moral advancement parallels his own: “lofty minds / And meditative,” who “from this solitary Being / Or from like wanderer” (“The Old Cumberland Beggar,” 110-11) have “found their kindred with a world / Where want and sorrow were.”

Such forays into consciousness and memory clearly do not feed solipsistic tendencies nor instill feelings of alienation and estrangement. They are undertaken with the consciousness of other minds as a kind of reassuring surround and actually reinforce Wordsworth’s sense of community and solidarity with the philanthropically inclined, “the wisest and the best,” and “lofty minds / And meditative.” Moreover, though these representations of an idealized philanthropic community seem mere abstractions, the conventionalized products of his discourse of virtue, there is every reason to believe that for Wordsworth they meshed with his real life and had roughly resembling counterparts in among his own acquaintance. Even in 1798, what we might think of as the Wordsworth circle was comprised of those who would still be deemed and, more
important, would still deem themselves philanthropists and hence radicals, those we know only as they appear in the letters and accounts of Wordsworth’s early years, men like James Losh, Francis Wrangham, and even the often maligned Basil Montagu. Some were friends from Wordsworth’s Cambridge years who had been enthusiasts with him of the first phases of the French Revolution; others had joined him in 1795 in what only one year after the great treason trials must surely have been a risky association with philosophic radicalism and its most notorious proponent, William Godwin. And though in 1798 the combination of disillusionment with events abroad and the dangers posed by the severity of repression at home had made “good men, / On every side fall off,” many of these members of the Wordsworth circle remained surprisingly and impressively steadfast in their dedication to revolutionary principles even then, and by that fidelity may well have conveyed to Wordsworth the sense that he dwelt among “lofty,” even “visionary minds.”

To that list of the steadfast, we must certainly add the name of a truly heroic champion of radical reform, John Thelwall, who was befriended and given refuge by Wordsworth and Coleridge at considerable personal risk to themselves (it apparently was a major factor in Wordsworth’s loss of
his lease at Alfoxden) in an episode that must figure heavily in any assessment of Wordsworth’s political allegiances during this period. (In terms of both what he believed and what he endured, Thelwall is not an implausible candidate for that conjectural “one” who might be nothing less than “the wisest and the best / Of all mankind.”)

In turning to poetry, declaring that to be his true vocation, Wordsworth did not really cast off old allegiances; he did not distance himself by a supposedly isolating withdrawal into consciousness from old allies with whom he had earlier shared a profoundly revolutionary faith. Indeed, speaking as a poet, Wordsworth clearly took for granted a fundamental identification with those whose interests were narrowly and specifically political, assuming that his inner history and theirs would be essentially alike, no doubt because he knew them to share common values that surely must have had similar antecedents. (Turning from art to life, as evidence of how closely aligned the politically oriented and the poetically oriented visionaries perceived themselves to be, we might wish to look again to that diary entry by Wordsworth’s friend Losh that we have already noted, in which Losh, only three months before the composition of “Tintern Abbey,”
agrees with Southey that “were there any place to go to emigration would be a prudent thing for literary men and the friends of freedom.”) And it is doubtlessly because Wordsworth assumed his history and hopes to be so closely intertwined with those who had maintained their early revolutionary ideals, one of his stated purposes as a poet was to provide them with support, praising them as “lofty” and “visionary,” as wise and good, rallying them in a time of “dereliction and dismay,” lending his voice to that joint enterprise that would culminate in the “better time” desired by every “outlaw of the present age.”

It is in terms of these relationships—Wordsworth’s sense, even as a poet, of affiliation and identification with the progressive and enlightened, and his continuing membership in the part of humanity (to use the language of the age)—that we are best able to situate Wordsworth politically in 1798. To our current historicizing criticism, eager to dispel all claims that Wordsworth might be of that party and would therefore have to be reckoned a leveling poet after all, he remains the quintessential poetic solitary, “Spectator ab extra” as Coleridge characterized him, a judgment that an implacably hostile Marxist analysis has chosen to interpret as manifest evidence—indeed, as unassailable proof—of Wordsworth’s
estrangement by virtue of irrevocably fixed class origins from those of inferior birth with whom he professed to sympathize. So Michael J. Friedman, after subjecting Coleridge’s observation to just such analysis, is able to sum up Wordsworth’s relations to those he writes about in just these terms: “He was a gentleman. The shepherds and solitaries were not.” And David Aers, operating from similar presuppositions, condemns Wordsworth on much the same grounds as “someone whose social and economic assumptions and experiences had little in common with those in “genuinely low estate” to whom he refers so knowingly.” For Karl Marx himself, class is a more flexible and fluid category than this, so that accidents of birth need not be absolutely determining in the formation of class attitudes, especially as they emerge at those critical moments when society seems in “the process of dissolution.” Indeed at the “decisive hour” of revolutionary struggle, Marx tells us in an important passage from the “Communist Manifesto,” we shall find—as he found himself in his study of the great revolution a half-century earlier—“that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands.”

Even on Marxist premises then, we cannot simply assume that
by having been born a gentleman Wordsworth was constitutionally incapable of truly feeling the sympathy he professed—nor incapable of willingness to act on it—for those born to a station inferior to his own. The real issue to be settled is whether Wordsworth, who during most of the revolutionary decade had clearly cut himself adrift from the ruling class to which belonged by birth, did not remain adrift during the early years of the period of his greatest poetry. Because dissenting political opinion in England had been effectively stilled at that time, evidence that speaks to this matter is necessarily sparse: we can expect no manifestos or public pronouncements of radical allegiance from Wordsworth. But by these casual declarations of affiliation and identification with those who, in the morally encoded political language of the day, must surely be termed philanthropists, he still considers himself one of those who has cut himself adrift: “An outlaw of the present age” by his own admission. To be adrift, “An outlaw,” is, however, to stand apart yet not alone, to work in concert with “the wisest and the best,” the “lofty” and “visionary,” he thought of as a vanguard, moral and intellectual precursors and allies who read the course of history rightly and choose future good over present ease and profit.
But those first new historicist critics, anxious to prove Wordsworth, overtly or covertly, knowingly or unknowingly, a full-fledged conservative by 1798 are not all easy to categorize. To be sure, from the very beginning of his career, James Chandler has customarily been linked with those who are indisputably new historicists and, more to our point, practitioners of a hermeneutics of disparagement. His name even appears in that original listing by Levinson in *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems* of those whom she counts on to do the serious and necessary work of the day—those whose practice “at once materialist and deconstructive” in Levinson’s words will have as its corrective effect the stripping away of the liberal façade that conceals indifference to political and social reform or, still worse, that conceals an implicit adherence to the old order’s established interests and institutions. Only a few years later, David Simpson, seeking to put some distance between his own work and that of the other major new historicists, cites Chandler, along with McGann, Levinson, and Liu, as one of those who “go too far” in “emphasizing the covertly reactionary elements in the apparently democratic young Wordsworth,” thereby rendering Wordsworth’s early writings “too thoroughly a figment of the minds of our post-Althusserian generation.”
And most recently, in a broad and highly informed summing up of Wordsworth’s poetic career in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, Nicola Trott singles out Chandler, along with Levinson and McGann, as the “powerful revisionists” who have “produced readings of the early poetry in terms of its hidden clues to tergiversations, or silent evasions of “history.”311

From Chandler’s statement of purpose in his highly influential *Wordsworth’s Second Nature*, one would think that he would presumably feel comfortable with this designation, to be linked with McGann, his teacher—and Levinson’s—when they were graduate students at the University of Chicago, apparently laying the groundwork even then for that radical reconceptualization of critical aims that was to transform Romantic studies. His statement of purpose certainly sounds all the appropriate new historicist notes, letting us know that *Wordsworth’s Second Nature* is to be understood as a treatment of “the ideologies of philosophy and power in Wordsworth’s unfolding career.”312 Yet upon reading, *Wordsworth’s Second Nature* seems not at all, in intent, like the books his fellow revisionists, McGann and Levinson, were producing at roughly the same time. To be sure, like the others, Chandler does propose for us a Wordsworth in 1798 who was
more conservative than we ever might have imagined, an adherent of Burke rather than Rousseau, a foe rather than friend of the French Revolution, in short, a staunch reactionary. But what would have been automatically grounds for condemnation of Wordsworth by McGann and Levinson is to Chandler an ideological choice by the poet of which he apparently approves. Burkean conservatism, which virtually everywhere else in an emerging new historicism was a term of opprobrium, seems for Chandler an implicit good. But if Wordsworth’s Second Nature apparently differs in intent from those other new historicist works that only too obviously are governed by a hermeneutics of disparagement, it does not differ from them in the effects or consequences it produces, reinforcing and even advancing the enterprise of condemnation. At the heart of the new historicist project as governed by a hermeneutics of disparagement was a goal of divesting Wordsworth of any claim to possessing any meaningful liberal credentials during the first portion of the great period, and especially at the time of “Tintern Abbey,” of elaborating upon and verifying McGann’s indisputably revisionary stipulation that “Peele Castle” and “Tintern Abbey” are only separated from each other, ideologically and stylistically, by a difference in emphasis.” To that
implicitly disparaging end, Chandler, however much he may have deviated in his underlying sympathies from the new historicist’s oppositional predisposition, still lent immense support by virtue of the seemingly careful and wide-ranging scholarship he brought to the case for Wordsworth’s virtually career-long rejection of the spirit of revolutionary liberty; and it is accordingly a scholarship that requires assessment in the present study.

