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Two short essays:

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## Wordsworth's Missing Figures: Vaudracour and Julia

The omission of the episode of Vaudracour and Julia in Book VIV remains one of the most conspicuous changes to the *Prelude* of 1850, and carries with it a plethora of questions. How much is the story a submersion and/or sublimation of Wordsworth's own experience with Annette Vallon? Does its excision from the *Prelude* of 1850 signify Wordsworth's own "dejection, sorrow, and remorse," despite his protestation that "[t]heirs be the blame who caused the woe, not mine" (1805, VIV, 720; 911)? Or – because its removal is less purgation than transplant, in that he awards the incident its own poem in 1820 – should we be less skeptical of his dubious, inelegant transition, with its odd aposiopesis: "So might – and with that prelude *did* begin/The record; and, in faithful verse, was given/The doleful sequel" (1850, VIV, 557-559), and presume that Wordsworth was genuine in his implication that this story represents a discursive "creek" incidental to the "strong river" of his psychosocial development (1850, VIV, 562; 560)? These questions are conjectural, inherently inconclusive, at least in part because they concern the presence/absence of text, which allows little basis for comparison. Yet if we examine the final stanzas of Book VIV in both 1805 and 1850, we observe a marked transition that confirms Wordsworth's maturation as a poet even as it makes us question the effect of this maturation on the energy – and honesty – of the *Prelude*.

That Wordsworth's conclusion to Book XIV in 1805 is both laconic as well as charged and emotive implies its density. Wordsworth starts this stanza with a hemistich, one that completes the iambic pentameter of line 928. The caesura here seems to create an acephaly, one that amputates the suant iambic pentameter of the previous blank verse to form an arresting start to the stanza. The caesura also acts as a graphic representation of Vaudracour's isolation:

through lineation Wordsworth cleaves “Thus lived the youth” from his “visitor” (928). “Thus lived the youth” also implies pathos by emphasising Vaudracour’s age. The previous stanza’s portrait of Vaudracour connotes death: Wordsworth describes him as “shrunk[en],” with a “savage outside,” which might conjure either a geriatric or a body in a state of decomposition (925, 927), and “like a shadow” Vaudracour “glide[s] out of view,” which could allude to the shades of Dante’s *Inferno* (926). Thus Wordsworth’s diction, by calling attention to the “li[fe]” of the “youth,” accentuates Vaudracour’s plight by juxtaposing his youth (and its associated vitality and potential) with his deathly, troglodytic existence.

This juxtaposition anticipates the next line, with its crucial word “intelligence” (929). “Intelligence” signifies many things to Wordsworth, and each meaning offers a distinct reading of this line. “[C]ut off from all intelligence” might suggest stunted intellectual growth, a dearth of practical information (“intelligence” as information, dispatched knowledge), or an end to social rapport. Finally, “intelligence” evokes Wordsworth’s use of the word “intellect” to denote spiritual growth, a recurrent mention in the *Prelude*, and one that features as part of the poem’s resolution: “Imagination having been our theme,/So also hath that intellectual love,/For they are each in each, and cannot stand/Dividually” (1805/1850, XIII/XIV, 206-209). M. H. Abrams elaborates, “Spiritual love for Wordsworth, as for Coleridge, is the principle which unites an individual man both to other men and to Nature” (Norton, 468). Hence, the diverse applications for “intelligence” suggest that Vaudracour is ostracised cerebrally, socially, and spiritually, and if we read his story as a substitute for Wordsworth’s own, parallel experience, we see in these three facets of isolation the intensity of Wordsworth’s buried anxiety. Like Vaudracour, deprived of these varieties of intelligence, he is as good as dead. As a poet, he hopes that his work both advances his own intellectual development, and fosters in others a love for humankind, Nature

