“A NEW QUICKENING SHALL SUCCEED”: MULTIPLICITY AND REVOLUTION IN *THE PRELUDE*

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ABSTRACT

"A NEW QUICKENING SHALL SUCCEED": MULTIPLICITY AND REVOLUTION IN *THE PRELUDE*

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This project explores the ways in which William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805) constructs a discourse in verse that challenges the conventional discourse of society. By countering this institutionalization of mankind, the poem creates a space for thought that resists the limitations of established configurations of the subject and the social body. My reading begins with an investigation of history as a discourse that produces socio-political subjection by envisioning revolution through existing, tyrannical terms. This reading then focuses on *The Prelude*'s verse and its theorization of the social body as a multiplicity that resists systematic terms. I read the poem's treatments of London in Books VII and VIII as evidence of shift in the poet figure's relationship to the social body. The seminal point of this shift is the Arab Dream passage of Book V, which marks an apocalyptic overwhelming of the poet's consciousness and a critique of the poet's investment in social convention as the discourse through which he knows himself and his role within society. The poet figure of *The Prelude* only lays claim to a revolutionary discourse once he recognizes the creative potential of multiplicity and recognizes social convention as an impediment to thought and social relationships.

CHAPTER I

"A NEW QUICKENING SHALL SUCCEED": MULTIPLICITY AND REVOLUTION IN *THE PRELUDE*

William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* is an epic treatment of the figure of the poet. In the poem, the whole of the material world is the canvas for the consciousness of the poet and, at the same time, the history of the human world is mapped onto the poet's consciousness. Out of this double movement, a conflict arises. At times the poetry of *The Prelude* represents a radical liberation of consciousness by depicting the individual mind through the sublime terms of nature. At other moments, though, the poetry reflects the limitations of a human mind that, despite its own genius, is bound to its own formation within a specific socio-political discourse. Thus in its troubled representation of the poet, *The Prelude* conveys the conflict between the freedom of nature and the claims of culture that haunt its larger revolutionary project.

While *The Prelude* is consistently concerned with realizing its claim that "Love of Nature lead[s] to Love of Mankind," it reckons with a poet who has no inclination to universal love, and must therefore rely on nature to catalyze any such affection. The impulse to conflate subjectivity and nature is the effect of what in Wordsworth's poetry John Keats has called the "egotistical sublime" (147). Keats' theory illuminates a self-reflexivity in Wordsworth's verse that begs a critique of the concept of the Wordsworthian imagination. Only in recognizing nature as the antithesis of his own consciousness, which is governed by his place within human history, can the poet begin

to imagine a self that resists history and convention. Thus, it is only with this admission of nature's being separate from both the poet's consciousness and from human history that a new theorization of mankind can emerge. The egotistical sublime of *The Prelude* thus emerges to counter the socio-political formation of the subject precisely because it allows for a critique of what Wordsworth considers civil society and its social conventions. By creating a discourse of verse through which this critique is possible, the poet enacts a process available to all subjects and effectively envisions a social revolution that begins at the level of the individual.

The Prelude's most explicit revolutionary claim is thus characterized by a gap between the corruption of London and the natural purity of the country. This distinction is central to *The Prelude*'s attempt to locate a revolutionary potential in the collective social body. In an 1808 letter to Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth, remarking on the "sickly taste of the public in verse," writes, "[t]he people would love the poem of Peter Bell, but the public (a very different being) will never love it" (194). Wordsworth designates the "people" as a specifically rural social body with the capacity for aesthetic appreciation of his verse because they are uncorrupted by social conventions and affectation. Conversely, he constructs the "public" as the urban social collective for whom convention and the city itself obscure a connection to nature. In making this distinction, Wordsworth's letter reflects the paradox at the core of his idealization of the social body in the 1805 version of *The Prelude*. While rural individuals, "people," in their connection to nature can become the objects of the "Love of Mankind" *The Prelude* seeks, the "public," presents a seemingly intractable problem for the political liberties Wordsworth's poetic project attempts to envision. Wordsworth's verse is ever haunted by