For Chandler, it was Burke and Rousseau who provided “the crucial intellectual axes” (xx) by which we were to plot Wordsworth’s relationship with conservatism and radicalism in the age of the French Revolution; and, following Chandler’s directions, we would find Wordsworth’s major work “conservative from the start” (xviii), a vehicle for giving “veiled expression to his Burkean views” (xxii) and of launching “(equally Burkean) attacks on Rousseauistic systems of (political) education” (xxii). As the term veiled suggests, Chandler’s argument, like those of other new historicists, is teased out of the concealed and unapparent, “the silence or ‘unspeakable’ that inheres within the work,” in Levinson’s phrase. But while Chandler’s arguments are always subtle and intricate and often interesting, they are rarely compelling.
A case in point is Chandler’s analysis of “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” a work pivotal to his contention that by 1798 Wordsworth had absorbed, adopted, and was giving “veiled expression” to the view of Burke. In a passage from the poem essential to Chandler’s purposes, Wordsworth explains how acts of charity repeated over and over again, like those performed for the beggar by the villagers of the poet’s community, play a key role in the formation of the fully achieved moral character through the workings of a principle he calls “habit”:

Where’er the aged Beggar takes his rounds
The mild necessity of use compels
To acts of love; and habit does the work
Of reason; yet prepares that after-joy
Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul,
By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursued,
Doth find herself insensibly disposed
To virtue and true goodness.

(“Old Cumberland Beggar,” 98-195)

The use of the word “habit” here, we are told, is the signal that should alert us to the lifting of the veil, a momentary but manifest acknowledgment of the influence of
Burke that, according to Chandler, pervades and determines Wordsworth’s thinking about political and social matters. Undeniably, habit is a central concept in Burke; founded on prejudices whose wisdom is confirmed by the usage of “nations, and of ages,” habit is the key to those attachments to home and family, community and nation, those salutary prejudices on which a soundly functioning, indeed a good society rests. (Despite the piety with which Burke and finally Chandler invest these concepts—habit and attachment and prejudice—Burke’s many detractors then and now have been quick to point out that they were also the grounds for the mob’s burning of Priestley’s house in Birmingham in behalf of “King and Country.”)

But if we concede that the appearance in Wordsworth of a term as central to Wordsworth’s thought as “habit” should alert us to the possibility that Burke did, in fact, influence Wordsworth, we should not be lulled by the earnestness of Chandler’s predisposition into believing that this circumstance in itself constitutes proof of indebtedness. Two factors, indeed, militate against drawing such a conclusion: one is that the function of the term “habit” in Wordsworth’s argument in “The Old Cumberland Beggar” bears little resemblance to the notion of habit as Burke conceives it; the other is that we can
find the term “habit” used very much as Wordsworth uses it elsewhere, and most especially in the writings of another political philosopher antithetical to Burke in every respect, William Godwin. Closely examined, the passage in question does not, in fact, present the views of Burke but presents the most anti-Burkean views imaginable, for it describes nothing less than the making of a philanthropist, one who can act disinterestedly out of a truly rational benevolence in behalf of the interests of humankind in general, notions that for Burke not only run counter to our nature but are as injurious in their effects as they are experientially implausible. Here, as elsewhere in the years between 1797 and 1800, Wordsworth adopted a characteristic strategy to answer the question of how we can become and be philanthropists. Since Wordsworth, as empiricist, believed that we are not endowed at birth with a moral sense or any other innate propensity to benevolence, what then can the agent of transformation be that enables us to rise from self-centeredness—which, convinced by the example of his own experience, Wordsworth believed absolutely governs our conduct in our early years—to the pure disinterestedness that he intuitively perceived that he and a few gifted spirits had finally attained? In “The Old Cumberland Beggar” the agent that
finally produces this transformation is very plainly identified: habit is the vehicle by which we are carried from selfishness to virtue. Even in our acts of charity, Wordsworth tells us, self-interest is originally the motive to well-doing. In the most gentle of hedonistic phrases, he explains how, upon assisting the beggar, we are rewarded by “the sweet taste of pleasure unpursued,” a happiness, that felt upon and delighting the senses, induces in the giver the desire to give again, so that the remembered savor of “pleasure unpursued” becomes a subliminally enticing motive to charitable action. But through the wonderful economy at work not just in the external world but in our human nature too, the repetition of such acts—that is habit—eventually converts what were initially means to an end, charity for the sake of the pleasure it yielded, into an end in itself, and “the soul, / . . . Doth find herself insensibly disposed / To virtue and true goodness.” At this point the work that habit had done in the service of reason is at last taken up by reason itself, and the soul “disposed / To virtue and true goodness” is ready to make its moral judgments on the basis of a fully rational benevolence.

That the passage in question should be read this way becomes most apparent when we view it together with the
lines that immediately follow it (lines I adverted to earlier), especially as these lines appear in the Alfoxden manuscript, where we can see just how completely reason superseded habit in the exercise of the fully developed moral faculty.

Some there are,
By their good works exalted, lofty minds,
And meditative, in which reason falls
Like a strong radiance of the setting sun
On each minutest feeling of the heart,
Illuminates, and to their view brings forth
In one harmonious prospect, minds like these
In childhood, from this solitary Being,
Or from like wanderer, haply have received
(A thing more precious than all that books
Or the solicitudes of love can do!)
That first mild touch of sympathy and thought,
In which they found their kindred with a world
Where want and sorrow were.

(PW, 4:237)

We need look no further than this to see how closely
Wordsworth in 1798 still adhered to the radical principles
he had at this time supposedly discarded: the perfectibilian assumption that men and women could act toward one another on the basis of a genuine benevolence that had already been acquired by a scattered but special few and was thus the grounds of hope for a general human improvement; an emphasis on reason as the faculty preeminently involved in the highest form of moral choice; and above all, a continuing fidelity to the great end for which, as Beaupuy had taught him, the French Revolution was being fought, the relief of a “hunger-bitten girl,” an ideal carried forward into “The Old Cumberland Beggar” as the discovery by those lofty minds / And meditative,” through their childhood sympathy with the old Cumberland beggar, of “their kindred with a world / Where want and sorrow were.”

“Habit” then, as Wordsworth uses the term, is linked not to conservative doctrines of the salutary effects of prejudice but to radical ideas of benevolence, and rational benevolence at that. Though personal experience alone doubtlessly might account for Wordsworth’s conception of habit, if we attribute that conception to a book we are obviously better advised to turn from Burke to Godwin in seeking it out; and in the third edition of *Political Justice* we do find a passage on transition from self-
interestedness to disinterestedness that presents the mediating function of habit in that transition in terms very much like those proposed by Wordsworth:

A disposition to promote the benefit of another, my friend, my relation, or my fellow being, is one of the passions; understanding by the term passion, a permanent and habitual tendency toward a certain course of action. It is of the same general nature, as avarice, or the love of fame. . . . But it is the nature of the passions, speedily to convert what were at first means into ends. The avaricious man forgets the utility of money which first incited him to pursue it, fixes his passion upon the money itself, and counts his gold, without having in his mind any idea but that of seeing it and handling it. Something of this sort happens very early in the history of every passion. The moment we become attached to a particular source of pleasure, beyond any idea we have of the rank it holds in the catalogue of sources, it must be admitted that it is loved for its own sake. . . . If this be the case in the passion of avarice or the love of fame, it must also be true in the instance of beneficence, that, after having
habituated ourselves to promote the happiness of our child, our family, our country or our species, we are at length brought to desire this happiness without retrospect to ourselves.\textsuperscript{315}

Here, as in the passage from “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” we have an ostensibly descriptive account of moral improvement and change, one where “habit” at first “does the work / Of reason” and what was only the means to an end becomes an end in itself. But such a descriptive summary readily turns into prescriptive instructions for the engendering of the person of genuine benevolence (and since these instructions come from Godwin we can trust such benevolence to be rational): “after having habituating ourselves to promote the happiness” of others, “our child, our family, our country or our species,” Godwin contends, the element of self-concern and even pleasurableness that leads us to wish to do this disappears as a motive, and instead we find we can behave with a pure and unselfish concern for others, a distinterestedness that is fundamental to any ethic of benevolence.

On another matter too, the role of family attachment in our ethical development, Wordsworth is far more restrictive in what he is willing to count as behavior that
might serve as the basis for benevolence than Chandler credits him with being. Not only does Wordsworth in "The Old Cumberland Beggar" differ sharply from Burke in his assessment of the value of the domestic sympathies, but he even seems more critical than Godwin (at least the Godwin of 1798) in his assessment of the domestic affections, for Godwin at least regards love of family as sufficiently meritorious to serve as one of the types of beneficence in his list, as one of those desires that, habitually enough acted on, we eventually pursue as an intrinsic good "without retrospect to ourselves." For Burke, no fundamental conversion from self-interest to disinterestedness is even necessary: family feeling is the essential foundation for our larger attachments. "We begin our public affections in our families," Burke writes in what must surely have been one of the first of many conservative pronouncements of this sort. But in "The Old Cumberland Beggar," at any rate, Wordsworth will grant these primary affections no real part in the formation of the genuine moral character, but he treats family feeling, in fact, as a distraction from and perhaps essentially inimical to the fostering of "virtue and true goodness." While the "Many" (133) who are "not negligent / In acts of love to those with whom they dwell, / Their kindred, and
the children of their blood” (138-40) receive “Praise” (141) from Wordsworth, it is a backhanded praise, since judged by a standard of genuine beneficence, these “acts of love” toward “kindred” and “children of their blood” amount to no more than “inevitable charities” (145) that lack “Wherewith to satisfy the human soul” (146). Only by means of acts of pure charity in which we have no significant personal stake (and acts of kindness to the old Cumberland beggar perfectly suit such a category since he seems so devoid of any real interest for us that he well might stand for humanity in the abstract) can we ever hope to enter on a genuine moral course—that is, a rationally determined moral course—in which we act altruistically not from pleasure or habit but because “reason falls / Like a strong radiance of the setting sun / On each minutest feeling of the heart.”

