

## Revolutionary or Apostate?: Wordsworth's *Cintra* Tract

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### Abstract

The question of whether and when Wordsworth turned his back on his early political ideals has often been the topic of Wordsworthian studies, and many critics believe that after the French Revolution the poet renounced its cause and became a conservative. This paper seeks to demonstrate that rather than becoming a renegade of revolutionary causes, the poet “modified” his political ideas. In order to do this, I first examine the political pamphlet—*Convention of Cintra*—that Wordsworth wrote in his middle years (1808 to 1809), that is, after his “retirement” to the country at the end of 1799, a retirement that has always been interpreted as reactionary and a sign of betrayal. Then I compare *Convention of Cintra* with a political tract written during his radical years—*A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*. Such a comparison will show that the poet retained some of his earlier political ideas, but modified the relatively radical ones, especially those regarding violent revolutions.

**Key Words:** Wordsworth, *Convention of Cintra*, *A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, apostate, virtue

## I. Introduction

In the 20th and 21st centuries, almost all Wordsworthian critics have favored *The Prelude* over *The Excursion*—a poem considered by the Victorian readers and the poet himself as one of his most important works. This preference results in the fact that after the 1949 publication of Wordsworth's five-volume *Poetical Works* edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, most of the poet's major works were newly edited by the end of the last century and became the scholarly Cornell Wordsworth series. However, editing *The Excursion* did not begin until the early part of the 21st century, with its publication scheduled for later this year. Part of the reason that *The Excursion* has been eclipsed by the poet's autobiographical poem stems from the "conservatism"—whether socio-political or religious—that it displays. This popular dissatisfaction with the poet's conservatism is, of course, not a modern-day phenomenon. Wordsworth has long been seen as a "renegade" or "apostate" of revolutionary ideas, and Shelley, Hazlitt and Browning expressed disappointment with the poet's change of political stance. The numerous debates and discussions about when and why he betrayed the cause of the French Revolution have created the so-called "Wordsworth question" (Simpson, 1993: 152-159). With the publication of the new edition of *The Excursion*, perhaps interest in the poem will be re-kindled, and the question of Wordsworth's conservatism might be re-examined. While I agree that the poet did change his political ideas after the Revolution, I take issue with those who regard him as an "apostate." In this paper, I would like to demonstrate that after the French Revolution, Wordsworth "modified" his political ideas rather than becoming a conservative. In order to make the argument, I have chosen to look at a political pamphlet which Wordsworth wrote after he moved to Grasmere, that is, after his "retirement" to the country at the end of 1799, a retirement that has always been interpreted as reactionary and a sign of betrayal. The political pamphlet that I refer to is the *Convention of Cintra*

tract,<sup>1</sup> written from 1808 to 1809, and thus far the subject of little attention.<sup>2</sup>

The *Cintra* tract was written in response to events that took place on the Iberian peninsula. In 1807 Napoleon invaded Portugal via Spain. The Prince-Regent of Portugal escaped to Rio de Janeiro, and the French army arrived in Lisbon on 30 November without much resistance. At the same time, the Spanish King, Charles IV, was threatened by his son who sought to seize the power. Napoleon made use of this conflict in the Spanish court to fulfill his ambition of becoming the King of Spain. Riots broke out in the country, spreading from Asturias to other areas and cutting the lines of communication of the French army in Portugal. In June 1808, Asturias sent envoys to Britain to obtain British support, and in August 1808, a British army, led by Sir Arthur Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington), arrived in Portugal and, with the assistance of Spanish and Portugal insurgents, inflicted heavy losses on the French army. Wellesley was to advance on Lisbon when Britain adopted a cautious policy, after which he was superseded by Sir John Moore, who accepted the French appeal for negotiations resulting in the signing of the Convention of Cintra.

Wordsworth, exasperated upon receiving news about the Convention, felt that Britain had betrayed the cause of justice on the Iberian Peninsula. In his later years, he recalled the situation and told Isabella Fenwick: "It would not be easy to conceive with what a depth of feeling I entered into the struggle carried on by the

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<sup>1</sup> The full title of the tract is: *Concerning the Relations of Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal, to Each Other, and to the Common Enemy, at this Crisis; and Specifically as Affected by the Convention of Cintra: The Whole Brought to the Test of Those Principles, by Which Alone the Independence and Freedom of Nations Can Be Preserved or Recovered.*

<sup>2</sup> One of the referees of this paper points out that a discussion of the development of Wordsworth's political thoughts should include his poetical works such as *Home at Grasmere* and *The Excursion*, to which I cannot agree more. The fact is, I am currently working on *The Excursion*, and the present paper, somewhat like a "sidetrack," is part of the result of my study on the poem. My treatment of *The Excursion* shall be dealt with in another paper.