its failure to fully realize the means by which the "people" and the "public" may be reconciled in a single, noble social body worthy of the poet's love. For the poet to love all of mankind requires that the "people" and the "public" be unified in the poet's own interpretation of the social body. The rural life of the "people," because it entails an experience of nature, becomes the model for poetic life. Indeed, the poet of *The Prelude* has his moments of greatest subjective lucidity at times of self-alienation because away from the overwhelming city. He recognizes, though, that his subjective clarity comes at the cost of relegating London to a subhuman state of existence, a den of the "public." The task of the poet, as *The Prelude* envisions it, cannot be fulfilled without accounting for the experience of the social body as a whole. The poet must resolve the divide between the way he interprets the "public" and the way he interprets the "people." Otherwise, the poet cannot claim to be any different from the poets who come under reprimand in the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems (1802),*" poets who "separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation" (Wordsworth 597). Were he to neglect "love" the "public," the poet would simply reinscribe a poetic tendency to name as art a type of verse or a type of subject already aligned with his own aesthetic preferences. Moreover, the Preface's theorization and role of the poet as the creator of verse that will "interest mankind permanently" by the "multiplicity and quality of its moral relations" (615) would be entirely invalidated. The chasm between these two distinct social bodies must be collapsed in order for the poet to reconcile himself to his own role as a social subject, but the very possibility of reconciliation is thrown into question. *The Prelude* thus charges the poet with the task of

deconstructing the very opposition that initially licenses its most revolutionary statements. The emergent goal is to join the "public" to the "people" without reductively homogenizing either one.

For *The Prelude*, the social body and nature represent almost identical problems for the poet's task of depicting either object in broad, epic terms. In the cases of both the human world and the natural world, the poet seeks to overwrite all that he experiences in egotistically sublime terms. Because what he experiences is both a multiplicity in itself and a multiplicity in his own varied interpretations of experience, *The Prelude* engages with the problem of revision. *The Prelude* is the constant object of intense critical scrutiny of Wordsworth's impulse to revise, and the thread of Wordsworthian scholarship that treats revision certainly addresses the implications of revision for varied notions of revolution represented in *The Prelude*. However, the critical tendency to see revision as a matter of a shift in the political circumstances that define the subject's perspective of political promise has neglected another possibility. Subjectivity itself undergoes a radically (re)visionary process within the chronologically discontinuous span of the epic. Critics such as Jonathan Arac, Stephen Parrish, and Stephen Gill have argued that the revision of *The Prelude* is evidence that the text resists the finality of thought (Leader 19-77). Gill, though he comments on revision as evidence that "Wordsworth could not bear the idea of finality" (qtd. in Leader 33), arranges his edition of Wordsworth's major poems chronologically in order to offer the reader a sense of the poet's development and of the way Wordsworth's poetry would have been experienced in his contemporary historical moment. Both Arac and Parrish have objected to confining Wordsworth's verse to its chronology. Arac argues for revision as an act of nobility in the sense that it resists

codification or characterization as being "lifeless as a written book" (VIII. 727). Parrish offers the notion of text as continuum to illustrate constant critical engagement with the problem of how to represent experience in verse.[1] While I concur with these views, I contend that in *The Prelude* there is another function of revision: an engagement with human history as itself an open text. Some examination of history's influence on human societies is vital to my reading of *The Prelude* as an attempt to break with a history that dictates subjective interpretation. History is manifest in the "public," for it is at once a human institution and the force that drives the evolution of an institutionalized social body. There can be no reading of *The Prelude*'s interpretation of history that is not involved in a reading of the poem's representation of the social body. By extension, the subject must be read in terms of history and especially in terms of the way the poet represents culture as the product of history. The poet's critique of his own consciousness, in moments such as the Arab Dream scene, is implicitly a critique of the history that has formed that consciousness. History is specifically the province of the "public" precisely because the "public" operates within the strictures that are passed to it from previous social eras. This limitation is not as obvious in the poem's representation of the rural "people."

The Prelude's various attempts to represent London in Books VII and VIII demonstrate the extent to which its project of mapping consciousness, of representing the poetic mind in epic terms, is tied to the individual's relationship to the social body and the extent to which any notion of that body is an unstable concept. The social body as

[1] See Zachary Leader's *Revision and Romantic Authorship* for a detailed treatment of the critical conversation surrounding Wordsworthian revision.

shown in the "people" is a noble object of representation because it is not limited by social conventions. Conventions are the product of a history of civil society. The "public" defines itself civilization both by the differential relationship that civil society has to uncouth groups, such as Wordsworth's favored "people," and the differential relationship that civil society has to other social moments. The "public" is thus always-already defined by its own discursive construction as superior to the social history that constitutes its present identity. The "public" imagines itself the benefactor of the historical failures of society, understands its own position in history as an original reaction against the tyrannical institutions of previous political generations. Because the "public" imagines itself as reacting against the tyranny of the past, it fails to acknowledge its own reproduction of tyrannical rule.