The second major element in Chandler’s proof of Wordsworth’s “veiled” conservatism in 1798, his opposition even then to Rousseau’s educational theories, depends on even more tenuously connected threads of evidence and is therefore even less convincingly argued. For Chandler the principal ground for believing this is his ostensible demonstration that Rousseau was the object of Wordsworth’s satire of education in a passage from book 5 of The
Prelude, a passage that, while not completed until 1804, plainly has its origins in lines written in 1798 or 1799 that appear in MS 18a. The obvious objection to this claim, an objection acknowledged on occasion by Chandler himself, is that nothing could seem more unlike the intellectual force-feeding that “These mighty workmen of our later age” (5:370) perform on Wordsworth’s “prodigy” than the essentially negative education proposed by Rousseau for Émile until he is about twelve. Nowhere is the common understanding of what Rousseau on education represents better summarized than in that notoriously anti-Rousseauistic educational tract, Cultural Literacy, by E. D. Hirsch Jr. For Hirsch, Rousseau is the archenemy of true cultural literacy, the thinker ultimately responsible for the “content-neutral curricula of our elementary schools,” the first and foremost of those “who believed that we should encourage the natural development of young children and not impose adult ideas upon them before they can truly understand them” (14), a principle that would seem to coincide with rather than run counter to those Wordsworth advocates in book 5 of The Prelude. Surely the characteristic most in evidence in the account of the “prodigy”—“No Child, / But a dwarf Man” (5: 294-95)---
sativized by Wordsworth is an amazingly precocious cultural literacy:

he can read

The inside of the earth, and spell the stars;
He knows the policies of foreign Lands,
Can string you names of districts, cities, towns,
The whole wide world over, tight as beads of dew
Upon a gossamer thread.

(5:332-37)

But however culturally literate such a child may be, he is nothing like Émile, who in his essentially negative preadolescent education studies no maps, learns no history, reads virtually no books, which for children are “the instruments of their greatest misery.”

To meet what would seem to be virtually insurmountable objections to his hypothesis, Chandler adopts two different strategies. One is to claim that what Wordsworth actually satirizes in Émile is Rousseau’s theory of moral education, though it is never made clear why Wordsworth should choose to satirize a relatively secondary element of a work whose larger principles he must certainly have sympathized with, at least according to his own praise of the “negative
education" of "A race of real children, not too wise, / Too learned, or too good" (Prelude, 5:436-37). As narrow as
this claim by Chandler is, it still remains unpersuasive,
since Chandler simply identifies four passages of the
utmost generality from the great length of Émile as those
Wordsworth satirically alludes to, three of the four
referring not to childhood, clearly the subject of the
passages from The Prelude, but to Émile's adolescent
education, which does not begin until Émile's childhood
education of simplicity and freedom has ended. 319
Chandler's alternative strategy is to regard the passages
from The Prelude not as satire upon the actual educational
writings of Rousseau himself—for these do not appear to be
in conflict with the views of Wordsworth—but as satire on
the theories of Rousseau as these were put into practice in
revolutionary France by the Committee on Public Instruction
under the direction of the Ideologues, who in turn,
according to Chandler, operated under the "aegis of
Rousseau" (219). But in revolutionary France invoking the
name of Rousseau was not as much an expression of influence
as it may, at first glance, appear to be. So great was the
celebrity of the apotheosized Rousseau at the time of the
French Revolution that in almost any dispute both sides
could claim to be acting under his aegis, as, in fact, both
prosecution and defense did at the trial of the king in 1792.\textsuperscript{320} While the Committee on Public Instruction might invoke the name and prestige of Rousseau, its program actually bore little resemblance to the content-neutral curriculum devised for Émile. Though students might have physical education and be instructed in a mechanical art, as Rousseau urged, they would also read books, study history, learn a science—this last, as Joseph Lakanal admitted, specifically contradicting the advice of Rousseau.\textsuperscript{321} And in a study of the Ideologues that Chandler himself cites as the best in English, Charles H. Van Duzer points out that on the all-important issue of education for the masses there were two major and opposing points of view in eighteenth-century France. Rousseau was one of those who did not desire “a type of instruction which would make the masses more reflective and perhaps render them unsuited to their humble condition of life.” But as Van Duzer explains, “D’Holbach, Helvétius, Turgot, and others regarded education as an unqualified good, and championed the right of the people to be educated up the full measure of their capacity.” And, he adds, “It was the latter school which was to come into control during the years of the Revolution” (91), a judgment that tellingly calls into question Chandler’s contention that the educational
programs of revolutionary France were essentially a putting into practice of the theories of Rousseau.\textsuperscript{322}

Though the Ideologues emerge as one of Wordsworth’s principal antagonists in Chandler’s account of how the poet adopted a Burkean and thus essentially British conservatism in 1798, actually they provide a perfect perspective from which to comprehend the radical orientation of Wordsworth’s conception of consciousness at that time. In a statement of the utmost tentativeness, Chandler admits that he is “aware” that “one might plausibly describe the French Ideologues as, say, ‘empiricists,’”\textsuperscript{323} a claim surprisingly qualified since that is the way historians of philosophy and historians of the Enlightenment have always described the leading theorists of the Ideologues--Condillac, and Cabanis, and Destutt de Tracy--and that is, in fact, what they surely were: empiricists, followers of Locke, sensationalists of the most committed and uncompromising sort.\textsuperscript{324} But even in acknowledging that the philosophy of the Ideologues might rest on concepts normally associated with Britain, Chandler--ever anxious to discriminate between British solidity and good sense and the shallow abstractness and fanaticism of the French--divides empiricism itself into two camps, the conservative empiricism associated with Hume that was in the ascendant
in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century, and its great nemesis, the radical empiricism of the Ideologues in France. Elsewhere I have argued at length that between 1797 and 1800 Wordsworth was himself an empiricist, a follower of Locke and a sensationalist of the most committed and uncompromising sort; and in this study I shall only add to that argument the observation that Wordsworth became an empiricist, not because he was a philosopher, making an academic decision among competing truth-claims, but rather because empiricism provided that explanation of man’s relation to the world most suited to Wordsworth’s announced project of human advancement. Unsurprisingly then, the version of British empiricism most congenial to Wordsworth, Hartley’s associationism as it appears in the abridgment of the Observations by Joseph Priestley, is scarcely conservative but in spirit and in principles displays deep affinities with the forms of empiricism promulgated and practiced in revolutionary France. Thoroughly sensationalist in their basic explanations of the origins of human knowledge, implicitly egalitarian in their descriptions of mind, positing a common tabula rasa, so that similarity of environmental circumstances must, of necessity, produce similar intellectual and moral consequences, these philosophers are
the epistemologists of revolution par excellence, social engineers confident that by reordering human institutions one can, in effect, remold humanity itself. For these philosophers, any morally accomplished individual is potentially what Wordsworth knew himself to be, a forerunner, a harbinger of betterment; since “associationism tends to make us all ultimately similar,” Hartley writes, “if one be happy, all must.”

So mixing receptivity of the senses, the informing and determining power of external objects, and necessity, Wordsworth produces a similar recipe for progress: “thus deeply drinking in the soul of things / We shall be wise perforce, and we shall move / From strict necessity along the path of order and of good” (PW, 5:402-3). For Wordsworth then, looking to consciousness is a way of measuring personal progress and identifying those constituent simples that enter into the formation of his moral nature and his not unrelated sense of inner well-being. It is by inference an implicitly social activity and inherently predictive, because the goodness and happiness not attainable by one is readily extrapolated into a goodness and happiness not merely possible but eventually inevitable for all. Accounting for the politics of “Tintern Abbey” does not at all depend on solving the
mystery of the missing abbey. Rather it is through a discourse of virtue that Wordsworth once more signals his continuing revolutionary allegiance, his "more than Roman confidence" in the better time to come. Those who hear "the still sad music of humanity" do so, despite all the critical grumbling at the abstractness of that phrase, because they belong humanity's party. Recognizing "In nature and the language of the sense" (108) the "soul / Of all my moral being" (110-11), Wordsworth is able to produce the crucial underlying formula for an environmentally conditioned exemplary life that, as the preliminary instance of his sister shows, stands ready for general replication.

If Wordsworth's political views in 1798 are not to be determined by his affinities with Burke or by his opposition to Rousseau and the Ideologues, how then are we to establish his politics at this crucial moment when his literary career truly enters upon its great period? There is at least one piece of credible evidence that suggests that Wordsworth remained in fact a committed radical during the whole of the great period. In what is probably the most explicit statement we have of Wordsworth's political opinions during these years, the publisher John Taylor (to whom Wordsworth had sent a presentation copy of the second
edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1806 invited Wordsworth to dine and was reported to have been “startled to find him ‘strongly disposed towards Republicanism. His notions are that it is the duty of every Administration to do as much as possible to give consideration to the people at large, and to have equality always in view; which though not perfectly attainable, yet much has been gained towards it, and much more may be.’”

But if we do not wish to take Taylor’s words at face value, we can find still more direct evidence of Wordsworth’s political opinions in 1798—the year of “Tintern Abbey”—from his own words in three surprisingly little discussed blank-verse fragments, written in Germany only a few months after “Tintern Abbey.” One could scarcely imagine sentiments uttered, even if in the privacy of an unpublished manuscript, more un-Burkean or perhaps even consciously anti-Burkean, nor sentiments that more closely adhered to the inflammatory egalitarian rationale of Beaupuy for revolution, the grave social injustice expressed in the appearance of a “hunger-bitten girl / Who crept along, fitting her languid self / Unto a heifer’s motion,” an injustice that ignited Beaupuy and his young poet-disciple’s revolutionary fervor: “‘Tis against that / Which we are fighting.”
One of these fragments, “For let the impediment be what it may,” as I noted in chapter one (where it is discussed at length), represents Wordsworth’s most extensive contribution to the late 1790s debate on the idea of universal benevolence. Two questions dominate that debate: Is there really any such capability by men and women for disinterestedly loving all humanity—as Godwin and like-minded radicals claimed, a claim, however, that Burke and fellow-conservatives vigorously denied and denounced; and, if there is such a capability, do not the domestic affections, a more narrowly focused but more intense love of family, pose a barrier to its attainment, distracting us from our more obligatory duty to humanity at large—an extreme position apparently held in 1798 only by the most radical of radicals. On both questions, it is with these most radical of radicals—and certainly not with the Burkeans—that Wordsworth in this Goslar fragment sides. He does assume that one can act both benevolently and disinterestedly—that one can perform an “act of love” toward others by “The light that shines abroad.” Moreover, he also assumes—and this is the substance of the fragment—that too exclusive a devotion to one’s family poses an essentially insurmountable obstacle to our acting from this socially and politically indispensable human capability for
disinterested benevolence, indispensable at least if we wish to create the good society. For Wordsworth, the man wholly devoted to the welfare of his family becomes the “worst of slaves, the slave / Of his own house.” What is most truly extraordinary about this passage though is that its criticisms are directed wholly against “the poor man.” Forced by circumstances, the narrowing of vision that poverty entails, “the poor man” (understandably perhaps) concerns himself with and cares about only those “His hands must clothe and nourish.” He thus can never do the good that the benevolent man does, never comfort the “afflicted” nor those who possess “the eye of grief / And sorrow,” at least if the “afflicted” and those who grieve and “sorrow” dwell beyond the family circle. And as an even more personally hurtful consequence, the “poor man” will never reap the pleasurable personal benefits that derive from the performance of benevolent acts, never will “hear / The sweet creative voice of gratitude,” will never have “[k]nown” “the name of friend.”