Spaniards for their deliverance from the usurped power of the French” (Wordsworth, 1993: 28). In London public meetings were held to petition the King to discredit the Convention. Wordsworth and his friends, including Coleridge and Southey, also made an effort to hold a public meeting in Cumberland; however it had to be aborted due to local objections from Lord Lonsdale (Wordsworth, 1974, I: 198). As a consequence of this frustrated attempt, in November 1808 Wordsworth resorted to what he was best at, writing, and the result was the pamphlet the *Convention of Cintra*, which took him seven months to complete, much longer than he and his friends had expected, but which was in the end, as one of Wordsworth’s biographer claims, “one of the masterworks of English Romantic prose” (Gill, 1989: 276).

The *Cintra* tract was, as mentioned earlier, written between 1808 and 1809, long after the time when he had allegedly turned his back on revolutionary causes. What I wish to explore is whether Wordsworth retained his earlier political beliefs when he wrote this pamphlet concerning the situation on the Iberian Peninsula. Many critics have made attempts to find out when and why the poet’s political stance changed. E. P. Thompson, for example, suggests that after the war between England and French broke out, Wordsworth turned from “disenchantment” to “apostasy,” and actually withdrew from engagements in politics as early as 1794 due to the political situation in England. This is what Thompson calls: “Jacobinism-in-recoil” (1969: 152). New Historicists further argue that there had always been a streak of conservatism hidden in the poet’s works, even those written during his radical years.<sup>3</sup>

## II. Wordsworth’s Political Ideas

When discussing Wordsworth’s change of political attitude,

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Chandler (1984) and Levinson (1986).

most Wordsworthian scholars focus on the years between 1792 and 1798. However, what exactly happened during this period is little known, as sources of information—letters or other forms of documentation—are in short supply. We will therefore put aside the question of when Wordsworth turned his back on the French Revolution. What we can be sure of is that during the Revolutionary years, the young Wordsworth saw himself as a republican and democrat.<sup>4</sup> In a 1794 letter to William Mathews, he wrote: “You know perhaps already that I am of that odious class of men called democrats, and of that class I shall forever continue” (Wordsworth, 1967: 119). In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth attributes his republican penchant partly to his childhood life spent in “a poor district” where none “[was] vested with attention or respect/Through claims of wealth or blood” (*Prelude*, IX: 225-226),<sup>5</sup> and partly to his education at Cambridge where he witnessed, although on a very small scale, an intellectual community imbued with a republican spirit of true equality:

[Something] there was holden up to view  
Of a republic, where all stood thus far  
Upon equal ground, that they were brothers all  
In honour, as of one community—  
Scholars and gentlemen—where, furthermore,  
Distinctions lay open to all that came,  
And wealth and titles were in less esteem  
Than talents and successful industry.  
(*Prelude*, IX: 229-236)

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<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth himself does not differentiate between the terms “democrat” and “republican,” although he seems to use the former more often. Simply put, “democracy” places emphasis on social equality and the election of government by all citizens, whereas “republicanism” gives stress to the replacement of monarchy with a republic, and it is against hereditary nobility. In view of the ideas revealed in the letter to the Bishop of Llandaff and the *Cintra* tract, we can see that the poet embraces both kinds of political thoughts, and this is the reason that both terms are used in this paper.

<sup>5</sup> All references to *The Prelude* are from the 1805 edition (Wordsworth, 1979) unless otherwise specified.

Later in Book IX of the same poem, Wordsworth describes a “hunger-bitten girl,” whom he and his French friend Michel Beaupuy saw in the Loire valley. The sight of the girl elicits a passionate response from Beaupuy and himself, followed by the poet’s vision of an ideal society:

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, that we should see the earth  
 Unthwarted in her wish to recompense  
 The industrious, and the lowly child of toil,  
 All institutes for ever blotted out  
 That legalized exclusion, empty pomp  
 Abolished, sensual state and cruel power,  
 Whether by edict of the one or few—  
*And finally, as sum and crown of all,*  
*Should see the people having a strong hand*  
*In making their own laws, whence better days*  
 To all mankind.

(*Prelude*, IX: 520-534, my emphasis)

Here we see the poet’s attitude towards monarchy and aristocracy, which he anticipates will be abolished and replaced by a government and legislative body constituted of common people, which clearly manifests his republican inclinations.