The problem with the relationship between tyranny and revolution in *The Prelude* is, therefore, analogous to the paradoxical admission of William Blake's character Los in *Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion*, "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Man's" (20, 10, E 153). To supplant one system of meaning with another is not to abolish a human subject's dependence on a systematic understanding of his or her own consciousness and its relationship to the material world. Revolution cannot be sustained as long as it supplants one system of social order for another. Rather than a movement towards political freedom for the "people," revolution always reproduces the tyranny of the "public" at both the level of aesthetic possibility and the level of political possibility, for a new system inevitably emerges in the place of the one overthrown in order to stabilize a subject's social constitution as the "public," the enlightened product of historical errors. Where *The Prelude* errs is in constructing the "public" as a vilified other

to both the "people" and especially to the poet himself. That the poet has such a strong reaction to what he regards as the corrupt city suggests that his own interpretation of himself as a subject is at stake in breaking with the "public." A break is still necessary, though, and the poet thus implicitly assigns power to social conventions—a power that he must grapple with before addressing himself to any one individual subject, including himself. The history of revolution's returns to tyranny is inscribed first in the poet's consciousness, so it is in the poet's consciousness that the cycle must first be broken.

In the trajectory of the poem's interpretation of London, first in Book VII and then in Book VIII, I will trace the shift from *The Prelude*'s subscription to the historical cycle of revolution and tyranny to an irreducible multiplicity that resists tyrannical structure—that resists history as a stable determinant in theories of civilization. I will argue that *The Prelude*'s two extended treatments of London exhibit the instability of the poem's theorization of the social body by showing a difficulty on the poet's part of reconciling his objective of showing how "Love of Nature Lead[s] to Love of Mankind" and his loathing of urban community. Book VIII revises Book VII's representation of London as the "public" with a view toward locating promise in the city. Book VIII, then, seeks the "people" in the city, hoping to find at the heart of even the most affected social body a multiplicity that naturally resists systematization. These two moments in the text, specifically the St. Bartholomew's Fair passage of Book VII and the Den of Yordas passage of Book VIII would seem to show the poet unable to reject a revolution-tyranny cycle and indeed mark his reinscription of that insistence on history but for the Arab Dream. The Arab Dream passage of Book V represents the poem's versification of a space in which the revolution-tyranny model of culture collapses. This moment centers

the entire poem not by establishing or proposing a new order, but by allowing new confusion to characterize the poem's readings of society. In this way, *The Prelude*'s experiments with verse lend a historically specific political inflection to the Lacanian principle that subjects are written by language even as they speak it. While this dual function of language might simply reinscribe a cycle that precludes a sustainable revolution, Wordsworth's epic suggests another possibility. Between revolution and tyranny, between man's being constituted by language and man's discursive constructions within a language that already overwrites him, *The Prelude* offers the means of a critical purchase on the extent to which language itself forms a subject. By this same token, though, language is also the material by which a subject can be reconstituted. The poem constructs a principle by which the "people" may be drawn out of the "public" and by which London society in particular may realize its potential as "the destiny of Earth itself"(VIII. 748): the individual's radical subjectivity and its implications for a revolution in and of language.

Language is problematic insofar as it breeds the conventional discourse of civil society, but the critique of such conventions that *The Prelude* makes creates the space for a counter-discourse in verse. In the poem's direct treatment of language, conventional discourse, or the inherited system of using language with a specific socio-political context, is an impediment to natural feelings—the vehicle of affectation and imaginative impoverishment. Though the poet of *The Prelude* constantly attempts to codify this problem of a "people" vs. "public" binary, to stabilize a precarious poetics, the poet expresses the complexity of convention's effect on the subject and on society even as he seeks to map his consciousness in stable terms:

There are who think that [love]

. . . is falsely deemed

A gift, to use a term which they would use,

Of vulgar Nature, that its growth requires

Retirement, leisure, language purified

By manners thoughtful and elaborate,

That whoso feels such passion in excess

Must live within the very light and air

Of elegances that are made by man. (XII. 185-193).

The poet here locates the manners of society in "language," making a distinction between the "vulgar" passions of "Nature" and the "elegances that are made by man" (XII. 188-89, 193). In this passage, the poet has already constructed a difficult classification, for he implicitly recognizes a progression from a subject imbued with natural passions to a subject who operates only "by manners thoughtful and elaborate" (XII. 190). These lines beg the question of agency. The poet judges man as the creator of this artifice, this conventional discourse that does not express anything of the natural vulgarity of emotion, and he goes on to condemn this specific function of language, saying that

. . . where oppression worse than death

Salutes the Being at his birth . . . and to Nature's self

Oppose a deeper nature, there indeed,

Love cannot be; nor does it easily thrive

In cities, where the human heart is sick. . . (XII. 194-202)

Identifying the failures of a discourse that is opposed to nature as an invention of mankind and of a specifically urban society allows the poet to construct his own differential position in this scheme. Here discourse in its capacity as a system of conventions that perpetuates the social determination of thought is the object of the poet's disdain. Though this tenuous construction neglects the poet's own investments in conventional discourse as the agent of subject formation, his laying claim to other possibilities of language—the discourse of subjective verse—is essential to the whole of *The Prelude*. Verse emerges as the heroic counterpart to social convention, for it is necessarily a creative use of language that challenges such predetermined and predetermining discourse. The poet employs verse as a means of collapsing the tyrannical quality of conventional discourse.