and God. Vaudracour's fate leaves him so abject that he ignores Nature, "shunning even the light of common day" (930). And yet there is a mesmeric quality to Wordsworth's language in this stanza, with its supple, interwoven nasal and sibilant sounds, that gives the conclusion of 1805 a rich, hypnotic beauty. There are the lingual and labial sounds of lines 929-930 – "*intelligence with man,/And shunning even the light of common day*" – as well as the trochees of "shunning," "common" and "freedom," which seem to echo one another in (very) approximate rhyme (929-931). This is followed by the alliterations of "public" and "personal" and the consonance of "hope" and "deep" (932-933), and later the sigmatism of "wrongs/Rouze him, but in those solitary *shades/His days he wasted*" and the assonance of "shades," "days" and "wasted" (933-935). Thus while Wordsworth's conclusion to the story is brief and tragic, his language makes it tender. It is as if he has compassion for the young man he might have become; the stanza has the urgency of not-yet-distant fear.

The final stanza of Book VIV, 1850, exhibits a markedly different tone: blithe, detached, both admonitory and condescending. Like in 1805, he begins with a hemistich, but while we expect line 559 to explain the preceding "doleful sequel," it diverts our attention to the poet himself. Here Wordsworth's meta-awareness has an element of false modesty, for while he likens his poem's development to that of a "little bark/On a strong river" (559-560), his imagery is simultaneously grandiose in that it alludes to Homer's epic voyage and reinforces his claim that he is heir to the Homeric and Miltonic legacies, and will redefine/refine epic poetry by tracking the progression of the human mind. That he now regards the story of Vaudracour and Julia as digressive does not stop him from including it cursorily, as if to prove he has not forgotten it. Yet here the story loses the vibrancy and sensitivity of Wordsworth's earlier account. The confidence of the first six lines, with their swift, impeccable iambic pentameter

(achieved by the use of both a syncope – “[h]owe’er” [563] – and a striking caesura – “Would’st thou not chide? Yet deem not my pains lost” [564]), devolves into something clumsier, in the arrhythmic hypercatalexis of lines 565 and 566, and strangely dissociated, in his statement that their “story will draw/Tears from the hearts of others” but not his own (566-567). Wordsworth further qualifies the episode by deeming it worthy only of his reader’s “leisure” time, suggesting by default that his own work has a more hermetic, exalted status (569).

Moreover, the personal immediacy of Wordsworth’s first rendering gives way to something curiously abstracted, both cooler and blander. In his overview of the tragedy, he makes Vaudracour and Julia less agents of their own saga than passive reactants to the recondite forces of “public power” and “oppression” (570; 572). Because the lovers seem muted, prosaic, subsidiary, the ploc of “heart and heart” feels more an empty rhetorical flourish than a semantically resonant symbol. And while Wordsworth initially seems to assign blame to impersonal circumstances rather than the lovers’ choices, he also loses the empathy he evinced in 1805. Vaudracour is not absolved – he is “[a]ghast and prayerless” (578), torpid, prostrate and abased, lying “supine” on the “couch his fate had made for him” until “st[ung]” by “viperous remorse” (575). While the word “[r]ouze” in 1805 pertains only to the catatonia of his loneliness, in this version it could also refer to the “couch” of his fate. Since “supine” has connotations of indolence, here “[r]ouse” takes on a derisive quality. Wordsworth exchanges “[s]oon afterwards” for “[f]ull speedily,” and hence Vaudracour seems foppish, self-pitying, for wasting away as the swift, powerful voice of the French revolution echoes around him. Likewise, 1805’s “in those solitary shades” becomes the more sombre, shameful “hidden in those gloomy shades” (584), and Wordsworth inserts a hyphen to draw attention to the pejorative “an imbecile mind” (585). Thus it seems that Wordsworth’s attitude to the episode of Vaudracour and Julia has shifted: the

story merits only a desultory telling, and the poet seems both aloof and disparaging, impatient with the foibles of this young man.