A childhood spent in the country and an education at Cambridge may have provided the breeding ground for republicanism, but the intellectual content of Wordsworth’s political thoughts came from somewhere else. Wordsworthian critics have identified various sources of the young poet’s republicanism. Jane Worthington has shown that during Wordsworth’s stay in France in 1791, through his association with Michel Beaupuy and the leading revolutionists of the Girondist party, the poet received training in republicanism derived mainly from the Roman models (1946: 3-9). Besides Roman political ideas, Wordsworth was also much influenced by 17th-century English

republicanism very early on, because the Girondins were under the influence of not only the ancient Romans but also 17th-century English republicanism of James Harrington, Algernon Sydney, Edmund Ludlow and Milton. He very possibly imbibed much of this from Beaupuy whilst in Blois, and if not, his experience in Paris would definitely have exposed him to Harringtonian ideas (Fink, 1948: 110). Even had he not been exposed to these ideas in Paris, the English Jacobin circle in which he moved thanks to his friendship with Joseph Johnson after returning to England would certainly have introduced him to English republicanism (Fink, 1948: 111).<sup>6</sup>

The above discussion raises possible sources for Wordsworth's direct exposure to republicanism, but he might also have been influenced in a relatively indirect way. Nicolas Roe, reading Wordsworth from a Bloomian agonistic point of view, claims that Milton's influence on Wordsworth cannot be fully understood unless it is placed in the political context of English republicanism (1989: 113, 117-118). Matthew Biberian, agreeing with Roe's argument concerning the political aspect of Milton's influence on the later poet, further identifies the Christian Hebraic tradition, which provided the 17th-Century republicans with democratic and egalitarian models, as a link between Wordsworth and Milton (2001: 109 and *passim*). Examining Wordsworth's political ideas from a different angle—that of 18th-Century pastorals—but reaching a similar conclusion, John Williams, too, maintains that despite the poet's attack on mid-18th-Century poetry, Wordsworth not only inherited but to a great extent remained faithful to the major concerns of 18th-Century verse, as well as the Commonwealthman tradition set down by people such as Robert

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<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the French Revolution, the term Jacobin was generally used in England to refer to those who were in support of the Revolution and who held radical political ideas. The most well-known English Jacobin was John Thelwall who was a friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge, especially when Wordsworth lived in Alfoxden.

Molesworth and John Molyneux (1989: 3-6, 18).

The studies of these critics clearly show the political influences on Wordsworth, which are reflected in his political writings: particularly his pamphlet, written in 1793—*A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*. This essay clearly demonstrates the young poet's radical republicanism (although he never published it due to political conditions at that time). But we will leave discussion of this piece of early writing until later, and first concentrate on the *Convention of Cintra*.

Recent scholars tend to view Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra* as one more piece of evidence of the poet's apostasy. James Chandler, for instance, argues that in the *Cintra* tract Wordsworth not only echoes, but "takes over wholesale" Burke's conservative political ideas (1984: 43). Many ideas and passages in the *Cintra* tract do give the impression that Wordsworth had adopted Burkean philosophy and renounced Revolutionary causes, especially when one remembers the paragraph on the poet's admiration for the "Genius of Burke" added to Book VII of the 1850 *Prelude* (*Prelude*, 1850, VII: 512-43). In this paragraph, Wordsworth acknowledges the Burkean concepts that help preserve social ties and time-honoured institutions: "[He] forewarns, denounces, launches forth,/Against all systems built on abstract rights,/Keen ridicule; the majesty proclaims/Of Institutes and Laws, hallowed by time;/Declares the vital power of social ties/Endeared by Custom; and with high disdain,/Exploding upstart Theory, insists/Upon the allegiance to which men are born" (*Prelude*, 1850, VII: 523-30). And the poet concludes the paragraph with a rhetorical question that seems to question the radicalism of his revolutionary days: "Could a youth, and one/In ancient story versed, whose breast had heaved/Under the weight of classic eloquence,/Sit, see, and hear, unthankful, uninspired" (*Prelude*, 1850, VII: 540-543)?

The paragraph on Burke was first inserted into the poem in 1832, more than 12 years after Wordsworth wrote the *Cintra* tract, and it was not until 1831 that we see him praise the philosopher,

calling him “the wisest of moderns” (Wordsworth, 1978-1988: II, 561). We cannot say for sure, therefore, whether the attitude expressed in this paragraph on Burke reflects his frame of mind during the French invasion of the Iberian peninsula. However, the capitalized words in these lines are a good indication of Wordsworth’s own concern in his later life; they remind us of, for example, the poem dedicated to the poet’s brother, Richard, placed at the very beginning of the sonnet sequence *River Duddon*. This poem was composed in 1819, and in it Wordsworth refers to ancient customs with a strong passion: “Hail, ancient Manners! sure defence,/Where they survive, of wholesome laws;/Remnants of love whose modest sense/Thus into narrow rooms withdraws;/Hail, Usages of pristine mould” (55-59). Within the context of the *Duddon* sonnets, the customs he mentions here are of course those in his birth place—the Lake District, but for him the Lakes really represent England, as can be clearly seen in his treatment of the place in *Home at Grasmere* (Yu, 2003: 177).

