

Romantic Regionalism, Romantic Nationalism

JONATHAN BATE

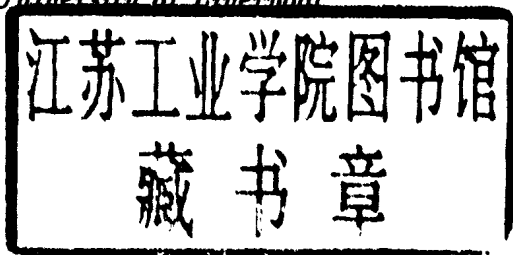
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William Wordsworth was the first English poet to record in detail the circumstances of composition of his own works, the first to reflect publicly and at length upon his own art and its development. As testimony to 'the growth of a poet's mind', his prefaces, notes, appendices and *obiter dicta* are of a piece with *The Prelude*. They are also, incidentally, a model without which the astonishing reflections upon self and poetry in the letters of Keats would not have been conceivable. Although clouded by age and thus unreliable on certain matters of detail, the body of notes which Wordsworth dictated to Isabella Fenwick in 1843, intended for subsequent publication, constitute the fullest commentary on himself by any major English poet. It is from one of the Fenwick notes that I wish to begin.

In the cottage of Town End, one afternoon in 1801, my Sister read to me the Sonnets of Milton. I had long been well acquainted with them, but I was particularly struck on that occasion by the dignified simplicity and majestic harmony that runs through most of them,—in character so totally different from the Italian, and still more so from Shakespeare's fine Sonnets. I took fire, if I may be allowed to say so, and produced three Sonnets the same afternoon, the first I ever wrote except an irregular one at school. Of these three, the only one I distinctly remember is "I grieved for Buonaparté."¹

The afternoon in question was in fact that of 21 May 1802, when, according to Dorothy's journal, William wrote two sonnets on Buonaparte after she had read Milton's sonnets to him. It is typical of Wordsworth

¹Fenwick note, in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 5 vols (Oxford, 1940-9; 2nd edn of vols 2-3, 1952-4), III, 417.

to construct his own past in such a way that he discovers a new form on a particular afternoon, which almost takes on the intensity of a spot of time.² Although Wordsworth characterises the difference between Milton's sonnets and those of Shakespeare and Petrarch as a matter of style—'dignified simplicity and majestic harmony' as opposed to verbal ingenuity and structured play—his practical response to them reveals that the distinction which really counted was that of subject-matter. Where Shakespeare and his fellow-Elizabethans followed the Italians in making desire the Leitmotif of the form, Wordsworth follows Milton in turning it to public account. It was obviously such sonnets as those on Cromwell and Fairfax which led Wordsworth to write on Buonaparte. The importance of Milton's public theme for Wordsworth is apparent from a letter to Walter Savage Landor in which he recollects the afternoon of 21 May 1802: he refers there not only to the sonnets' 'harmony' but also to their 'gravity' and 'republican austerity'.³ That letter was written in 1822, the year in which Wordsworth published his *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, a national history in which the republican age of Milton is a point of crisis.

Because he became Laureate and because the Victorians admired such effusions as 'Ode. The Morning of the Day appointed for a General Thanksgiving, January 18, 1816' and 'Occasioned by the Battle of Waterloo, February, 1816', Wordsworth had enormous influence as a public poet. It is therefore easy to forget that he wrote no public poetry of any significance prior to 1802. This is not to say that his poems of the 1790s failed to address the great political issues of the day. Far from it. But they did so obliquely: the revolutionary desecration of the monastery of the Grand Chartreuse was the occasion not for an Ode but for a picturesque incident in the loco-descriptive *Sketches* published in 1793; the character of the revolutionary was anatomised theoretically in the drama of *The Borderers*, not overtly in an apostrophe to Robespierre or Danton; instead of some poem entitled 'Ode on the eve of the ninth

²In fact it is not strictly true that he only wrote one sonnet as a younger man: see *Poetical Works*, I, 3, 265, 269, 296, 308. But, as always with Wordsworth, the self-made myth of the poet's career has more force than does the minute history of his development.