In setting up verse as a discourse with greater imaginative possibility than conventional discourse, *The Prelude* offers an interpretation of discourse as evidence of history's influence over how meaning is constructed. The "manners thoughtful and elaborate" that the poet describes are behaviors associated with conventional discourse that have developed over a history of various amendments to the ways civil behavior is defined (XII. 190). In the moment of defining what separates a civilized social body from a barbaric one, the historical discourse of civilization becomes the thing that privileges one group over another. The poem challenges conventional discourse as a mode of social relations that corrupts the creative potential of the social body. The poet, in Book VII, describes his impression of the social body of London as "[T]he whole creative powers of man asleep!" (VII. 655), but he must deduce the reason's for London's repressed potential. Here the difference between discourse and verse becomes essential to the

poem's realization of a positive principle that is possible even for the "public." Because the "public" enacts its social pageantry according to specific rules of convention and assigned social meanings of discourse, it reproduces its own discursive subjection to the previous generations that contributed to these restrictions on language's potential for multiple, unrestricted discourses. *The Prelude*'s subjective discourse in verse, though, has a liberating potential because it is a creative exercise in language. For the poet to create necessarily means that he must challenge the discourse already established by civil society. This creative challenge proves difficult and ultimately cataclysmic for the poet's consciousness. The poet's own investments in discourse are radically and violently purged by *The Prelude*'s moment of deluge before the poet can espouse any revolutionary verse.

The Arab Dream sequence of Book V reflects the poet's position between two contrary possibilities of discourse, complicating the already complex problem of the individual's position in society and to what extent a revolution at the level of the individual's consciousness has any bearing on the shape of society. I will not contend that the poet of *The Prelude* or, by extension, any subject can construct any discourse while simultaneously overturning his or her ideological constitution. I suggest, though, that in recognizing the way in which ideology is manifested in particular ideologies, *The Prelude* demystifies the ideological construction of a "people" as a "public," as a society that can only engage in the repetition of its own conventions. Society is at once involved in and distinct from the conventions upon which it relies for its own constitution as the "public." These conventions are the effect of culture, which David Collings defines as the "institutional structure of human societies" (2). Collings' classification, though,

illuminates the historical development of such a distinction. The sense of a broad history of human civilization is implicit in Collings' notion of culture. For the purposes of this reading in which I am locating a multiplicity of mankind even within the subgroup of the "public," the "public," or society, inheres the possibility of breaking with cultural convention.

Culture is the "institutional structure of human societies" not only in the sense that it orders human subjects in terms of a hierarchy, but it also represents the development of a group of human subjects according to a history of civilization (Collings 2). The distinction between society and culture, or between "people" and "public," is played out in the Arab Dream. Collings, in his reading of the dream, suggests "If one can celebrate the Arab Dream, one no longer bears allegiance to philosophical discipline and in fact is willing to violate it . . . until one has enabled nature to escape all discourses and to become a fabulously unreadable text" (190). In his argument that Wordsworth closes off nature's radical possibility of defying culture, Collings acknowledges the Arab Dream as a moment in which culture is destabilized by nature. This destabilization of culture and, in effect, of the conventional discourse through which the poet constructs his own consciousness requires the poet to "violate [philosophical discipline]," that is, to recognize the possibility of consciousness that is not defined by cultural conventions. If nature can here emerge as "a fabulously unreadable text," then the poet, in his interpretation of his friend's dream, has stumbled upon a revolutionary potential for language (190). Nature only has any meaning and, paradoxically, resistance to meaning in the moment of the dreamer's and later the poet's subjective interpretation of it. Immersion in subjectivity, therefore, is the means by which *The Prelude* counters the

cultural discourse that binds subjects together in a system of convention that spawns a historical cycle between revolution and tyranny.