Much the same lesson, the moral and spiritual deprivation imposed by extreme poverty, is also preached in the two other socially and politically oriented verse fragments written in Germany during Wordsworth’s six months there at the end of 1798 and early in 1799: “There is an
active principle alive in all things,” and “There is a law severe of penury.” With “For let the impediment be what it may,” these two fragments share the same premise: extreme poverty prevents the poor man from leading the fully human life that he is capable of and to which he is presumably entitled. Yet one point needs to be strongly emphasized: in describing the life of the poor as being in some ultimately significant sense less than what humans can and should be, Wordsworth is not indicting “a swinish multitude” but lamenting the workings of an unjust society whose controlling and oppressive ruling class prevents the poor man from realizing his true human potential. It is because of the policies and practices of the “rich man” (“There is an active principle alive in all things,” 56) that the poor cannot act disinterestedly out of genuine “beneficence” (notwithstanding the fact that for Wordsworth, the necessitarian, such “beneficence” may be mandated by the very nature of things) nor achieve true liberty and autonomy nor even enjoy one of the richest of Wordsworthian goods, the blessings of nature.

At least one of the fragments written in Germany would seem to provide us with a kind of groundwork of the metaphysics of Wordsworthian radical political morality, the passage that begins “There is an active principle alive
in all things,” lines that Wordsworth ultimately published in 1814 in revised form (with its most pointedly politically radical lines deleted), as the opening of book 9 of The Excursion. But as we have it in its earliest manuscript form, composed presumably only months after “Tintern Abbey,” it appears to offer an elaboration of and gloss upon the great statement of Wordsworthian metaphysics in the earlier poem, the tribute there to that active principle that manifests itself in “Tintern Abbey” as “a motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought / And rolls through all things” (“Tintern Abbey,” 100-102) with the added advantage of providing us with at least a preliminary exposition of what the political ramifications of these metaphysical premises might be.

“There is an active principle alive in things” is perhaps the purest and most extensive statement we have of what long ago was spoken of as Wordsworth’s panvitalism. That “principle alive in all things,” Wordsworth tells us, is “the soul of all the worlds” (“There is an active principle alive in all things,” 11), adopting a quasi-religious pantheistic vocabulary that goes back to antiquity (certainly to Stoicism). But it is not just that. From nature we learn that in “All beings” (6) there
is an actualizing core that compels them to reach out toward otherness, a self-impelling power akin to consciousness “in all natures” (2). Even in insensate things, “in every pebbly stone / That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks / The moving waters, and the invisible air” (3-5), we find “properties which spread / Beyond themselves, a power by which they make / Some other being conscious of their life” (6-8), and, by so spreading, that power manages to link all beings together in that interconnected harmoniousness toward which the order of things necessarily tends. This universal propensity, this inherent going-outness in things, this “Spirit that” Wordsworth asserts “circulates” from “link to link” binding all together, leaving “no insulated spot / no chasm, no solitude” (9-11), is nothing less than “the freedom of the universe” (12), a term that in the 1790s carried an obvious political resonance. But that term is appropriated to these essentially metaphysical ruminations not so that the language of “freedom” may be diluted, divested of its power to effect real change in the revolutionary world of the 1790s, the way in which we have been instructed by adversarial critics to read similarly abstractly metaphysical passages in “Tintern Abbey,” but in order to give metaphysical sanction and underpinnings to a
commitment to political reforms that in 1798 would be understood, certainly by Burkeans, as subversive and indeed seditious.

The cosmic principle that in nonhuman nature is actualized as a going out that would link the individual being with others in an interconnected harmoniousness, the goal toward which all things tend, is no less present in man. Indeed, “the human mind” is “[i]ts most apparent home” (15-16). For, as Wordsworth explains our human nature, we are so made that we, too, require the exercise of this “active principle” to realize our true and essential being; that is, we are to “be bound / By laws” (27-28)—as we ultimately should and must be—“in which there is a generating soul / Allied to our own nature” (28-29). Just as it was observed in nature, in ourselves, too, there is a going out toward others that in human terms takes the form of an ethical benevolence whose end would be the attainment of that interconnected harmoniousness that, translated into similarly human terms, emerges in community.

Two features of this argument are worth noting as we sort out its social and political meanings. One is its implicit utopianism with the concomitant dissatisfaction found in most utopianisms with the way things are. While
nonhuman nature has always lived in accordance with that interconnected harmoniousness that is the way things are metaphysically constituted to be, men and women do not live so yet. The social order as it is now is not organized by a going out toward others, the actively beneficent actions that are the way that “active principle alive in all things” expresses itself in men and women, but by conduct that, at best, amounts to nothing more than “simple abstinence from ill” (26), or at worst, to the imposition on others of “chains,” “shackles, and” “bonds” (26-27). Indeed, true freedom, what Wordsworth speaks of as “the freedom of the universe,” is, he tells us, as things now stand, “reverenced least, / And least respected, in the human mind, / Its most apparent home” (14-16). Still, we yearn for things to be otherwise: discontented with things as they are, “we live by hope / And by desire” (19-20), with a clear indication that, through the working out of the historical process, we too will realize our hopes and desires and achieve what nature already possesses, “the freedom of the universe,” a freedom whose “most apparent home” is “in the human mind.” Even now, in this dark time of “chains” and “shackles” and “bonds,” “we” already, at least imaginatively, “see by the sweet light / And breathe the sweet air of,” what Wordsworth, in the fragment’s most
strikingly utopian term, calls “futurity” (21-22). In this, Wordsworth still appears to remain very much the committed activist. What he advocates we do in the aftermath of the French Revolution to realize that utopian “futurity” whose “sweet air,” imaginatively, we may already “breathe” is not to wait passively for that progressively conceived, apparently inevitable, and necessary historical process to work itself out in time by its own inexorability but rather to engage in “meditated action” (17), “action” presumably undertaken with forethought and, therefore, doubtlessly less impulsively violent than the bloodbath that had gone on across the Channel--but “action” nonetheless.

A second feature of this fragment that also points to its essentially still radical political leanings is the presence here, too, of the Wordsworthian philanthropists, men who seem, in the actual conduct of their lives, to dwell in “futurity” already. They are, of course, benevolently disposed figures akin to those we have seen referred to elsewhere in the poetry of this period as “lofty minds, / And meditative,” “the wisest and the best / Of all mankind,” harbingers and forerunners of the society to come, providing through the “little realities” of their lives “the image of a better time, / Desires more wise and
simpler manners.” In contrast to those unhappy persons Wordsworth sorrowfully designates as “the many” (45), the Wordsworthian philanthropists, even if only a scattered few, provide us with a set of exemplary lives from which we know

That when we stand upon our native soil,
Unelbowed by such objects as oppress
Our active powers, those powers themselves
Become subversive of our noxious qualities:
And by the substitution of delight
And by new influxes of strength suppress
All evil.

(29-36)

Once “[o]ur active powers” are allowed to operate unimpeded, that is, once they become both pleasurable and strong, they subvert “our noxious qualities” and suppress “[a]ll evil,” terms by which Wordsworth surely means something akin to the self-regarding tendencies and habits that—in another fragment written in Germany, “I would not strike a flower”—he indignantly rails against as “those bastard loves / Those low and fickle yearnings of the heart, / The wayward brood of vanity.” Only after the
familiar Wordsworthian developmental process is completed with the disabling evil of self-regard cast out and supplanted by a new delight and strength—then, and only then—is the life of genuine benevolence ready to begin. But what is perhaps most remarkable about the account of benevolence offered here as human is how indistinguishable from that drive toward interconnected harmoniousness that Wordsworth has already ascribed to nature and has from the fragment’s first line elevated to a metaphysical principle is this specifically human going-out in “doing good” for others:

then the being spreads abroad

His branches to the wind; and all who see

Bless him, rejoicing in his neighborhood.

(36-38)

Later in this same fragment, Wordsworth again links the operations of nature and the workings of the human mind after it acquires its benevolistic disposition, but this time he does so through a more characteristically Wordsworthian figure that elsewhere, too, he uses in conjunction with the idea of general benevolence. The “active principle” that he declared to be “alive in all
things” is present in humans, he tells us, as “This intellectual power, / This vital spirit” (58-59) and--its inherent connection with an ethic of benevolence made even explicit--as “this [benign] existence” (62); in fact, through the workings of the “active principle” in ourselves we acquire the human equivalent of that “freedom of the universe” he had already ascribed to nature, since “this intellectual power” and “vital spirit” is “in its essence free” (58-59). In this instance though, it is not to the trees of earth but to the “light of heaven” (59) (an understandably much worked-over Enlightenment figure) that Wordsworth likens “this mind” now disposed to benevolence “that streams / With emanations like the blessed sun” (60-61) and that is “in its essence free.” Indeed, it is a likeness that Wordsworth reasserts elsewhere, for example, in the contemporaneous fragment “I would not strike a flower,” where through the elaborating figure of the sun Wordsworth makes the universal aspirations of such a concept of benevolence even more apparent. There, the man who turns from self-interested pride in ownership to “regard for things / In which he finds no traces of himself” will find

The wayward brood of vanity, must die
Within him and benevolence be spread
Like the Sun’s light upon the open sea.