³Letter of 20 April 1822, in *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2nd edn, 7 vols (Oxford, 1967-88), *The Later Years Part I: 1821-1826*, ed. Alan G. Hill (1978), pp. 125-6.

Anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille, July 13, 1798', we get 'Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798'. Of the two genres signalled by the title of *Lyrical Ballads*, lyric is the essential private form and it quickly becomes apparent that the ballads offer seemingly inconsequential narratives about idiot boys and old men digging at roots, not historical tales of battles and heroes. The latter kind of ballad was being collected by Sir Walter Scott around this time, but it was not until such examples as Scott's own *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Marmion* were in print that Wordsworth turned to this sort of subject matter in *The White Doe of Rylstone*; or, *The Fate of the Nortons*.

In 1798, the year of the first volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge published a volume containing three poems, the deeply personal 'Frost at Midnight', the very public 'France: An Ode', and the meditation which wonderfully links the personal and the public, the local and the national, 'Fears in Solitude'. But it was not until the reading of Milton's sonnets in 1802 that Wordsworth found a medium in which to write directly about contemporary history and national identity. He went on writing sonnets for the rest of his life, over five hundred of them, the vast majority Miltonic in form and public in matter. It will be my argument that they make up his most sustained and accomplished body of public poetry, and that, in contradistinction to the Petrarchan or Shakespearean sonnet which defines the poet's self in terms of love, time and fame, they transform Wordsworth into a national poet—but, crucially, a poet whose sense of nation is defined by a thoroughgoing regionalism. That regionalism sets him apart from the model of Milton, revealing him instead to be in a tradition that goes back to the antiquarian and chorographic prose and poetry of Queen Elizabeth's reign, which provided a precedent for the writing of nation through region.

It was in a sequence of sonnets written during the summer of 1802 that Wordsworth established himself as a poet of nation, having previously been pre-eminently one of nature.⁴ The force that led Coleridge to meditate upon love of country in 1798 was fear of invasion, of disruption of the peaceful landscape on which he looked down from the Quantocks; for Wordsworth in 1802, it was—paradoxically—the lifting of the fear of

⁴ To write sonnets in Miltonic form and upon Miltonic matter, but in a *sequence*, in the manner of the Elizabethans, was an innovation in English poetry.

invasion which gave him the opportunity to express his sense of his own Englishness. The Peace of Amiens enabled him to cross the Channel and revisit France for the first time since the early days of the Revolution. He arranged to meet Annette Vallon and his French daughter at Calais that August. His earlier crossing of the Channel back to England, late in 1792, a few weeks before the birth of the daughter whom he would not see for nearly ten years,⁵ had precipitated his crisis-year of 1793. Committed to revolutionary France both politically and personally, he had felt utterly cut off from the country of his birth once war was declared in February 1793. His conflict then is recorded in a vital passage of *The Prelude*:

I who with the breeze
Had play'd, a green leaf on the blessed tree
Of my beloved Country, nor had wish'd
For happier fortune than to wither there,
Now from my pleasant station was cut off
And toss'd about in whirlwinds.⁶

In this passage, patriotic belonging is imaged in pastoral terms. The country is figured organically in the blessed tree (in the later Wordsworth, imagery of this sort will be redolent of Burkean conservatism); the poet is a green leaf playing in the gentle correspondent breeze which is at once the inner imagination and the external spirit of place. It is from this composed state in which the self is given ease by its commanding hold over the harmonious English landscape—'pleasant station' is the language of the picturesque—that Wordsworth has been severed. The leaf is tossed in the revolutionary whirlwind. The conflicting pull of the word 'patriot' comes to the heart of a matter: it is a term for Wordsworth's bond with his native land (and in particular landscape), yet at the same time a key word in the radical lexicon—a patriot means a devotee of liberty and hence a staunch supporter of the revolution.⁷ The latter use of the term occurs in the previous book of *The Prelude*, when

⁵ This is to assume that he did not see Annette and the baby Caroline on the brief return visit to Paris which he seems to have made in the autumn of 1793.

⁶ 1805 *Prelude*, X, 253–8, quoted from reading text in *The Thirteen-Book 'Prelude'*, ed. Mark L. Reed, The Cornell Wordsworth, 2 vols (Ithaca and London, 1992).