In a strange way, then, this amendment seems to contradict Wordsworth's proclaimed rejection of Godwinism – "the philosophy that promised to abstract the hopes of man/Out of his feelings" (1805, X, 224-226) – and his mistaken tendency "to sit in judgement [rather] than to feel" (1805, XI, 136). Whether Wordsworth, in contrition, is now too discomfited by the story to engage properly with it, or whether he feels the passage of time has made an oblique reference to Annette Vallon unnecessary, is ambiguous. Yet we feel, involuntarily, that this stilted, dispassionate revision compromises the integrity of Wordsworth's claim to emotional truth.

## Tethered Motion in “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison”

In “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” Coleridge, marooned at home with a milk-scalded foot, meditates on his friends’ adventures. Through the effort of imagining their expedition, he gleans his own resolution about yearning, patience and joy. We can look at Coleridge’s psychological progression through the motif of tethered motion, which informs the imagery and structure of the poem.

The imagery of this forfeited excursion is abundant with symbols of tethered motion. Although Coleridge’s friends might climb to the “hill-top edge,” the “springy heath” of this apex hints at their imminent descent; they are reeled in by gravity, for “springy” implies the parabolic contour of bouncing (8). Indeed, they next go “down” to “that still roaring dell...o’erwooded, narrow, deep” (8-10). The contrast between the exposed pinnacle of the “hill-top edge” and the dell’s enshrouded, subtended confinement might be seen in Coleridge’s juxtaposition of “still” with “roaring,” for while it certainly refers to his own previous experience of the place, it is also oxymoronic. That the dell is “only speckled by the mid-day sun” (11) conveys its remove from the sun and open sky: when the sun is at its highest and most brilliant, *only* – Coleridge’s modifier is telling – splinters of light filter through the screen of foliage to dapple the water’s surface. Within this trough exist additional, microcosmic images of tethered movement. By the water’s edge, “its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock/Flings arching like a bridge” (12-13); this elastic momentum has a sort of fixed dynamism in that it is rooted (literally) in the trunk’s permanent position – the tree throws out its shadow, which stretches away but always boomerangs back. Likewise, “yellow leaves” “tremble,” “[f]anned by the waterfall” (14-16);

bound by their petioles, they flutter but never detach. In the first stanza's final image, a "dark green file of long lank weeds" "nod and drip beneath the dripping edge" (17; 19). Their motion is equivalent to the "trembl[ing]" leaves, and Coleridge presents it metrically as well, with the spondaic "dark green file of long lank weeds" retarding the swift see-saw of the previous lines' iambic pentameter. These seven strong syllables give the weeds a solidity, an inertia, dislodged/unsettled by line 19, where the memetic syntax of the polyptoton "drip beneath the dripping edge" accelerates into something that resembles the augmenting force and pressure of the waterfall.

In the second stanza, the hills form a "many-steeped tract" (22); this architectural image relates to our notion of tethered motion in that it implies a pyramid-like structure, one whose slender spire thrusts into the zenith, a lone apex, yet stays tied to a dominant, fixative base. (This image of worship also prefigures Coleridge's reference to the "Almighty Spirit" at the end of the stanza [42].) There is the reining in of the previous stanza's "mid-day sun" (11), retracting from its apogee to "slowly sink/Behind the western ridge" (32-33). Finally, Coleridge portrays Charles Lamb as a captive temporarily set free: "[i]n the great City pent, winning thy way/With sad yet patient soul" (30-31), and "most glad" (27) for the fleeting expanse and catharsis of nature. These images spur us to consider the title of the poem, and its relation to this idea of extension and rebound. The lime-tree bower is an apt metaphor here, with its (literal) rooting, as well as its high boughs and linden flowers. It signifies both Coleridge's "prison" – his concrete surroundings, his grounding in reality – and his brief jailbreak, the elevated, embellished blossoms of his imagination.

Structurally, the poem traces the arc formation of tethered motion. Coleridge's opening, "Well, they are gone, and here I must remain" (1), which combines wistful frustration with

petulance, even resentment, tinges the tone of the stanza's remaining lines. Coleridge never lets us forget that he has been left behind. Both self-referential – Coleridge mentions himself in the first-person four times, even digresses from the action to do so (the dell “of which I told” [9]) – and conjectural – he writes about his friends' imagined journey in conditional terms (“perchance” [8]) – the stanza rappels back to an invalid Coleridge: he is its pivot, its joint.