But for Wordsworth, the figure of the sun is to be associated not just with the concept of universal benevolence but with the concept of a universal benevolence under the governance of reason (once again a common and natural Enlightenment conjunction of figure and referent), a rational benevolence much like that advocated by Richard Price and by Godwin. In “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” Wordsworth predicts that those who, out of childhood encounters with the old Cumberland beggar or some “like wanderer,” have become benefactors of humanity, philanthropists—to use the term of the time—will produce “good works” that “[w]ill live, and spread, and kindle,” that suggestively incendiary kindling presumably providing an impetus to far-reaching social change. But to effect such change, they must practice not just a universal benevolence in which all humanity is the object of their good will but a universal benevolence in which reason will ultimately direct action, since from their “lofty minds / And meditative” reason falls
Like a strong radiance of the setting sun.
On each minutest feeling of the heart.

Perhaps what primarily draws Wordsworth to liken our human essence to the essences of natural objects is that once the active principle is actualized in the human individual—the newly constituted philanthropist—his recently acquired powers, like the “active principle” in nature, become “laws” (28) by which he is “bound,” (27). Just as the things of nature have intrinsic “properties” found in “[a]ll beings,” necessarily impelling them to “spread / Beyond themselves,” so too do these Wordsworthian men of benevolence, “authors of delight / And happiness” (“The Old Cumberland Beggar,” 107-8), necessarily “spread” beyond themselves, exercising their ultimately identical “properties” to produce socially beneficial effects that “to the end of time / Will live, and spread, and kindle” (italics mine). For the man of benevolence, liberty, the “one only liberty” (There is an active principle alive in all things,” 39), is a consciousness of necessity: he “by beneficence is circumscribed” (40); he cannot do otherwise. To him

the power of doing good

Is law and statute, penalty, and bond,
His prison, and his warder

(41-43)\textsuperscript{332}

Once again it is worth noting that, in both language and concept, Wordsworth’s account of the benevolent man is very much like other rationally based formulations of an ethic of benevolence in the late eighteenth century, those of Price and Godwin certainly, and, with some qualifications, even that of Kant. With these moralists too, there is the same paradoxical combination of freedom and necessity, the same insistence that the conclusions of reason, while voluntarily arrived at, impose obligations, bind with the force of law (albeit the moral law), so that one cannot do otherwise and is thus “circumscribed” by “beneficence.” (In speaking of “the power of doing good” as both “law and statute,” Wordsworth does not seem to me so very far removed from Kant’s third formulation of the categorical imperative, where in the kingdom of ends, one acts as both sovereign and subject, legislating universal laws that the sovereign must himself obey.)

By these politically weighted references to benevolence, I would suggest that what Wordsworth is trying to say is, first, that even now, in “times of dereliction and dismay,” the benevolent man, the rationally motivated
philanthropist, is still to be found among us, working for present and future good; and that, more important, his ways will ultimately prevail when the universal moral truths reason obliges him to follow and to instruct others in are generally disseminated. It is, of course, this faith in “futurity” that gives the ethics of rational benevolence its perfectibilian tenor and makes rationally inclined moralists like Price and Godwin (and, I would argue, Wordsworth himself) true radicals in the Enlightenment sense, proponents of reform, confident of that general advancement of humanity that they are committed to assist in bringing about. But Wordsworth also understands that the world as it is does not as yet live by any such code of rationally motivated laws of beneficence; “the many,” to whom Wordsworth in this fragment extends his “sorrow” (45), also live by laws, but not by the metaphysical laws that are “alive in all things,” laws whose “generating soul” is “[a]llied to our own nature,” the laws of an active going-out that in humanity translates into the “doing good” of benevolence. Instead “the many” live within a “close prison-house of human laws” (75) that promote not vital activity but

hesitations, pining langours, cold
And dead suppressions, all the subtle host
Of feverish infirmities that give
Sad motion to the pestilential calm
Of negative morality.

(69-73)

In reality, that “negative morality” Wordsworth bemoans is simply the other side of the coin of the life of self-interestedness he so strongly rejects. But here the perspective of the self-interested is not that of the aggressor pursuing pleasure and satisfying appetites but of the victim whose only realistic aim is the avoidance of pain. To do that, the “many” must resign themselves to a debilitating inertness that deprives them of all sense of personal autonomy; from the first they quickly learn that

[on themselves]

They cannot lean, or turn to their own hearts
To know what they must do.

(48-50)

All that therefore remains for them are lives of self-abnegation and obedience:
their wisdom is

To look into the eyes of others, thence
To be instructed what they must avoid.

(50-52)

So schooled in avoidance, the “many” can ask from life no more than to be “least observed,” (53) until “with most quiet and silent death” (54) they “waste away” (57).

But what gives the fragment its truly radical character is that the one cause Wordsworth specifically singles out for blame for the present state of things is “[t]he rich man” (56), an accusation by the poet that one might think would gladden the heart of most of Wordsworth’s adversarial detractors or, at the least, encourage them to rethink their anti-Wordsworthian premises. The reason why the “many” are to be instructed in this ethic of avoidance, this soul-wasting “negative morality,” Wordsworth tells us, is to ensure that they do “the least taint and injury to the air / The rich man breathes” (56-57). Predictably, if we understand the Wordsworth of 1798 to have remained a true philanthropic radical, the price the many pay for acquiescence in these “human laws” of class oppression is nothing less than the wasting away of what Wordsworth, in a phrase with a startlingly Blakean resonance, celebrates as
“the human form divine” (56). In the end, this elaborate exercise in the Wordsworthian metaphysics and moral philosophy of 1798 may be read as, above all else, one of the boldest assertions we have of Wordsworthian political and economic theory, an assertion, moreover--it hardly needs saying--that could not be more unlike Burke.

Of the three fragments written in Germany that I have singled out as overtly politically and socially oriented, “There is a law severe of penury” is the most indisputably radical in outlook, the poem by Wordsworth that most clearly reveals how much the metaphysical and moral superstructure of his poetry in 1798 rests upon an economic base. If we would know why nature does not always make those good who live in closest proximity to it, an objection raised almost from the first against his claims for the moral advantages of rustic life, his answer to that question is in part given here, in this account of “the cottage boy” (2). Extreme poverty in which all of one’s attention and energies must be given over to the struggle for mere subsistence, Wordsworth indignantly concedes in this fragment, effectively nullifies the premises of his nature philosophy. The influence of natural objects cannot direct the individual “from strict necessity along the path / Of order and of good” toward a life of personal
benevolence and social concern, if, from the earliest stage of his mental life, that individual finds his "thought" (2) directed by a prior and "premature necessity" (3) that "[b]locks out the forms of nature" (4), finds his "thought" directed, that is, by the even more basic human need to be fed and clothed that supersedes all others.

But the "[b]lock[ing] out of the forms of nature" really is just the beginning of Wordsworth's catalogue of penalties that the "law severe of penury" (1) exacts from "the cottage boy." Most of the remainder of the fragment is taken up by a listing of those personal attributes, characteristics, and faculties that extreme poverty prevents the poor child from ever experiencing or acquiring. Even if the receptive mind is initially a blank tablet on which nature stamps and writes itself, according to the epistemology of the empiricist Wordsworth of 1798, nonetheless, the child, in the course of his early development must bring to its experience of nature inner qualities that would seem to be the necessary precondition for nature to do its intended work, that work by which "[t]he mind of man is fashioned and built up / Even as a strain of music" (Prelude, 1:351-2, MS V). But extreme poverty prevents "the cottage boy" from developing the mind
in the way in which it should be developed or, indeed, in some instances, from ever developing it at all.

First of all, the prematurely necessary “early thought” (2) that “the cottage boy” must give himself over to—apparently the “necessity” of caring for himself when others should care for him—precludes his ever making proper and effective use of those faculties of feeling and reason whose collaborative interaction in proper sequence, we have seen earlier in “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” is indispensable in the forming of the morally responsible individual who looks beyond himself to the needs and interests of others. This “premature necessity”—Wordsworth tells us in a haunting phrase depicting something used up before the time designated for its proper employment, used up by the impoverished child in his desperately anxious attempt to save the self from destitution rather than eventually to go beyond the self to serve those others it has been designed (in accordance with the economy of human development) to serve—“preconsumes / The reason” (5-6). It prematurely takes away from one who might have ultimately acted out of rational benevolence the human faculty indispensable to what is ultimately for humankind the only true basis for carrying out the moral life.
Other deleterious effects would also seem to follow from “[t]he reason” being thus “preconsume[d].” In his ideal model of human development, as Wordsworth presents it in 1798, cultivation of the feelings should precede the deployment of reason in the tasks of benevolence; some preliminary going beyond the self must occur—even perhaps if only in the maternally inspired epistemological sense of coming to know the world of objects in infancy we are told of in book 2 of *The Prelude*, “the first poetic spirit of our human life.” But when the “law severe of penury” requires that, to satisfy the more pressing needs of sheer subsistence, reason act out of sequence, before its designated time, that natural and desired order of development through cultivation of the feelings and this earliest going beyond the self is permanently inhibited. The “thought” induced by the “law severe of penury” not only “blocks the forms of nature” and “preconsumes / The reason,” but it also “famishes the heart” (5) and “shuts up / The infant being in itself” (5-6).

But what Wordsworth seems finally to lament most about the “cottage boy” is not what he shall not become but what he now is, someone so much less than what a child should be because he has failed to participate in aspects of childhood that, while means to a greater developmental end
to be realized, are still, for Wordsworth, intrinsic goods. For the other Wordsworthian children of 1798 revel in the very sense of being alive. If the “boyish days” (73) of the child of “Tintern Abbey” are coarser than they shall eventually become, they are nonetheless pleasurable; and if his activities amount to no more than “animal movements” (74), these are still “glad” (74); and while the little girl of “We are Seven” knows nothing yet “of death” (4), the child there still feels “its life in every limb” (3) and plainly experiences feelings akin to those Wordsworth so movingly speaks of in “Michael” as “[t]he pleasure which there is in life itself” (77). But the “cottage boy” knows no such joy, no such sheer delight in the very pleasure of being alive: in him

this organic frame,

So joyful in its motions, soon becomes
Dull, to the joy of its own motions dead;
And even the touch, so exquisitely poured
Through the whole body, with a languid will
Performs its functions.