⁷ On the complexity of the term, especially in the 1790s, see chap. 1 of Peter Swaab, 'Wordsworth and Patriotism', unpubl. Ph.D. diss. (Cambridge, 1989).

Wordsworth commits himself to the revolutionary cause in Orléans: 'and thus did soon / Become a Patriot, and my heart was all/ Given to the People, and my love was theirs' (IX, 124-6). The ambivalence of the patriotic urge accounts for Wordsworth's sense of almost inexpressible alienation once he is back in England. A village church is part of that organic English community in which he finds his home, yet in that church the villagers pray a prayer he cannot share for the defeat of liberated France:

It was a grief,
Grief call it not, 'twas any thing but that,
A conflict of sensations without name,
Of which he only who may love the sight
Of a Village Steeple as I do can judge
When in the Congregation, bending all
To their great Father, prayers were offer'd up,
Or praises for our Country's Victories,
And 'mid the simple worshippers, perchance,
I only, like an uninvited Guest,
Whom no one owned, sate silent, shall I add
Fed on the day of vengeance, yet to come?

(1805 *Prelude*, X, 263-74)

The return to France in 1802 brings the healing of Wordsworth's bond with England. The sonnets composed there and on his immediate return were later gathered to make up the opening group of the section of his *Poems, in Two Volumes* of 1807 entitled 'Sonnets dedicated to Liberty'. He added to the group in successive editions, but the overall title remained the same until 1845, when it became 'Poems dedicated to National Independence and Liberty'. This late change to the title is revealing: where the aged Laureate is explicit about his nationalism, in the editions from 1807 to 1843 the celebration of nation is implicit in that of liberty.

Wordsworth's brief stay in Calais coincided with the proclamation of Napoleon as consul for life. For the poet, this was confirmation that France could no longer be associated with freedom; liberty had to be reclaimed by England. Once it is seen that this was the project of the public poetry which Wordsworth began writing in 1802, it may also be seen why he chose the form that he did in which to write it: Milton's

sonnets are defining texts of English liberty, written as they were in praise of martyrs to the cause of liberty such as the republican Vane and the proto-protestant Waldenses massacred in Piedmont.⁸

As they were arranged for publication, the 'Sonnets dedicated to Liberty' begin with 'Composed by the Sea-side, near Calais, August, 1802'. The origin of this poem is to be found in Dorothy's journal of the visit: 'We had delightful walks after the heat of the day was passed away—seeing far off in the west the coast of England like a cloud crested with Dover Castle, which was but like the summit of the cloud—the evening star and the glory of the sky.'⁹ This becomes:

Fair Star of Evening, Splendor of the West,
 Star of my Country!—on the horizon's brink
 Thou hangest, stooping, as might seem, to sink
 On England's bosom; yet well pleas'd to rest,
 Meanwhile, and be to her a glorious crest
 Conspicuous to the Nations. Thou, I think,
 Should'st be my Country's emblem; and should'st wink,
 Bright Star! with laughter on her banners, drest
 In thy fresh beauty. There! that dusky spot
 Beneath thee, it is England; there it lies.
 Blessings be on you both! one hope, one lot,
 One life, one glory! I, with many a fear
 For my dear Country, many heartfelt sighs,
 Among Men who do not love her, linger here.¹⁰

In Dorothy's journal, the coast is 'crested' with Dover Castle; in William's poem, the evening star is England's crest. The castle is not mentioned, though the banners implicitly evoke flags fluttering on its battlements. Wordsworth can assume that his readers will know it is Dover which may be seen from the French coast; he withholds the place-name and its resonances for a pair of sonnets to be written on his return. In this opening poem he guards the land not with a fortification built by

⁸ Vane is cited in Wordsworth's Liberty sonnets (No. 15) and the Waldenses in his Ecclesiastical ones (II. 14).

⁹ Entry in 'Grasmere Journal', Aug. 1802, quoted in *Poetical Works*, III, 452.