It is in the second stanza that Coleridge releases – indeed, propels – his friends' activity. His qualifying asides give way to a coherent, vivid rendering “[o]f hilly fields and meadows, and the sea” (23). His verse gains authority, even takes on the imperative:

Ah! slowly sink  
Behind the western ridge, thou glorious sun!  
Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,  
Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!  
Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!  
And kindle, thou blue ocean! (32-37)

His commands imply his (transient) apotheosis: he animates this imagined scene, lets it gather momentum and breathe as its own entity. His creation exists independently until he actually merges with it – “So my Friend/Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood” (37-38) – conflating Charles Lamb's vista with his imagination. Lamb stands “silent with swimming sense” as he absorbs “the wide landscape” (39-40); we think simultaneously of the flight of Coleridge's imagination, protean, fluid, free. Lamb's experience is transcendent, no longer “gross” or “bodily” but divine (41), the very “veil” of the “Almighty spirit” (42). For Coleridge, too, the Muse has transported him, given him momentary omniscience.

Yet the heady thrill of this moment, Coleridge will suggest, is more concoction, enchantment, even artifice, than authentic union or synchronicity. In the final stanza he returns to his prison to discover that it has become home, its stability “sooth[ing]” (47). He finds its familiar details satisfying, even delightful. Coleridge manages to instil the sublime into the

quotidian with phrases such as “Pale beneath the blaze/Hung the transparent foliage” and “a deep radiance lay/Full on the ancient ivy” (47-48; 52-53). We are reminded of the “o’erwooded” dell by this “late twilight” and its layered, gradated darkness (56) – the “transparent foliage” “[p]ale beneath the blaze” (47-48); the ivy that “usurps/Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass/Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue” (53-55). These sheaves of darkness swaddle Coleridge, womb-like; he absorbs their calm, as Lamb has absorbed the immensity of the sunset. He loses his agitation, and his reflection on silence and sound evinces the complacency (in its Romantic sense of contentment, as opposed to smug self-satisfaction) that anticipates the crux of the poem. Coleridge tells us that “though now the bat/Wheels silent by, and not a swallow twitters,/Yet still the solitary humble bee/Sings in the bean-flower!” (56-59); while he wants for some sounds, he appreciates those that take their place. In the same way, if he misses certain experiences, his imagination can compensate, but more importantly he can revel in local, distinctly glorious pleasures. We nearly expect his following sentiment:

Henceforth I shall know  
 That Nature ne’er deserts the wise and pure;  
 No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,  
 No waste so vacant, but may well employ  
 Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart  
 Awake to Love and Beauty! and sometimes  
 ’Tis well to be bereft of promised good,  
 That we may lift the Soul, and contemplate  
 With lively joy the joys we cannot share. (59-67)

This “joy[ous]” “contemplat[ion]” of “joys we cannot share” is the sympathy (empathy) Coleridge prizes, that he shows in the second stanza for his “gentle-hearted Charles” who has “pined/And hungered after Nature, many a year,/In the great City pent, winning thy way/With sad and patient soul, through evil and pain/And strange calamity!” (28-32). He returns to it now, and his newfound peace supports, indeed bolsters, his compassion. Out of this compassion

emerges the poem's first and final image of unfettered flight, the rook's "straight path" "[h]omewards" (69-70). That he chooses the homely, humble rook implies the humility of his previous realization; its path implies this realization's resultant sympathy in that it creates a bridge between the two men. We can see this bridge symbolically when the bird "cross[es] the mighty orb's dilated glory" (72). Ultimately, "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" succeeds beyond its own dimensions, for it forms a bridge between poet and reader. Coleridge's (metaphysical) journey arouses our admiration, and our empathy, making the poem satisfy Romantic terms as well as the timeless desire for poignancy and Aristotelian catharsis.