(34-40)
Undoubtedly, the way in which “the law severe of penury” most visibly inscribes itself upon “the cottage boy” is in his languor: there is “the languid interest” (19) “the Stripling” (15) takes in a parent’s recounting of the child’s earliest years, “his miraculous feats and freaks” (17) in “days that are long past” (15); and there is “the languid will” (39) with which “the touch” (38) “[p]erforms its functions” (40), a languor that has supplanted the “purity” (32), the “joy” (32), the “dignity” ((30), and the sublimity we should expect to find in the “countenance” (28) and “port” (28) “[o]f no mean being” (29). But I believe that the most important conclusion we can draw from the languor that Wordsworth in 1798 tells us he has observed in “the cottage boy” is how much it must remind the reader who truly cares about Wordsworth’s politics in 1798 of nothing so much as an earlier and even more crucial observation by Wordsworth of a child’s languor—“the languid gait” of “a hunger-bitten girl,” another child he observed in the company of Beaupuy in France, a child fitting her steps to “a heifer’s motion”-- and thus how much the poet of 1798 has kept the faith with his earlier radical self. On the basis of these fragments, I would argue that, if we must look for a mentor and grounds for Wordsworth’s politics in 1798, we should
turn, not to Burke, as Chandler advises, but once more to that acknowledged mentor of 1793, Beaupuy, and to his justification for taking arms in behalf of the Revolution: the languor of “a hunger-bitten girl”—“Tis against that / That we are fighting”—“fighting” so that

poverty

Abject as this would, in a little time,

Be found no more.

Moreover, I must also add that, whether it is “a hunger-bitten girl” or a “cottage boy” who is imprisoned by the “law severe of penury,” I can think of no more praiseworthy justification than this for Wordsworth’s continuing siding in 1798 with the cause of the French Revolution, his still fervent desire to relieve the sufferings and deprivations of children consigned to “poverty / As abject as this.”

One final word. At the beginning of The Romantic Ideology, McGann told us that in pursuing his new view of Romanticism, he will “retrace many of the lines of inquiry which were taken up in critical traditions we now associate with Marx.” But from the earliest writings of Marx himself, these same traditions have largely presented a critical view of the French Revolution; they have
construed its meaning as the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie in the name of society as a whole and its use of an ethical instead of a political language as a mere "masking" that so understood serves as proof positive of the essentially bourgeois orientation of Jacobinism. Thus, the grounds on which McGann finds Wordsworth wanting are, in effect, the very same grounds on which Marxist historiography has always found the Revolution wanting, and yet the Revolution would seem to provide the only fair and legitimate standard by which to judge the politics of Wordsworth’s poetry. In a series of letters to William Mathews in 1794, Wordsworth pronounced himself "a determined enemy to every species of violence" and deplored the "miserable situation of the French" (EY, 124), but he insisted on his unqualified rejection of "monarchical and aristocratical government" (122) and "[h]ereditary distinctions and privileged distinctions of every species" (123) and declared himself a member "of that odious class of men called democrats," adding "and of that class I shall ever continue" (119). Fidelity to the spirit of that promise during the years under discussion is, I submit, the only valid basis to decide whether Wordsworth during the period of his greatest poetry is entitled to be numbered among the "Friends of Liberty." To invoke some other criterion in the name of
history, and especially one in which condemnation is almost
certainly entailed by its premises, sounds like nothing so
much—if I may borrow a phrase from Wordsworth himself—as
“sneers / On visionary minds” (Prelude, 2:439-440).
Notes to Introduction


12. Because of the complex problems presented by the manuscript version of the “Prospectus to The Recluse” in which this line appears (MS 1), this line reference and all subsequent references to this manuscript will be to the transcription of MS 1 presented on pages 255-63 of the Cornell University Press edition of Wordsworth (William Wordsworth, *Home at Grasmere: Part First, Book First of The Recluse*, ed. Beth Darlington [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977], 1042). Citations from this manuscript will appear in the text as *Home at Grasmere*, followed by the line number from the Cornell transcription. Suggested dates for this manuscript version of the “Prospectus” vary from 1798 to 1806. For a helpful discussion of the questions surrounding the date of composition of this important text, see Darlington’s introduction to *Home at*
Grasmere (19-23). I follow Darlington in taking 1800 as the most probable date of composition.


14. I know of no better account of this pervasive “gotcha” mentality in current academic practice than that provided by Robert N. Watson in The Rest Is Silence: Death and Annihilation in the English Renaissance (Berkeley and Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994); “Many conference papers consist largely of reading to a snickering audience passages in which some canonical author violates our current consensus on issues of race, class, or gender, as if these passages were wiretap transcripts that might finally bring an arrogant career-criminal to justice, or Freudian slips on behalf of an entire culture that discloses its dysfunctions” (18).


18. If Wordsworth had suggested an interest in becoming the highland girl’s husband, I have no doubt that accusations of sexual exploitation (probably justifiable) would have followed, in keeping with what I suspect is the damned-if-you do-or-damned-if-you-don’t attitude taken toward the white male canonical poet by most of our adversarial critics. I thank my colleague Helena Michie for this observation.

Notes to Chapter 1


23. Mary Hays, "Improvement Suggested in Female Education," Monthly Magazine and British Register 2 (July 1796): 469.


36. Joan Wallach Scott, "'A Woman Who Has Only Paradoxes to Offer': Olympe de Gouges Claims Rights for


45. Gill, William Wordsworth, 84.


47. Liu, Sense of History, 266.


50. *EY*, 637 n. 3. This explanation of John Mounsey’s title is also offered by the Reverend W. P. Morris in the text of *The Records of Patterdale* (Kendal, Eng.: T. Wilson Publishers at Highgate, 1903), although in his notes Morris speculates that the Mounseys "may have received the appellation because of their comparative affluence" and adds Clarke's suggestion "that the Mounseys received the title of the 'Kings of Patterdale' from their having neither paid any rent or done any homage, fealty or service for the King, or any claiming under him" (47). But neither of these alternative explanations gives us any reason to consider John Mounsey's wife one of the "local poor."

33. Pamela Woof has suggested to me that there might be one indicator of class in this sentence, with the word "stuff" here referring to household goods. If this is the case, and Peggy Ashburner still has a heart that works for the Queen of Patterdale, a heart that goes out to her, regardless of all her wealth, that can only exacerbate Liu's misreading of the passage as the account of a middle-
class woman condemning the poor. I had initially understood "stuff" to mean "things she had to put up with," "mistreatment," an interpretation that still seems to me consistent with what goes on in the passage as a whole.

52. Liu. Sense of History, 266.

53. Liu, Sense of History, 249.


56. Coleridge, Letters, 1:527,


62. How much these views are in the ascendant is exceptionally well illustrated by a recent essay by James Heffernan, a critic who has been at the study of Wordsworth almost as long as I have and who, in those early years, was a critic more inclined to praise than to denounce Wordsworth. But in “Wordsworth’s ‘Leveling’ Muse in 1798,” in *1798: The Year of the Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Richard Cronin (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 231-53, he offers the following unflattering summary of the treatment of Dorothy by William: “[T]he roles that Wordsworth and Coleridge assigned the women around them were strictly ancillary: transcribing what the men wrote, writing journals that would now and then be raided for the men’s poetry, even writing a little poetry themselves—but never publishing it” (232).


Notes to Chapter 2


73. Ross, “Naturalizing Gender,” 394.
This is essentially the position taken by Gregory Jones in "'Rude Intercourse': Uncensoring Wordsworth's 'Nutting,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 35 (1996): 213-43, who tells us that with "the ending of the published 'Nutting,'" Wordsworth "reminds us that the maiden is capable of physical aggression—why else would Wordsworth need to warn her to be gentle?" (221). I find much to admire in this essay, but I hope to show that in the end Jones leaves too much that is crucial to our understanding of the poem unaccounted for, and he does so because he adheres too closely to the governing paradigm.


In "Teaching Wordsworth and Women," in *Approaches to Teaching Wordsworth's Poetry*, ed. Spencer Hall with Jonathan Ramsey (New York: Modern Language Association, 1986), Anne K. Mellor tells us that this is not only the way in which she interprets the poem but the way her "students usually interpret the 'Nutting' episode" (143). Ten years later this consensus still holds, according to Daniel P. Watkins in *Sexual Power in British Romantic Poetry* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), who writes, "It is commonly recognized that "Nutting" can be recognized on one level as a story of a rape and that
the portrayal of rape includes within it a commentary on the relations between masculine sexuality and imperialist conquest" (56).

77. For an extended argument that Wordsworth means "intercourse" in its modern sense with all its sexual connotations, see Jones, "'Rude Intercourse,'" 224.

79. Jacobus, Romanticism, 255 n.130.
84. Wolfson, "Gatherings of 'Nutting','" 27.
85. Wolfson, "Gatherings of 'Nutting','" 29.
86. Jones, "'Rude Intercourse,'" 222-23.
87. Lyrical Ballads, 303.
89. Jones, "'Rude Intercourse,'" 228.
90. Wolfson, "Gatherings of 'Nutting','" 27.
91. Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, 302.
92. Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, 302.
94. Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, 304.
95. Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, 305.
96. So in typical adversarial fashion, Anne Mellor, in Romanticism and Gender (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), converts Keats's famous descriptive classification of the antipoetical character, "the wordsworthian or egoistical sublime," into an explicitly gendered concept, "the heroic masculine self" (148) and then argues that such "sublime self-assurance is rendered possible, as many critics have observed, only by the arduous repression of the Other in all its forms," one of those forms predictably being that "of Dorothy" (149), all of this to be understood as part of Wordsworth's attempt at "masculine control of the female" (150).
97. Homans, Women Writers. 54.