¹⁰ Quoted from reading text in *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, ed. Jared Curtis, The Cornell Wordsworth (Ithaca, 1983). Subsequent quotations from the 'Sonnets dedicated to Liberty' are also from this text.

man, but with a natural power, the light of the evening star. Its shining over the English coast mirrors the star that shone over Bethlehem and is thus made to mark the land out as blessed, as a place of special destiny. The sonnet is Wordsworth's first major statement of faith in England. It came to be tested throughout the nineteenth century, most notably in Arnold's 'Dover Beach', which rewrites it from the other side of the Channel by turning England into a 'darkling plain' and replacing the star with a gleam of light from the French coast.

The second sonnet picks up from the end of the first, reversing the movement. Where Wordsworth lingers by the sea-side near Calais, as if magnetically drawn to England, other Englishmen—'Lords, Lawyers, Statesmen, Squires of low degree'—hurry towards Paris, 'With first-fruit offerings crowd to bend the knee / In France, before the new-born Majesty'. The reference is to C.J. Fox and the other 'appeasers' of Napoleon, whose visits to France hot on the heels of the Treaty of Amiens were much mocked at the time.¹¹ In Wordsworth's view it is a deep irony that his own headlong commitment to the newly liberated France of 1790–92 would have been viewed as seditious, whereas now that Paris was yoked to a tyrant others were eager to embrace it. The contrast between 1790 and 1802 is the matter of the third sonnet in the sequence, 'To a Friend, composed near Calais, on the Road leading to Ardres, August 7th, 1802':

Jones! when from Calais southward you and I
 Travell'd on foot together; then this Way,
 Which I am pacing now, was like the May
 With festivals of new-born Liberty:
 A homeless sound of joy was in the Sky;
 The antiquated Earth, as one might say,
 Beat like the heart of Man: songs, garlands, play,
 Banners, and happy faces, far and nigh!
 And now, sole register that these things were,
 Two solitary greetings have I heard,
 'Good morrow, Citizen!' a hollow word,

¹¹ As in Gillray's caricature 'Introduction of Citizen Volpone [Fox] and his Suite, at Paris'. Wordsworth's poem was first published in January 1803 in the *Morning Post*, which, partly under the influence of Coleridge, had swung in the autumn of 1802 from an anti-Pitt and anti-war position to an anti-Fox and anti-peace one.

As if a dead Man spake it! Yet despair
 I feel not: happy am I as a Bird:
 Fair seasons yet will come, and hopes as fair.¹²

This sonnet is exact about its time and place of writing because its effect depends upon a reanimation of the past which defines the compositional present by contrast. Of all Wordsworth's sonnets, it is the one which comes closest to being a 'spot of time' like those in *The Prelude*. In terms of the sequence it is of great importance because it is the only poem to locate 'Liberty' in France, not England. As Wordsworth re-walks the road to Ardres, ghosts of his revolutionary youth return to him. He marks himself out as a 'patriot' in the radical sense of that word: the title 'To a Friend' evokes the spirit of *fraternité*, conjuring up the English Jacobin catch-phrase, 'Friends of Liberty'; the information that the two friends 'Travell'd on foot together' identifies them as of the people, in sharp contrast to the lords, lawyers and statesmen of the previous poem who 'Post forward' to Paris by carriage. The memory of 1790 buys into the full range of revolutionary iconography: the festival, the songs and garlands, the renewing of the 'antiquated Earth', the sense that the revolution entails a reuniting of man with nature in the Rousseauesque style. The hollowness of the *citoyen's* greeting, the one remaining revolutionary icon on the silent road, proclaims the end of the dream. The 'dead Man' who speaks it symbolically becomes the poet's own youthful self. The figure revisiting the spot can do no more than comfort himself with the vague, distant hope of some future renewal.

The next part of the sequence lays out the evidence in support of the argument that liberty has been extinguished in France. There are two sonnets on Buonaparte, the one written back in May after hearing Dorothy read Milton and another on how 'his is henceforth an established sway, / Consul for life'. Then there is 'On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic', a response to Napoleon's conquest of what Wordsworth viewed as the model republic of the post-classical world, 'Venice, the eldest Child of Liberty'. To a far greater extent than Robespierre's

¹²This poem was heavily revised in 1815 (see the text in *Poetical Works*, III, 110). It was a revision for the worse, introducing ponderous phrases like 'vernal coverts'. Most notably, the third line was altered to read 'Streamed with the pomp of a too-credulous day', the pontificating adjective distancing Wordsworth utterly from his revolutionary youth and destroying the subtlety whereby the spirit of 1790 is rekindled in the very regret for its loss.