It would seem that as Wordsworth matured, he not only rejected the radicalism of his younger days, but also came to defend the British institutions and laws as Burke once did. However, his acceptance of the “genius of Burke” may be partial and not, as Chandler puts it, “wholesale.” In 1804, writing to Sir George Beaumont, he quoted Goldsmith’s lines on Burke: “Born for the universe, he narrowed his mind,/And to party gave up what was meant for mankind” (qtd. Moorman, 1965: 506). These two lines suggest that even if Wordsworth changed his mind about Burke, a Burkean philosophy for him may not have contained all that is needed to reform society or mankind. As is typical of Wordsworth, he very possibly adopted some of Burke’s ideas and added his own. The fact that in his later life he befriended the Earl of Lonsdale and even engaged himself in political campaigns for the aristocrat shows that he most probably no longer considered hereditary honours an absolute evil. But his strong stance for populism—the formation of government by the people rather than aristocrats—seen in the *Cintra* pamphlet indicates that he remained

a democrat. I therefore agree with Deidre Coleman, who has convincingly illustrated that the Burkean ideas alluded to in the *Cintra* tract are often used by Wordsworth to suit his own purposes in championing republicanism and populism, and are “sometimes subtly altered, or accompanied by riders which reverse, or at least mitigate, Burke’s emphasis” (1989: 155). The Burkean notion that one detects in the pamphlet, rather than being taken up indiscriminately, is merely employed to provide structural support (Coleman, 1989: 146).

### III. The *Cintra* Tract

Indeed, if we read the *Cintra* tract closely, we find Wordsworth emphasizes the right of common people in marked opposition to the Burkean notion of the supreme power of monarchy. For example, in reference to the will of the Spanish and Portuguese people to expel the French army, Wordsworth fervently expresses the idea that “the voice of the people is the voice of God” (*Cintra*, 971-972).<sup>7</sup> For Wordsworth, the people, and not the ruler or the government, constitute a nation: “[Nations] are nothing but aggregates of individuals” (*Cintra*, 1803). Therefore, “the whole Spanish nation ought to be encouraged to deem themselves an army, embodied under the authority of their country and of human nature” (*Cintra*, 1803). On the same basis, Wordsworth points out that in fighting against the French army, “the whole people [of Spain] is their army, and their true army is the people, and nothing else” (*Cintra*, 377-378). These ideas provide evidence of Wordsworth’s populism, and also suggest that Wordsworth has retained his youthful republicanism. Richard Clancey even calls the *Cintra* tract “an impassioned, rhetorically sophisticated, populist manifesto” (1995: 79).

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<sup>7</sup> All references to the *Cintra* tract, shown by line numbers, are from Volume I of the 1974 Oxford edition of Wordsworth’s *Prose Works*.

In addition to populism, other concepts connect the middle-aged poet to his younger revolutionary aspect. Closely related to Wordsworth's populism is the concept of virtue. For the poet, virtue is one of the basic elements constitutive of a sensible individual, healthy community, and independent and liberal nation. Therefore, the British people, as Wordsworth says in the *Cintra* tract, "by the help of the surrounding ocean and its own virtues, had preserved to itself through ages its liberty, pure and inviolated by a foreign invader" (*Cintra*, 175-177). Having maintained this pure liberty, the British people naturally wished that other countries could attain it as well, and it was precisely these "moral yearnings" (*Cintra*, 152) that motivated the British people to help defend the countries of the Iberian peninsula. It follows that the Spanish people, facing Napoleon's ambitious expansionism, must also depend for their emancipation and salvation on virtues and morality rather than on military power. Thus, in a letter to Captain Pasley, Wordsworth insists that only through "moral influence" can Europe be liberated (Wordsworth, 1969, I: 436), and quotes himself: "[Something] higher than military excellence must be taught *as* higher, something more fundamental, *as* fundamental" (*Cintra*, 440-441, Wordsworth's emphasis). This "something" is moral virtue: "In the moral virtues and qualities of passion which belong to a people, must the ultimate salvation of a people be sought for" (*Cintra*, 442-443). The Spaniards, therefore,

must now be taught, that their strength chiefly lies in moral qualities, more silent in their operation, more permanent in their nature; in the virtues of perseverance, constancy, fortitude, and watchfulness, in a long memory and a quick feeling, to rise upon a favourable summons, a texture of life which, though cut through . . . unites again—these are the virtues and qualities on which the Spanish People must be taught mainly to depend (*Cintra*, 448-454, Wordsworth's emphasis).