106. We can certainly assume Wordsworth had a broad familiarity with Enlightenment ideas and writers from his eager reading in the "master Pamphlets of the day." (*Prelude*, 9:96). On the basis of the arguments in Wordsworth's “Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff,” Leslie Chard, in *Dissenting Republican: Wordsworth's Early Life*
and Thought in Their Political Context (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1972), makes a strong case for Wordsworth's having read and been influenced by both Montesquieu and Condorcet (77-78). And Duncan Wu in Wordsworth’s Reading, 1770-1799 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), points out that Wordsworth had in his library a copy of Holbach's System of Nature originally owned by his father (74-75).


Notes to Chapter 3


3. Ralph Wardle, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1951), 21. In *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), Virginia Sapiro similarly treats Wollstonecraft as an empiricist in this tradition, describing Wollstonecraft as "very heavily influenced by Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715-1771) and David Hartley (1705-57)" (53) and contending that, in keeping with associationism, she regarded "mind" as "a mechanism for turning sense impressions into ideas and combining ideas to create thoughts" (53).

115. Thus discussing Wollstonecraft's *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*, Wardle writes, "Her old belief that character is the product of environment underlay her whole argument--so much so as almost to impel her to sympathize with Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette" (*Mary Wollstonecraft*, 210).


123. For a good summary of these disputes, see Burton Pollin, "Mary Hays on Women's Rights in the *Monthly Magazine*," *Etudes Anglaises* 24 (1971): 271-82.

124. This is the information given us by James Losh, *Diaries in Manuscript*, 26 vols. Reference Library, Carlisle Public Library, The Lanes, Carlisle, England. All citations from Losh are from this source.


128. Mary Hays, "Improvement Suggested in Female Education," 469.


131. Norton suggests that the original constitutional formulation was "a simple oversight on the part of the framers" (*Liberty’s Daughters*, 191) that eventually turned into a "loophole" (193). In a fascinating essay, "Female Suffrage in New Jersey, 1790-1807," *Women and Politics* 10 (1990): 47-58, Irwin H. Gertzog notes that the vote was only granted to women in the southern and more conservative counties of New Jersey, though these counties contained a high proportion of Quakers, who were more egalitarian in their attitudes toward women. But, as Gertzog convincingly shows, the politicians of the southern counties seemed more interested in the political advantage that would accrue to them by granting votes to women and thereby expanding their voter base than in striking a blow for equality of the sexes.


142. Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary

143. Quoted in Wardle, Mary Wollstonecraft, 158.

144. Tomalin, The Life and Death of Wollstonecraft, 111.


146. Coleridge, Letters, 1:114.


150. In this earlier part of his career he obviously did believe that women could appropriately and successfully pursue a career of authorship; at least this seems the only reasonable inference to draw from his describing Charlotte Smith as “a woman of genius,” after meeting her in London
in 1803. Quoted in Mark Storey, *Robert Southey: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 154. In *A Passionate Sisterhood: The Sisters, Wives and Daughters of the Lake Poets* (London: Constable, 1997), Kathleen Jones argues that Southey underwent a major change in his attitude toward women: “Southey, while approving of female education in principle, had long since parted company with the theories of Mary Wollstonecraft that had seemed so attractive to the young Pantisocrats. He paid lip-service to the ideas of female education, but was still a misogynist at heart” (192).


Peter Manning describes Southey’s support of this project as “High Church feminism” (277-78).

155. Southey, New Letters, 166.

156. That Southey would speak with particular admiration of the redistributive views of Babeuf is not altogether surprising, since, as George Burnett explained, the “grand object then” of Pantisocracy “was the Abolition of Property, at least of individual property” (quoted in Storey, Robert Southey, 51).


158. Southey, New Letters, 118.

159. In his extremely valuable study of Wordsworth’s
early politics and his friendship with Coleridge in the years leading up to the major poetry, Nicholas Roe provides an excellent summary of Losh's career as a radical in the 1790s. See Roe, _Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years_ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 191-92, 241-43.


161. It seems likely that the Warner with whom Losh had his dispute would be the Rev. Richard Warner, who was present at a dinner with Wordsworth and Losh in Bath on 8 July 1798. Earlier in 1798 he had published _A Walk through Wales in 1797_, a book featuring “a frontispiece of Tintern Abbey,” (Kenneth Johnston, _The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy_ [New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1998], 588). According to a letter written by Southey in December 1797, “Warner had gotten himself into a scrape at Bath by a foolish and false assertion from the pulpit respecting the death of poor Mary Godwin. He publicly acknowledged that he had been mistaken, and this ought to have satisfied everybody, but when I left Bath, an anonymous pamphlet was expected against him, and it is rumoured (I know not with what truth) that Godwin himself means to notice the circumstance” (Southey, _New Letters_, 1:156).

163. E. P. Thompson has also suggested Losh as a candidate for one of those good men who fell off (Thompson, *The Romantics*, 58).


Notes to Chapter 4


172. In her introduction to *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Ann Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), Mellor notes that feminist critics have recently sought to expand our sense of how such "noncanonical forms"
as the journal and diary were used to express a "uniquely female culture" (4).


174. Homans, *Women Writers*, 41. On the question of William's responsibility for Dorothy's not becoming a poet, feminist critics are divided. Thus Mellor, in "Teaching Wordsworth and Women," takes exception to those "feminist readers" who "have accused William of 'stealing' Dorothy's material or even of silencing Dorothy's own poetic identity and career. As evidence against "this line," Mellor cites "Dorothy's own letter to Lady Beaumont of 20 April 1806, in which she insists that she has 'no command of language, no power of expressing my ideas, and no one was ever more inapt at molding words into regular metre’" (Mellor, "Teaching Wordsworth and Women," 145). Despite conceding this and further adding "that we must give Wordsworth full credit for genuinely loving Dorothy and his wife" (146), Mellor certainly exemplifies that contemporary feminist criticism of Wordsworth that, in Page's words, judges him "a domestic tyrant," for this is precisely the view Mellor tells us she wishes to leave her students with: "I end the class by reminding students that he entirely dominated his own household, using its female resources to further his own poetic craft and career. Borrowing from Dorothy's
journals, dictating his compositions to Dorothy, Mary and Sarah Hutchinson, relying on their admiration and devotion, Wordsworth fully appropriated their female identities into his own male egotistical sublime" (146).


191. Alexander Pope is damned with faint praise in the 1800 preface for contriving "to render the plainest common sense interesting, and even frequently to invest it with the appearance of passion" (*PrW*, 1:159). But this statement is omitted from the final published version of the preface.


195. Levin, Dorothy Wordsworth, 155-56.

196. Page, Cultivation of Women, 40.

197. Simpson, “Figuring Class, Sex, and Gender,” 542.


203. Page, Cultivation of Women, 40.

204. Quoted in Moorman, Wordsworth: Early Years, 101.


207. Wu, Wordsworth’s Reading 1770-1799, 137.

208. Ibid. 149.


218. Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, 62


220. De Selincourt, *Dorothy Wordsworth*, 368. This detail presumably is presumably taken by De Selincourt from Christopher North’s description in *Blackwood’s* of his visit to Kent’s Bank.


224. This unpublished letter from Jewsbury to Dora is in the Dove Cottage Papers and is quoted in Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, 68.


229. In *Wordsworth: A Life*, the most recent biography of the poet, Juliet Barker rather severely tells us, “Miss Jewsbury was not the fragile flower she liked to paint herself, and less than three weeks after receiving this letter, she had inveigled her way into Rydal Mount” (577).


233. Ibid., 126.

234. Sara Coleridge, *Coleridge and Reed*, 124.


240. Wolfson, "‘Domestic Affections,’" 139.


244. Wolfson "Domestic Affections," 137.


246. The famous account by Haydon of that meeting is quoted in Gill, *William Wordsworth*, 326. But Gill suggests that Haydon may be unreliable.


Notes to Chapter 5

254. This is, of course, the well-known argument of Harold Bloom in the *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973) and in the subsequent books in which he elaborated it.

255. Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of*
Contemporary Criticism, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 187-228.


266. McGann, Romantic Ideology, 1.


268. The one notable exception to this general practice was Susan Wolfson, who in "Individual in Community: Dorothy Wordsworth in Conversation with William," in Mellor, Romanticism and Feminism, expresses sharp disagreement on this issue with Margaret Homans, a principal representative of the feminist position in Wordsworth studies:

"If at times he writes nature as 'feminine' in order to take advantage of traditional sexual politics, to imply, as Homans does, that this 'feminization of nature' is the whole of his imagination (p. 13) and to privilege as a 'usual tendency' those moments in William's poetry when he strives 'to dominate in subject-object relations' (23) is to attend to only half the evidence. For just as typically, and with a full range of investigation, this poet may represent male consciousness as passive,
itself inscribed by voices of the 'other': 'the changeful earth . . . on my mind had stamped / The faces of the moving year' (Prelude, I. 586-88); the 'common face of Nature spake to me . . . impressed / Collateral objects and appearances, / Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep / Until maturer seasons call them forth / To impregnate and to elevate the mind' (I. 615-24). Here the self is not just passive but feminine, and imaged, implicitly, with the potential of female (re)productivity" (146-47).

269. Mellor, Romanticism and Gender, 20.

270. Homans, Bearing the Word, 2.

271. Homans, Bearing the Word, 3-4. Meena Alexander assigns this same passage a crucial function in differentiating between William and Dorothy's writings on the basis of gender (Alexander, Women in Romanticism, 87-88).

272. Ibid., 2.

273. W. J. B. Owen, "'The Props of My Affections,'" The Wordsworth Circle 24 (1993): 177. Both Hartman and Onorato saw in these lines a reference to the loss of the mother (or in Onorato's case to the loss of both parents. Neither Hartman nor Richard Onorato made any effort to refute or even take note of alternative interpretations, though there


275. Owen, "'The Props of my Affections," 179

276. Owens, "'The Props of my Affections,'"179.


279. In their introduction to *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780-1834*, Richardson and Hofkosh, responding to criticisms of Wordsworth by Mary Jacobus for his “historical repression” of the slave trade in *The Prelude* (another instance of the privileging of the absent signifier over what a writer overtly states), point to just
these poems as evidence of Wordsworth’s “anti-slavery” sentiments (7).