Terror, it was Napoleonic expansionism that turned English Jacobins against France. In Coleridge's 'France: An Ode', the invasion of the model democracy, Switzerland, is the turning-point; the extinction of Venice has the same effect on Wordsworth. Later in the sequence, he follows Coleridge in citing Switzerland. 'Two Voices are there; one is of the Sea' (Britain), 'One of the Mountains' (Switzerland), 'each a mighty Voice', and each the 'chosen Music' of 'Liberty'. Now that the mountain voice has been silenced by the 'Tyrant', Liberty must cleave to the maritime one.

Another symptom of the end of liberty in France was the return of slavery. The eighth sonnet in the sequence concerns Toussaint l'Ouverture, the black leader of the Haitian uprising, who became governor after the French Convention's enfranchisement of slaves in 1794; he resisted Napoleon's edict re-establishing slavery, was arrested and sent to France. He was in prison when Wordsworth was in France in August 1802 and within a year would die in captivity. In the sonnet on Jones, the forces of nature had sung in harmony with the revolution; in that on Toussaint, they are reduced to a remnant in which the spirit of liberty can live on after the man who incarnated it has been destroyed:

Thou has left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee.

Not only did Napoleon reintroduce slavery, he also banished all negroes from France. Wordsworth's ninth sonnet, simply entitled 'September 1st, 1802', describes the dignity of a negro woman going into exile as a fellow-passenger with Wordsworth and Dorothy on the boat out of Calais. One begins to see with what extraordinary care the sequence has been organised. The sonnet on the negro woman is appropriate both to follow that on Toussaint and to chart Wordsworth's own voyage. She is described in her own right with plain and unpatronising sympathy, but she is also another of the poet's doubles: where the voice who speaks the hollow fraternal greeting is the dead revolutionary self, the negro woman is also Wordsworth driven from France, from his formative years there and from his daughter.

It should by now be apparent that Wordsworth's patriotism is complex, thought through and hard won. It is no knee-jerk jingoism. This

must be recognised if we are to do justice to the next poem, which is the turning-point—or rather the landing-point—not merely in the sequence but in the whole configuration of Wordsworth's public poetry. He has come home to the peace of an English pastoral, to the protection of a womb-like vale. This return does not replicate the ambivalence of the one ten years previously. Sonnet ten of the sequence is entitled 'Composed in the Valley, near Dover, on the Day of landing':

Dear fellow-Traveller! here we are once more.
 The Cock that crows, the Smoke that curls, that sound
 Of bells, those Boys that in yon meadow-ground
 In white-sleeve'd shirts are playing by the score,
 And even this little River's gentle roar,
 All, all are English. Oft have I look'd round
 With joy in Kent's green vales; but never found
 Myself so satisfied in heart before.
 Europe is yet in Bonds; but let that pass,
 Thought for another moment. Thou art free
 My Country! and 'tis joy enough and pride
 For one hour's perfect bliss, to tread the grass
 Of England once again, and hear and see,
 With such a dear Companion at my side.

In the previous poem, the negro woman was a 'fellow-Passenger'; here Dorothy is the dear 'fellow-Traveller'. 'Fellow' retains the discourse of *fraternité*—or perhaps in these instances we should say *sororité*—but removes it from France. *Liberté* has now crossed the Channel with the Wordsworths, leaving behind the Europe that is 'yet in Bonds'. As for *égalité*, it is to be found not in a social agenda but in the composition of the landscape, the integration of humankind (curling smoke, playing children) with nature. Wordsworth is moving here towards an image of organic England which may well be construed as Burkean.¹³ But the precise location in Kent, I would suggest, sets Wordsworth apart from Burke.