Borrowing Collings' definition of culture, then, I suggest that it is with culture that *The Prelude* begins to imagine a society that does not simply reinscribe a revolution-tyranny cycle. *The Prelude*'s only recourse to such a bold revision of human society is the employment of verse. *The Prelude* constitutes a mapping of this complicated and self-conflicted process, for the poem oscillates between moments of resistance to a system of meaning and moments of imposing its own system, i.e. its own fantasy of meaning, on the material world. Even in its own moments of tyranny, the poem exhibits nothing short of obsession with the extent to which perspective is determined by the possibilities of various kinds of discourse. This exaltation of the creative potential of discourse and the critical use to which *The Prelude* puts subjective discourse comprise the poem's claim to a truly revolutionary poetics. The poem collapses the opposition between the social body and subjective experience. However, the poem's struggle for this position is epic in its own right. In taking London as the subject of Books VII and VIII, the poet sets himself up as the epic hero attempting to navigate a shift from the moral critique of the freakish marketplace in St. Bartholomew's Fair to a celebration of the treacherous confusion of the Den of Yordas. For the poet of *The Prelude* to envision a society liberated by a subjective discourse that is not bound to cultural narrative, the poet must first contend with warring discourses that situate the poet either within discourse in its capacity to uphold cultural convention or discourse in its capacity to eradicate any underlying structure of interpretation.

The Prelude reads the poet's consciousness as the symbiotic opposition of two

methods of interpretation, two modes of experience—the reading of experience through cultural signs and the recognition of experience a multiplicity that cannot be reduced by a system of meaning. The poem offers the Arab Dream as a moment in which the poet is confronted by an external agent and thereby forced to come to terms with his own radical subjectivity, which is as yet alien to his cultural modes of thought. However, the poet imposes an agency on nature in his very representation of it. In concluding his description of the Arab Dream, the poet says that, in his intermittent returns to the dream, ". . . I to him have given/ A substance . . . Have shaped him, in the oppression of his brain" (V. 142-3; 147). With these phrases, the poet exercises the tyranny of his own interpretation of the wanderer. His appreciation of the multiplicity of the scene is contained by his need to contextualize the wanderer in fictional narrative. That he is so deeply invested in his own reading of the "Arab Phantom" (V. 141) shows the poet's very representation of the dream to be a struggle to understand the problems it presents for his own consciousness. I argue that, while the poem clearly states that the poet is presenting his friend's dream, it is the poet's own representation of the dream, his appropriation of it, which makes the Arab Dream such a stunning moment in *The Prelude*. To that end, I read the dreamer and the poet as mirror images of one another and see the scene's struggle for perspective as a microcosm of the poet's representations throughout the entire poem. The poet describes part of the exchange with the wandering guide thus:

> . . . 'Strange as it may seem,
> I wondered not, although I plainly saw
> The one to be a Stone, the other a Shell,
> Nor doubted once but that they both were Books . . .'" (V. 110-113).

Here the dreamer acknowledges the gap between what he sees and what he understands. The Arab Dream illuminates the difference between a physical object—a stone, a book, or a shell—that can be interpreted through a system of cultural signs and a physical object that bears no correspondence to culture. These objects are thus the manifest content of the poet's confusion at the disparity between an experience with no point of reference in a totalizing system of meaning and an a priori understanding of all experience as relating to such a system regardless of their foreignness. Culture and multiplicity and the continual tension between them characterize the very process by which the poet figures his own existence. The dream is a projection of the poet's consciousness and not of nature as an external agent.[2] That nature's power is a projection of the poet's mind, though, is problematic insofar as the poet cannot critique the cultural investments of his own mind from any perspective that is not bound up in those same investments. This complicit critique, though, enables the poet to draw from his experience of chaotic nature a social principle, for his transformed subjectivity will echo in the social body to which he is inextricably connected. The poet's attempt to give the wanderer "substance" (V. 143) and "shap[e] him" (V. 147) reveals a multiplicity of its own: on the one hand, the poet seeks to reduce the wanderer to the cultural terms that are familiar to him, but, by the same token, the poet's desire to "shape" (V. 147) the wanderer suggests an investment in effecting social change by redirecting the subjective potential of the London masses.

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[2] M.H. Abrams argues, for example, that the influence of nature in *The Prelude* is secondary to the power of the human mind (94). Abrams' argument, though, still attributes to nature a power external to the mind even if it is of lesser importance in Wordsworth's aesthetic. I am suggesting here that nature is a reflection of, rather than a support of, the poet's mind.