282. Liu begins his own argument by asserting the centrality of that passage and, of course, of Hartman as its most important expositor: “The readings we now have of the Simplon Pass episode, among which Geoffrey Hartman’s is in the vanguard, are so powerful that the episode has become one of the handful of paradigms capable of representing the poet's work” (Sense of History, 4). For an extended statement of Liu’s opposition to and challenge of Hartman, see the long third footnote to his chapter on the Simplon Pass episode (513-15).


284. Liu, Sense of History, 10.


287. Liu, Sense of History, 28.

288. Ibid., 30.
Notes to Chapter 6

299. A few recent commentators have maintained that Wordsworth’s radicalism continued after 1798. In The Gang: Coleridge, the Wordsworths, and the Hutchinsons in 1802 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), John Worthen states, as a seeming given, that, when William met Annette in Calais in August of 1802, “he remained republican” (228). Perhaps even more significantly, in Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth’s Poetry of the 1790s (Chicago:
David Bromwich asserts his "sense of Wordsworth's fidelity to a democratic idealism (though in defensive and specialized forms) a full decade after Napoleon's attack on the Swiss republic cooled his enthusiasm for France." But Bromwich only adverts to his "sense" of Wordsworth's continuing democratic politics in a casual aside in a footnote, acknowledging, even as he offers it, that his view is one that "has not been shared by many recent commentators" (6 n.3).

300. Thompson, Romantics, 36.
301. McGann, Romantic Ideology, 8.
303. James K. Chandler, Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and the Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). A notable exception to this general trend among new historicists is David Simpson, who, in Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt against Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), while discussing "the best recent criticism" of Wordsworth --"by Jerome McGann, James Chandler, Marjorie Levinson, and Alan Liu, for instance"-- nonetheless, carefully distances himself from his customary allies in this one matter by sharply rebuking these same critics for emphasizing "the covertly reactionary elements in the apparently democratic
young Wordsworth": "to put the conservatism back into the early career and in some cases, to disavow completely any radical or countercultural integrity, conscious or otherwise, in the early writings," Simpson argues, "is to go too far, and to render those writings too coherent and too thoroughly a figment of the needs of our post-Althusserian generation" (154).

304. Quoted in Thompson, 44.


315. Godwin, Political Justice, 1:424-27. In The Philosophic Mind (160-61) I also suggested that this passage in Political Justice was probably the basis for the lines quoted from "The Old Cumberland Beggar" (160-65). But Nicola Trott has disputed this in "The Coleridge Circle and 'The Answer to Godwin,'" Review of English Studies 41 (1990): 212-229, arguing that the lines in question by Wordsworth are in fact "a conscious hit at Political Justice," apparently because the passage from Godwin first
appears in “the third edition, where Godwin (probably due to Coleridge) accepts the role of habit and emotion in forming disinterested conduct” (226). It is not at all clear to me why the fact that the passage on “habit” does not appear until the third edition should turn the passage from Wordsworth into a hit at Political Justice, since, though somewhat a modification of Godwin’s earlier views, it still conforms in essentials to them, still advocates a universal rational benevolence, with all that implies for the radical politics of the time. Trott does argue that, in contrast to the moral philosophy of Godwin, the lines in “Old Cumberland Beggar” reduce the role of reason in Wordsworth’s ethical formulation, placing their emphasis on that pleasurable “after-joy / Which reason cherishes,” but I am not convinced that this is so. In the lines that immediately follow this in the earliest draft we have of this passage, Wordsworth tells of those who are the prime beneficiaries of this process of moral development, those I have termed “philanthropists,” describing these “lofty minds / And meditative” as men from whose minds “reason falls / Like a strong radiance of the setting sun.” Moreover, while the chronological relationship of Godwin’s book and Wordsworth’s poem may seem to work against the argument for a Godwinian influence on the lines in
Wordsworth, again I do not believe that this is really the case. The third edition of *Political Justice* does have a 1798 date and the date of composition of “The Old Cumberland Beggar” is usually given as 1797, but in fact the third edition of *Political Justice* was actually published in December of 1797, and the passage by Wordsworth describing the role of “habit” in the disposition of the mind “To virtue / And true goodness” was not written until sometime between 25 January and 5 March 1798, according to the dating of the stages of composition of the poem suggested by Butler and Green in the Cornell edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. And though the ethical argument of the passage by Wordsworth so strikingly follows the general outlines of the argument by Godwin in the third edition of *Political Justice*, we do not even have to assume that Wordsworth had Godwin’s book in front of him at this time. Indeed, it seems reasonable to assume that moral philosophy was one of the subjects regularly discussed by Wordsworth and Godwin during their frequent meetings, since Godwin credits himself with having “converted Wordsworth . . . from the ‘doctrine of self-love to that of benevolence’” (Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). 139); and it therefore seems similarly reasonable also to assume that moral
philosophy and Godwin’s newly devised argument for habit as the enabling mechanism in moving one from self-love to benevolence was one of the matters discussed during Wordsworth’s visit to Godwin in London on 13 December 1797 (Kenneth Johnston, The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Rebel, Lover, Spy, 545), the month of publication of the third edition of Political Justice. I am also puzzled as to why Trott attributes Godwin’s views to Coleridge rather than to Hartley, to whom Priestley ascribes them in his edition of the third edition of Political Justice (Priestley, 3:24).


That is certainly the way Palmer describes the Ideologues. *Ideologie*, Palmer writes, “was a word coined in 1796 by Destutt de Tracy to describe his theory of knowledge . . . It was essentially an epistemology, holding that all reliable knowledge was derived ultimately from sense perception, so that all valid knowledge must rest on ‘the analysis of sensations and ideas, or the relation among words as found universally in all languages, and so indicative of the operation of the human mind’” (Palmer, *Improvement of Humanity*, 222-23).

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Quoted in Johnston who discounts the significance of Taylor’s comment as an indication of Wordsworth’s political opinions, apparently on the grounds that because he was a government informer, Taylor’s views were unreliable. Of equal importance is the fact that by the stage in his account when this episode appears, Johnston is already committed to the view that by 1806 Wordsworth had long been considerably more conservative (*Hidden Wordsworth*, 825-26).

Quotations from the texts of all three fragments are taken from the reading texts of the fragments that appear in *Lyrical Ballads* in the Cornell Wordsworth (Butler and Green 307-11). Butler and Green date the composition of the three fragments as sometime “between October 6, 1798 and late April 1799.” But they conjecture that two of them, “There is a law severe of penury” and “There is an active principle alive in all things,” were composed “probably at Goslar between October 6 and December 28 1798” (*Lyrical Ballads*, 307, 309).


The same Goslar fragment can also be viewed as an elaboration of and gloss upon “Lines Written in Early Spring,” another poem written earlier in 1798 that links an order of nature bound together in pleasurable connectedness, “Nature’s holy plan” (22) as Wordsworth
would eventually call it, with the society of men, who, he implies, could live in a similar pleasurable connectedness, if they only would determine to do so.

332. Johnston, one of the few critics to discuss the political fragments written in Germany, proposes what amounts to a composite reading of the three in *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy*, in which they serve as a kind of encoded expression of and rationale for his service as a spy while in Germany. As Johnston explains it, in order to avoid "'the law severe of penury,' a crushing load of debt, which would make him 'the worst of slaves, the slave / Of his own house,'" Wordsworth had acted as a spy, taking money from "the 'warders' of the state's 'prisons'" (668). Hence, according to Johnston, the language of the passage I have just quoted is "political language—bUt of a police state" (667)—quite possibly the guilt-laden "rhetoric adopted by a man who had been offered the alternatives of cooperation or exposure and imprisonment" (668) by what amounts to a secret police and had presumably chosen the first of these alternatives (668). Johnston's interpretation is predicated on the assumption that Wordsworth had served the secret police as a spy (or at least as a courier) during his trip to Germany in 1798, and, at the same time, with the circularity to
which such interpretations are prone, the passage, so interpreted, is used to lend support to the hypothesis that Wordsworth was a spy. But with that contention now called in question by Michael Durey's discovery that the Wordsworth referred to in the duke of Portland's paybook was not William Wordsworth but Robinson Wordsworth (Michael Durey, "The Spy Who Never Was," Times Literary Supplement (10 March 2000), 14-15), Johnston himself would seem to have backed away from this hypothesis. In the revised version of his biography of Wordsworth, Johnston not only acknowledges his basic error in taking the paybook entry as proof of Wordsworth's complicity with the government's apparatus of surveillance, but he also removes his "'swashbuckling' sub-title," Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy, from this new version. Publishing the paperback edition simply as The Hidden Wordsworth (London: Pimlico, 2000), xii. Yet Johnston still persists in reading the political fragments written in Germany essentially as a spy story, with the original meaning trimmed down in the revised edition but still largely intact, including an earlier reference to a "Secret Department" that implies a biographical context for the passage in a relationship between Wordsworth and the Home Office that we now suspect never existed (480). Only Hermann J. Wüscher (among the critics I am aware of who
have in the past three decades written on Wordsworth’s politics) in *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity in Wordsworth: 1791-1800*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia. Uppsala, Swed.: [University of Uppsala]; Stockholm: distributed by Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1980 takes up the fragments written in Germany as expressions of Wordsworth’s continuing radicalism while in Germany and reads them (as I do) as “protest poetry,” stressing how “an active exertion of man’s capacities in the service of liberty leads to effective political reform” (117).

333. Johnston, rather puzzlingly—at least to my mind—reads these fragments written in Goslar self-referentially, as part of a “blank verse ‘argument’” that is “preoccupied with the negative effects on genius of the ‘law severe of penury’ and the need to earn a living; they form an economic subtext to the ideology of genius presented in the grander passages of nature worship he interleaved with his boyhood ‘spots of time’” (Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy*, 663). But since the figure singled out as victim of the “law severe of penury” is “the cottage boy” (2), presumably a child growing up in a household of agricultural laborers, Wüscher seems to me much closer to the mark when he contends that the poem
“exposes the evils of child labor. It shares the angry tone of his earlier protest poetry, thus appealing to legislators to change radically those conditions that run counter to a free and normal development of the child’s mind” (117).