It is here that regional specificity begins to play its part in Wordsworth's construction of national identity. Burke had argued in favour of

¹³ For the argument that there is a perennial Burkeanism in Wordsworth, see James K. Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago, 1984).

evolution over revolution, of the organic, unwritten English constitution over the mechanical, formalised codes of France with its revolutionary proclamations and codified declaration of the rights of man. Tom Paine's most telling dismantling of this argument came at that moment in the *Rights of Man* when he asked from where this evolving English constitution came, to whom the line of the monarchy could be traced back. The answer was the invading, marauding Frenchman, William the Conqueror. 1066 has always been a problem for those who want to see England as set apart in the silver sea, as an inviolable chosen nation. The need for that myth of uniqueness became especially acute with the Reformation: the Norman inheritance was not such a problem when England was part of Catholic Europe, but with Henry VIII's break from Rome, history had to be rewritten. That task fell to the Elizabethans, as they worked to secure the Anglican settlement so as to ensure that there would never be another counter-Reformation like that of Mary. The creation of an English national identity was one of the main functions of writing in Elizabethan England.¹⁴ One thinks immediately of Holinshed, of *Henry V*, of *The Faerie Queene*, of Warner's *Albion's England*.

The apogee of this kind of writing was William Camden's *Britannia*, published in 1586 and expanded in successive editions in 1587, 1590, 1594, 1600, 1607 and 1610 (when it was translated into English by Philemon Holland). '*Britain*, called also *Albion*,' Camden begins, 'the most famous Island of the whole world, is divided from the Continent of *Europe* by the Ocean.'¹⁵ The sea encloses the island and creates the conditions for national individuation, which, according to Camden, is effected by a combination of geography, language and mode of government. Camden's method of inventing national identity may be described as history-through-topography. He aimed 'to restore Britain to its Antiquities, and its Antiquities to Britain'.¹⁶ He did this by undertaking a county by county survey, emphasising points of local historical interest. Much of his material was taken from John Leland, who had begun a similar survey on behalf of Henry VIII, but another model for

¹⁴ See Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, 1992).

¹⁵ *Britain*, p. i, quoted from *Camden's Britannia, Newly Translated into English*, publ. Edmund Gibson (London, 1695), which I have used because it is a more accurate translation of Camden's Latin than is Holland's.

¹⁶ Preface, sig. d2v.

Camden's county-based approach was the first published English chorography, William Lambarde's *Perambulation of Kent*. In Lambarde, Kent has particular associations with liberty. 'The yeomanrie, or common people ... is no where more free, and jolly, then in this shyre'. This is principally because of a distinctive form of land tenure. 'There were never any bondmen (or villaines, as the law calleth them) in Kent',

Neither be they here so much bounden to the gentrie by copyhold, or custumarie tenures, as the inhabitants of the westernne countries of the realme be, nor at all indangered by the feeble holde of tenant right, (which is but a discent of a tenancie at will) as the common people in the northern parts be: for Copyhold tenure is rare in Kent, and tenant right not heard of at all. But in place of these, the custome of Gavelkind prevailing every where, in manner every man is a freeholder, and hath some part of his own to live upon.

The Kent in which every man is a freeholder thus becomes an ideal commonwealth. And, crucially for Lambarde's account, the county is said never to have fallen under the Norman yoke: 'the communitie of Kent was never vanquished by the Conquerour, but yeelded itself by composition'.¹⁷

From Lambarde, via Camden, the idealisation of Kent reached the key poetic text of chorography, a book well-known to the Wordsworth circle, Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion. Or a Chorographickall Description of Tracts, Rivers, Mountaines, Forests, and other Parts of this renowned Isle of Great Britaine, With intermixture of the most Remarquable Stories, Antiquities, Wonders, Rarities, Pleasures, and Commodities of the same*—a title which reveals that Drayton is following Camden in the writing of history-through-topography. As it was originally published in 1612, *Poly-Olbion* ended with a marriage of Kentish rivers. The Stour praises his own county:

O noble *Kent*, quoth he, this praise doth thee belong,
The hard'st to be controld, impatientest of wrong.
Who, when the *Norman* first with pride and horror sway'd,

¹⁷ *A Perambulation of Kent* (1570), quoted from 1826 reprint of the second edition, repr. with an introduction by Richard Church (Bath, 1970), p. 7.