The two italicized words—"chiefly" and "mainly"—emphasize

the importance Wordsworth attaches to virtue. Inconsideration of this emphasis, the signing of the Convention of Cintra certainly would have struck Wordsworth as a violation of English moral values; indeed, he vehemently accuses the British officials on the Iberian peninsula, whose deeds, he says, “exhibited in this connection with each other, must of necessity be condemned the moment they are known: and to assert the contrary, is to maintain that man is a being without understanding, and that morality is an empty dream” (*Cintra*, 2132-2136). Combining the ideals of populism and virtue, Wordsworth also maintains that “the ultimate salvation of a people” lies not in political leaders, but in “the moral virtues and qualities of passion which belong to a people” (*Cintra*, 442-443).

As stated above, for Wordsworth, virtue concerns not only individuals, but also communities and the whole nation. It is thus, in part, of the basis of good government. Michael Friedman, in his study of the *Cintra* tract, aptly describes Wordsworth’s pamphlet as a “statesman’s manual” (1979: 270-287). Indeed one of the main arguments therein concerns the criteria of government, statesmen and courtiers. Wordsworth repeatedly maintains that a good government must possess knowledge of human nature: “[We] may confidently affirm that nothing, but a knowledge of human nature directing the operations of our government, can give it a right to an intimate association with a cause which is that of human nature” (*Cintra*, 3384-3387). Statesmen and courtiers, however, due to their “exclusive and artificial” superior social status, are incapable of possessing knowledge of human nature. Furthermore, their social position, which brings “worldly distinction” and places them in “offices of command,” renders them unable to understand social equality, because “it does not separate men from men by collateral partitions which leave, along with difference, a sense of equality—that they, who are divided, are yet upon the same level” (*Cintra*, 3404-3406). In other words, statesmen and courtiers are simply not in a position to possess the wisdom necessary to lead them to virtue—“a strong spirit of love” bred by “humility and

simplicity in mind, manners, and conduct of life” (*Cintra*, 3526-3532). Wordsworth further holds that the power conferred upon statesmen and courtiers will necessarily corrupt their minds: “[There] is an unconquerable tendency in all power, save that of knowledge acting by and through knowledge, to injure the mind of him who exercises that power; so much so, that best natures cannot escape the evil of such alliance” (*Cintra*, 3545-3548).

All the central ideas of the *Cintra* tract discussed above—populism, virtue and the criteria of good government—are important republican concerns. As was discussed earlier, Wordsworth was influenced by a variety of political ideas. And yet, whether Roman models, 17th-Century English republicanism or the Commonwealthman tradition, these political beliefs share certain ideas that are reflected in the *Cintra* pamphlet. Virtue, or morality, for example, is a part of the common ground that these political ideas share. Worthington has observed that “[without] a single exception the Romans whom Wordsworth knew best all confessed in their major works a didactic purpose” (1946: 20). Virtue is also an essential element in the political theories of seventeenth-century republicans concerning the nature of government, such that Wordsworth regarded people like Milton as “moralists” as well as political thinkers (Fink, 1948: 118). Similarly, in the political discussions of the mid- and late-18th-Century, the Commonwealthman philosophy also contributed to the moral and spiritual beliefs of both contemporary and later-day followers (Williams, 1989: 7).

The word virtue originated in the Latin *virtus*, which formed part of the “ethos” of the Roman “political and military ruling class” (Pocock, 1975: 37). According to ancient Roman philosophy, a good political leader had to be equipped with two qualities. First, he had to have the personality to control fortune; secondly, he needed to possess certain qualities so that he would be able to face the vicissitudes of life (Pocock, 1975: 37). Later on, the Latin word *virtus* was incorporated into Greek and gained further meanings that had been developed through the philosophies of Socrates and

Plato. For republicans, the word came to mean several things—“It could signify a devotion to the public good; it could signify the practice, or the preconditions of the practice, of relations of equality between citizens engaged in ruling and being ruled; and lastly, . . . it could signify [an] active ruling quality . . . which confronted *fortuna*” (Pocock, 1985: 41). For Wordsworth especially, it might also mean “the moral goodness which made a man, in city or cosmos, what he ought to be” (Pocock, 1975: 37).