The Arab Dream is a moment of promise for liberated subjectivity, but it is also the moment of *The Prelude* that contains the most obvious example of the poet's warring impulses. The books are images that represent culture insofar as they are material instances of codified thought, but the poet's interpretation of what the books might mean oscillates between a hope for unconventional human thought's transcending the material stamp of culture and a respect for conventional, discursive thought's ability to lend stability to society. The wandering guide is on his way to bury the books, the first of which has some supernatural power to create a community that is uncorrupted by power structures: "The one that held acquaintance with the stars, / And wedded man to man by purest bond/ Of nature, undisturbed by space or time . . ."(V.104-106). This passage suggests that one of the books contains some sublime knowledge that allows a pure community of human subjects—a community that is never subject to the shifting power structures of culture. The poet gives the dreamer's description of the second book, saying that "[t]he other that was a God, yea many Gods, / Had voices more than all the winds, and was/ A joy, a consolation, and a hope" (V. 107-109). If books, in this passage, represent culture, and culture, at this point, is the system of meaning through which the poet interprets experience, then these descriptions of books are also descriptions of the human mind itself. Read thus, the second book makes a stark contrast to the first. The first outlines a society of human minds that is "undisturbed by space and time," that is, by culture (V. 106). The description of the second, though, in referencing "Gods" who "had voices more than all the winds" suggests a network of power structures—of cultural "Gods" that rule the human mind (V. 107-109). The dreamer says that the second book "was a joy, a consolation, and a hope" (V. 109). "Consolation" in particular suggests that

the dreamer takes comfort in the security that these "Gods" can offer (V. 107, 109). These "many Gods" with "voices more than all the winds" represent a system of meaning that manifests itself in language, in cultural language that restricts experience to its own tyrannical terms (V. 107-108). Even at this level, books represent culture insofar as culture strings together disparate images or sensations in a totalizing narrative. *The Prelude*, though, is unable to reconcile this totalizing cultural narrative with the poet's own chaotic interpretations of images that he both sees and recreates in representation.

The most radical threat to culture that *The Prelude* makes comes in the Arab Dream's representation of the moment of deluge that marks the end of the human race. The wandering guide tells the dreamer to put the shell, which is also a book, to his ear, at which point the dreamer says

> . . . I did so,
> And heard that instant in an unknown Tongue,
> Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
> A loud prophetic blast of harmony,
> An Ode, in passion uttered, which foretold
> Destruction to the Children of the Earth
> By deluge now at hand. (V. 93-99)

The verse of *The Prelude* here effectively turns culture into an irreducible multiplicity. Listening to the book that is the shell, the dreamer hears "a loud prophetic blast of harmony" (V. 96) This line alone is a chaotic multiplicity, for the sound it describes is at once a "loud . . . blast" and foretelling of "harmony" (V. 96). This image is already disjointed, but the dreamer's hearing it in "an unknown Tongue, which yet [he]

understood" further compounds its disparity (V. 94-95). The dreamer describes the foretelling of the "destruction of the Children of the Earth" as an ode, suggesting a celebratory anticipation of the apocalyptic moment (V. 98). In the destruction of the human race, culture is destroyed. The poem does not desire the literal end of mankind, but the end of a mankind that is defined by culture. Reading apocalypse this way locates that which must be destroyed, that which is culpable or corrupt in the sense of requiring a biblical annihilation, in the social body as it is ideologically constructed—in the "public"—and the earth insofar as it is determined by mankind's ideological representation of it. If the poem's representation of the deluge can cleanse the social body of its ideological investments and free it from the ideological networks of institution, then the poem can read the social body as a multiplicity and nature as unwritten by the perspective the "public" has imposed on it. The Arab Dream thus makes possible human society in the sense of a community that is liberated by indeterminacy and without restrictions of a totalizing system of meaning.

The Arab Dream undoes culture by conflating it with multiplicity to the point that no system of meaning can be imposed for the sake of ideological stability. As this process is played out in the poet's consciousness, the poet loses the "consolation" of knowing his experience through familiar, cultural terms (V. 107). However, he gains the radically subjective versification of his own consciousness. He experiences an apocalypse, an irreversible revolution, in his own mind, and his subjectivity, once loosed from conventional language, becomes a multiplicity of experiences not linked together by cultural narrative. In the space between the St. Bartholomew's Fair passage in Book VII and the Den of Yordas passage in Book VIII, the poem realizes the social principle that it

sets up in the Arab Dream. As the poet emerges from the solitude of nature, he meets with the practical challenge of how he will interpret and represent the London crowd, whether he will read the city in terms of cultural judgment or in terms of multiplicity.