Threw'st off the servile yoke upon the *English* lay'd;
 And with a high resolve, most bravely didst restore
 That libertie so long enjoy'd by thee before.
 Not suffering forraine Lawes should thy free Customes bind,
 Then onely show'dst thy selfe of th' ancient *Saxon* kind.
 Of all the *English* Shires be thou surnam'd the Free,
 And foremost ever plac't, when they shall reckned bee.¹⁸

Wordsworth's distinction between the bonds of Europe and the freedom of Kent is in a line of descent from Drayton's juxtaposition of the Norman yoke against Kentish independence and liberty. 'To the Men of Kent', the twenty-third of the twenty-six 'Sonnets dedicated to Liberty' in Wordsworth's *Poems* of 1807, alludes explicitly to the Kentish yeoman's history in the vanguard of English liberty:

Ye, of yore,
 Did from the Norman win a gallant wreath;
 Confirm'd the charters that were yours before.

The genealogy of Wordsworth's perception of Kent gives the 'Valley, near Dover' sonnet a different kind of patriotism from Burke's, a patriotism rooted not in evolving Westminster institutions ultimately of French origin, but in a tradition of local defence of liberty. It should be remembered here that Richard Price's controversial sermon which provoked Burke to write the *Reflections* was on the subject of the love of country and argued that England should welcome the French revolution as an extension across the Channel of liberties long won at home.

It is to the history of English liberty, and the fearful effects of a decline from its high ideals, that Wordsworth then turns his sequence. First, he remembers the example of the heroes of English republicanism: 'The later Sydney' (Algernon, that is), 'Marvel, Harrington, / Young Vane, and others who call'd Milton Friend'. Then he laments how the 'most famous Stream' of 'British freedom' is in danger of perishing 'in Bogs and Sands' (Sonnets 15, 16). The controlling image of the river, also in the tradition of Drayton, will recur in later sequences. Drayton's Stour and Wordsworth's Duddon serve as pure sources of locally-grounded national

¹⁸ Song XVIII, 729-38, in Drayton's *Works*, ed. J. William Hebel, 5 vols (Oxford, 1933), IV, 381. Selden's 'Illustrations' to this Song specifically cite Lambard's *Perambulation* as a source for information about Kent (p. 386).

identity, but when the greatest of English rivers nears the sea, it becomes, as Blake saw in his lyric 'London', 'the chartered Thames'—licensed out for commercial use, sullied in the pursuit of gain. London is the root of England's ill, so it is in the sonnet 'London, 1802' that the presiding genius of English republican virtue and freedom must be invoked. At the exact mid-point of his sequence Wordsworth places a model Miltonic sonnet—apostrophic, flexible in caesura, magniloquent in overflowing syntax—on Milton. The octave consists of two sentences, broken not at the end of the first quatrain, as they would be in a Shakespearean sonnet, but irregularly, in the middle of the sixth line, in homage to the presider:

Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
 England hath need of thee: she is a fen
 Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
 Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
 Have forfeited their ancient English dower
 Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
 Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
 And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.

The sestet then begins with the famous line, 'Thy soul was like a Star and dwelt apart'. In the context of the sequence, this echoes the first lines of the first sonnet, 'Fair Star of Evening, Splendor of the West, / Star of my Country!' Milton has become the star of England and the extinction of his spirit—the embodiment of 'manners, virtue, freedom, power'—is proof that England is no longer true to itself. Wordsworth implicitly sets himself up as Milton Redivivus, calling England to return to its heritage of virtue and freedom.

Where the star image in the sestet harks back to the opening of the whole sequence, that in the octave which calls England 'a fen / Of stagnant waters' is a variation on the recurring image of the nation as a stream. The point here is that the water is no longer flowing and there is accordingly a nasty smell coming from the institutions evoked by altar, sword, pen, fireside and hall (church, army, clerisy, family, gentry). In two later sonnet sequences Wordsworth set the stream flowing again. It is to them that I will now turn.

The River Duddon, conceived as a sequence and published in 1820, is a public counterpart to the private fluvial movement of *The Prelude*.