Another important issue in republicanism, related to civic virtue, is patriotism. Throughout history, republican political thinkers have held that it is the passion for one’s native land which constitutes civic virtue (Viroli, 2002: 70). But in republican philosophy, this love of the homeland does not preclude a person’s duty towards humanity in general, because he is first and foremost a human being, which is placed before his citizenship. Nationalism, therefore, will not threaten other countries, and patriotism can never be used as an excuse for moral indifference to international issues (Viroli, 2002: 85). This kind of expansive republicanism is fully present in Wordsworth’s *Cintra* tract: “[The] man, who in this age feels no regret for the ruined honour of other Nations, must be poor in sympathy for the honour of his own country; and that, if he be wanting here towards that which circumscribes the whole, he neither has—nor can have—a social regard for the lesser communities which Country includes” (*Cintra*, 4377-4381). Due to his lack of sympathy for people in another country, Wordsworth goes on to say, such a man would not be able to defend his own family with “dignified love,” and even in protecting himself, his action is at best that of a “brute” or “coward” (*Cintra*, 4382-4386).

Wordsworth’s ideas, whether political, religious or philosophical, are more often than not of a mixed nature. To various philosophies he would add his own ideas, derived from life experience and meditation. Thus, seeing the French Revolution turning bloody and violent, Wordsworth turned from politics, but if we see this as proof of the poet’s being a renegade, it must be admitted that he was never a renegade to the “cause” of the

Revolution, but to its “results;” Wordsworth was, after all, an “idealist.” Instead of seeing his change of political attitude as apostasy, therefore, I see it as a “modification” of his early republicanism. This “modification” can best be illustrated by comparing the *Cintra* tract with *A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, which he wrote in 1793, 15 years prior to penning *Cintra*. Such a comparison will show us that the middle-aged poet was no longer the radical he had been in the last decade of the 18th century, but certain aspects of his political commitments remained more or less the same.

#### IV. *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*

In January 1793, receiving news of the execution of Louis XVI, Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, was very much shocked. He immediately wrote an essay against the execution and in defense of the British constitution, which was published as an appendix to a sermon he had preached many years before. Wordsworth was greatly exasperated by Watson’s attitude towards both the event in France and the political system in Britain. *A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* was written not only as a response to Watson’s essay but also to voice his republican political stance, and it is worth noting that he did not reveal his identity, but signed himself “a republican,” which on the one hand shows how eager he was to defend the republican cause, and on the other hand suggests how he was afraid of realing his true identity.

Since Watson sympathizes with the French monarchy, a great part of Wordsworth’s letter is devoted to a vehement attack on monarchical rule. Wordsworth argues that “[the] office of king is a trial to which human virtue is not equal. . . . It seems madness to expect a manifestation of the *general* will, at the same time that we allow to a *particular* will that weight . . . that can, with any propriety, be called monarchical” (*Llandaff*, 388-394,

Wordsworth's emphasis).<sup>8</sup> But, for the general will of the people to operate, a form of government is nevertheless needed, even in a republic, and there will of necessity be legislators. The young radical admits this, but says that government is "at best, a necessary evil" (*Llandaff*, 417). To remedy this evil, he proposes that "the person in whom authority has been lodged should occasionally descend to the level of private citizen" so that he can learn "a wholesome lesson" (*Llandaff*, 417-418). And it is for this reason that Wordsworth fervently criticizes hereditary honours and authority which, he asserts, would only "generate vices" (*Llandaff*, 500).

Wordsworth's strong objection to hereditary nobility is related to his idea of populism. It is no surprise, therefore, to find him in support of general suffrage: "If there is a single man in Great Britain, who has no suffrage in the election of a representative, the will of the society of which he is a member is not generally expressed" (*Llandaff*, 570-573). Such an idea is based on an equality that is "to be met with in perfection in that state in which no distinction are admitted but such as have evidently for their object the general good" (*Llandaff*, 402-405). For this equality to exist in a nation, the government ought to prevent people from becoming extremely poor or rich, situations that will "corrupt the human heart" (*Llandaff*, 437-438).

Comparing the letter to Bishop Llandaff and the *Cintra* pamphlet, we find that the older Wordsworth has retained the republican idea of populism, and that the ideal form of government has always remained on his list of priorities. What is gone from the later political tract, though, is the loud protest against monarchy—a change resulting from the now mature poet's deep reflection on the meaning of bloodshed in the Revolution. In the letter to Llandaff, he was relentless about violent revolutions: "[A] time of revolution is not the season of true Liberty. Alas! The

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<sup>8</sup> All references to *A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, shown by line numbers, are from Volume I of the 1974 Oxford edition of Wordsworth's *Prose Works*.

obstinacy & perversion of men is such that she is too often obliged to borrow the very arms of despotism to overthrow him, and in order to reign in peace must establish herself by violence" (*Llandaff*, 100-104). This eagerness for violent revolutions also leads Wordsworth to distinguish between "political virtues" and "moral virtues," and the former are to be developed at the expense of the latter. By the summer of 1794, however, the bloodshed in France made him change his notions, and he no longer considered violence as necessary in overthrowing despotism. In a letter to Mathews, he wrote: "I recoil from the bare idea of a revolution. . . . I am a determined enemy to every species of violence. . . . I deplore the miserable situation of the French" (Wordsworth, 1967: 124).