While it is multiplicity that holds the revolutionary potential for *The Prelude*'s representation of the city, the confusion that the poet experiences has several critical possibilities. Criticism surrounding *The Prelude* locates in its exhaustive treatment of Book VII the most important manifestation of the poem's theory of society.[3] Critics have generally seen the chaotic multiplicity of the city as the failure of the unifying task of the poetic project or simply a moment in which the poet's desire to harness imagination is confounded by unfamiliar experience not readily reduced to a cultural mode of interpretation. It is at least critically accepted that Book VII represents perhaps the poet's greatest aesthetic struggle. Mark Bruhn follows Frederick Burwick to conclude, "Wordsworth here takes his central place in the discussion [of the poetic mind's influence on that which it represents] . . . in order to advance 'a truth that may well reside in illusion but is nevertheless the truth of the reciprocity between mind and nature'" (Bruhn 159). Through a meticulous reading of the spatial dynamics of Book VII, Bruhn ultimately reads the misrepresentation of the external by the poet as indicative of *The Prelude*'s progressive artistic goals, as a didactic vision of how the individual might productively process his subjectivity. The result of this kind of process for Bruhn is an art

[3] James Heffernan constructs a notion of Wordsworth's ideal reader—a figure that cannot actually in any real social structure, but allows the poet figure to distance himself from the monster of London's marketplace society (426). For Heffernan, Wordsworth's representation of London becomes a matter of classism, which is contrary to my argument that a pervasive conventional discourse is the problem that *The Prelude* locates in London society.

that is aesthetically, if not socially, revolutionary. Bruhn's reading gives the artistic possibilities of anthropomorphized subjectivity precedence over the social possibilities with which Book VII struggles and thus admits a certain power of the poet's to overwrite the urban scene and all the people in it as disembodied manifestations of his own subjectivity. Even the bodily experience of other bodies, in Bruhn's interpretation, becomes a form of radical, poetic egocentrism.

I concur with Bruhn's argument for Book VII as a moment of the poet's egocentrism, but this egocentrism is not the limit of the aesthetic and social principles of the poet's radical subjectivity. The possibilities that this subjectivity enables cannot be evaluated by reading Book VII in isolation. The pair that Book VII and Book VIII make serves as a self-reflexive representation of *The Prelude*'s commentary on revision as process of vast importance to the process of revolution itself. Critics have treated the obsession with revision that is visible across Wordsworth's oeuvre, but I offer to this thread of Wordsworthian criticism the possibility of reading within the layers of Wordsworth's revisions a modeling of the very process that I have so far observed in the Arab Dream. Book VII, as a precursor to its counterpart in Book VIII, must be read as an instance of thought that requires revision. Book VII's St. Bartholomew's Fair passage is evidence of thought that is subject to the contagion of the "public" mode of interpreting itself as a social body. However, because it is a point of revision insofar as the Den of Yordas passage complicates the poet's initial reaction against the multiplicity of the city, *The Prelude* suggests that this perspective of London is lacking and may be "repaired" by the "mighty Mind" of poetic genius (XIII. 69; XI. 265). To the extent that the need for its revision suggests this moment in Book VII as flawed, codified thought, I read this scene's

failing as its inability to abandon its reliance culture to situate experience within some totalizing narrative. The physical form of *The Prelude* as a book compounds this desire for a totalizing narrative, for its own material presence represents a codification of its poetic experimentation. *The Prelude*'s very publication is the reduction of an attempt at liberated, chaotic thought into a cultural form, a paradox that has its metonymical representation in Book VII.

Culture is for *The Prelude* both an impediment to man's creative genius and a narcissistic record of that genius that the poet sometimes desires. At the same time that culture confines genius to ideological constraints that have developed over history, culture also promises the poet some lasting place within its narrative. In the poet's description of St. Bartholomew's Fair, this tension between a desire to break with culture and a desire to carry on its narrative is evident:

> . . . there see
> A work that's finished to our hands, that lays,
> If any spectacle on earth can do,
> The whole creative powers of man asleep! (VII. 652-655)

In this passage, the potential of man's creative powers is an object of awe, but that these powers exist only potentially—that they are "asleep"—is the essence of the poet's critique of the city (VII. 655). The poet's ability to read the city as a locus of the pure potential of mankind, though, is constantly thwarted by his own cultural investments. Once noting that this potential is latent, the poet goes on to lodge further complaints: ". . . what a hell/ For eyes and ears! what anarchy and din/ Barbarian and infernal! 'tis a dream,/ Monstrous in color, motion, shape, sight, sound" (VII. 658-662). The poet's

assertion that the spectacle of urban society is monstrously chaotic and therefore "barbarian and infernal" is based on his own sensory discomfort (VII. 660). To condemn the city as "anarchy and din" based on "color, motion, shape, sight, sound" shows the poet unwilling to abide any scene that he cannot order as a readable text through a cultural method of interpretation (VII. 659, 662). Because the city overwhelms the cultural system of meaning that the poet understands, the poet declares the crowd low and beastly rather than considering that his own genius might be asleep and thus not fit for the task of interpreting the urban multiplicity. As the books of the Arab Dream, the very act of representing the city in verse has two possibilities—either the reductive assignment of cultural meaning or the sublime experience of multiplicity. The poet, still in Book VII interpreting the city in cultural terms, can do nothing but make a moralistic judgment of the crowd. The poem thus reveals the more insidious aspects of culture: its impulse to degrade what it cannot understand and, by that degradation, to bring the unknown into subjection.