The massacres of the Revolution led Wordsworth to reflect deeply upon the radicalism of his younger days, but he retained his republican principles. In 1821, when asked by James Losh about his changed political opinions, the middle-aged poet answered:

If I were addressing those who have dealt so liberally with the words Renegada Apostate, etc., I should retort the charge upon them, and say, *you* have been deluded by *Places* and *Persons*, while I have stuck to *Principles*—I abandoned France, and her Rulers, when *they* abandoned the struggle for Liberty, gave themselves up to Tyranny, and endeavoured to enslave the world. (Wordsworth, 1988, I: 97, Wordsworth's emphasis)

It was precisely because he was "sticking to principles" that Wordsworth responded so strongly to the events in Spain and Portugal. In writing the *Cintra* pamphlet, the poet's republicanism was revived to the extent that he was afraid that the pamphlet would bring him "a world of enemies, and call forth the old yell of Jacobinism" (Wordsworth, 1969, I: 290). Jonathan Wordsworth also remarks that the Spanish uprising aroused the poet's "old political idealism" (1982: 366), and Kenneth Johnston, addressing the question of whether or not Wordsworth was an apostate, argues that the poet's "inward" turn away from political

involvement and social responsibility was not, as many critics suggest, a breaking away from politics, but rather, a sign of a “profoundly troubled commitment to the cause of human possibility, democratically defined,” which can be seen in the “creative tension” of his works (1996: 219). Such a tension stems mainly from the dilemma between “strong claims to political action on the one hand, and very attractive calls to a reflective, idealist philosophy on the other” (Johnston, 1996: 217).

Johnston’s contention concerns Wordsworth’s *Ruined Cottage*, but it is relevant to the *Cintra* tract because it is in these two pieces of work that we find the “reflective, idealist philosophy” in which Wordsworth had engaged in since his disillusionment with the French Revolution. Wordsworth spent most of his life trying to work out solutions to “redeem” a corrupt English society, and when social actions such as public demonstrations and revolutions proved a failure, resorted to language and poetry. In writing the *Cintra* pamphlet, Wordsworth was ambitious. Through this pamphlet, he wished to not only address the political situation on the Iberian Peninsula and condemn the “immoral” behaviour of British political leaders, but also put forth his ideas on political and social philosophy. All his discussions eventually centre upon one significant thing, and that is the improvement of society and the well being of Britain, that is, “National Happiness—the end, the conspicuous crown, and ornament of the whole” (*Cintra*, 4873-4874). For him, finding ways to ensure national happiness is the duty of a poet. He once remarked that, for every hour of thought devoted to poetry, he devoted 12 hours to society (ctd. in Worthington, 1946: 11). This sense of duty echoes loudly in the *Cintra* tract: “[Let] me avow that I undertook this present labour as a serious duty; rather, that it was forced . . . upon me by a perception of justice united with strength of feeling;—in a word, by that power of conscience . . . to which throughout I have done reverence as the animating spirit of the cause” (*Cintra*, 3340-3344). It is worth noting that this sense of duty leads the poet to assume the role of spokesman for his countrymen: “[We] were calm till the

very moment of transition; and the people were moved—and felt as with one heart, and spake as with one voice. Every human being in these islands was unsettled” (*Cintra*, 2760-2769). Towards the end of the pamphlet, it is not just the people on these islands for whom he speaks, but also their posterity and the whole of mankind: “[The] theme is justice; and my voice is raised for mankind; for us who are alive, and for all posterity:—justice and passion; clear-sighted aspiring justice, and passion sacred as vehement” (*Cintra*, 3009-3012).

In these passages we see Wordsworth’s assumption that what he feels must be felt by other people as well. This assumption ties in with his perception of the role and duty of a poet demonstrated in other works. From the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to *The Prelude*, we find him repeatedly making similar statements, all of which show that for Wordsworth, social responsibility is something of the utmost importance to his poetic agenda. In the passage on the definition of a poet in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, besides the well-known idea of “a man speaking to men,” Wordsworth also bestows a unifying power upon the poet who “binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time;” he is “the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder and preserver” (1977, I: 881). For Wordsworth, understanding human nature is an essential task of the poet, and this reminds us of his political idea concerning the ideal rulers of a country expressed in the *Cintra* tract, which we discussed previously. One of his objections to a nation’s being governed by statesmen and courtiers is that they are in a position that renders them incapable of understanding human nature. The poet, in contrast, claims Wordsworth in the Preface, is someone who possesses “a greater degree of human nature . . . than are supposed to be common among mankind” (1977, I: 877). Implicit in these ideas, when read together, is the suggestion that the poet might better serve as a governor of the country. But if governor is too heavy a burden to the poet, the role of a teacher and prophet would, for sure, be happily taken up by Wordsworth,

as is proclaimed at the end of the 1805 *Prelude*: “Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak/A lasting inspiration, sanctified/By reason and by truth; what we have loved/Others will love, and we may teach them how” (*Prelude*, XIII: 442-445).

The same topic is brought up in a letter written in 1802 by Wordsworth to John Wilson, a student from Glasgow: “[A] great Poet ought to a certain degree to rectify men’s feelings, to give them new compositions of feelings, to render their feelings more sane pure and permanent, in short more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things. He ought to travel before men occasionally as well as at their sides” (1967: 355). And later in 1808, Wordsworth again emphatically asserts: “Every great poet is a Teacher; I wish either to be considered as a Teacher, or a Nothing” (1969: 170). These and similar remarks reveal that Wordsworth’s sense of social responsibility not only did not die away with time but increased as he grew older. What was different was, as Carl Woodring discerningly points out, that he sometimes broadened the scope, and sometimes heightened the degree, of his involvement in society (1970: 85).

From all our discussions above, we conclude that after the French Revolution, Wordsworth, rather than becoming a cynical hermit of the Lakes like the Recluse in *The Excursion*, preserved not only his sense of social responsibility but also his republican political ideals. And yet his experience in the early years led him to the realization that there were other ways and means of improving society than violent revolutions, and he modified accordingly his social and political concepts. As he grew older, his maturity enabled him to develop a deeper sympathy for human beings than that of the young radical. At the very end of the *Cintra* pamphlet, in a famous and often cited passage, the poet broadened the human world to include that of the dead:

There is a spiritual community binding together the living  
and the dead; the good, the brave, and the wise, of all ages.

We would not be rejected from this community; and therefore do we hope. We look forward with erect mind, thinking and feeling: it is an obligation of duty: take away the sense of it, and the moral being would die within us. (*Cintra*, 4811-4816)

When Wordsworth envisions the “spiritual community” that includes the dead, he brings two things to the fore: first, the idea of the spiritual reminds us of the republican principles of “virtue” and “patriotism” (in its broad sense) that reverberate throughout the *Cintra* tract; second, including the dead, and not just any person dead, but “the good, the brave, and the wise,” suggests that Wordsworth has in mind all those who have helped make Britain a country of virtue and liberty. Among those dead, Wordsworth singles out one personage—Sir Philip Sidney—to whom he pays homage, calling him “a deliverer and defender” (*Cintra*, 4820). Throughout his life Wordsworth aspired to be the same—a deliverer and defender, and it was with this aspiration that he wrote not just the *Cintra* tract but also *The Excursion*. Whether he succeeded in delivering the people and society in Britain, and whether his ideal society is practicable, is another matter.

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## 渥茲渥斯的《辛特拉協約》 及其政治理念之轉變

余幼珊

### 摘要

許多批評家認為，浪漫詩人渥茲渥斯在法國大革命之後，便開始背棄早年的革命信念，成爲一保守主義者。諸多學者也爲文探討詩人到底是什麼時候開始成爲革命的叛徒。這篇論文擬論證渥氏並沒有完全拋棄其革命理念，而是予以「修正」。此修正可見於渥氏中年所著之政論《辛特拉協約》。此政論寫於一八〇八至一八〇九年，爲詩人在一七九九年底「歸隱」湖區後的作品。一般咸認爲其歸隱乃保守反動之表徵。在論文中，我將首先深入分析《辛特拉協約》，找出渥氏政治理念的綱要和脈絡。之後我將分析渥氏早年激進時期所寫的另一篇政論，也就是《給藍達夫主教的一封信》，並將前後兩篇政論相互比較。經過比較，可發現，渥氏中年時期仍保留早年的政治理念，但是修正了較爲激進的部分，尤其是有關流血革命的思想。

**關鍵詞：**渥茲渥斯、《辛特拉協約》、《給藍達夫主教的一封信》、叛徒、美德