If Book VII signifies the poet's cultural process of interpreting the London Crowd, the Den of Yordas passage in Book VIII offers a post-deluge process of interpretation. The poet's revision of his representation of the city bears no evidence of any attempt to order or subdue the chaotic experience of the urban scene. In the first half of the passage, the poet describes a cavern whose dimensions have an almost fluid aspect. At first sight, the poet's perspective shifts "Like Spectres" (VIII. 723) so that

> He sees, erelong, the roof above his head,
> Which instantly unsettles and recedes
> Substance and shadow, light and darkness, all

Commingled, making up a Canopy

Of Shapes and Forms and Tendencies to Shape,

That shift and vanish, change and interchange. (VIII. 717-722)

The instability of perspective in these lines recalls the poet's frustration at the sight of St. Bartholomew's Fair, which he ultimately reduces to a moralistic judgment because it does not yield to a cultural interpretive process. Indeed, the poet is inclined to force the image of the cave into something readable, saying that after his initial confusion, "The scene before him lies in perfect view,/ Exposed and lifeless, as a written book" (VIII. 726-727). Here, the poet momentarily succumbs to the impulse to reduce the overwhelming image of the cave to the cultural terms he can understand. The imagery of reading this chaotic sight "as a written book" suggests a need for the external world to be simplified in order to yield a traditional interpretation, an interpretation through culture (VIII. 727). The poet ultimately resists this kind of reduction of the image of the cave and embraces the incoherency of the vision, saying "But let him pause awhile, and look again/ And a new quickening shall succeed" (VIII. 728-729). From these lines until the end of the passage, the poet catalogs several images that signify worldly experience and concludes this list by calling vision "A spectacle to which there is no end" (VIII. 741). The poet no longer reads the external world in the systematic terms of culture, but as a sublime multiplicity of experiences. Images are no longer linked together as specific signs within a cultural framework. The poet no longer constructs his experience with any cultural meaning as its foundation. Varying subjects and varying subjective experience are joined together as a social body only insofar as all subjects may exercise radical subjectivity.

This process by which subjectivity acts a vehicle for social revolution is profoundly abstract and has revolutionary potential in its very distance from the particular socio-political concerns of a given historical moment. To suggest that *The Prelude* only lays claim to the possibility of revolution by instituting a discourse that defamiliarizes socio-political specificity, though, would be an injustice to the poem's clear investments in its own contemporary political climate. While the apocalyptic language of the poet of *The Prelude* marks the emphatic destruction of the cultural networks that tie subjects together as the "public," the poet and the poem still desire the constitution of subjects as a social body. This constitution is inescapably political, for the conditions that group a given body of subjects together are necessarily the product of a history. History chronicles the socio-political struggles by which a society arrives at its present state and thus becomes the justification for one social group's being distinct from another. However, a society's cultural history only has any bearing on how that society—and groups within that society, i.e. the "public" and the "people"—comes to be distinct from other societies. This history has no bearing on how subjects, however they come to be situated ideologically and geographically together, will further define their social ties. This is not to suggest that, once individual subjects find themselves bound together in the culmination of historical circumstances, these subjects will be able to forget or abandon that history. Rather, within these groupings of subjects, radical subjectivity will allow for an understanding of the multiplicity within each subject and, thus, for an understanding of the multiplicity within a given society. For *The Prelude* itself and indeed Wordsworth's verse in a broader sense, the very notion of society as a body of interconnected individuals must be revised. In viewing the city, the visible proof of

indelible human connections, as “a spectacle to which there is no end,” the poet and, by extension, *The Prelude* make a deeply political statement against all society’s failed attempts to determine its future in service to the past (VIII. 741). In Book VIII, the poet’s impulse to continue to interpret the city in the terms of his own judgment reflects society’s impulse to design its socio-political future in the vein of cultural institutions that it had no hand in building. The poet’s representation of the city as an endless multiplicity of intersubjective human connections, though, suggests a more radical social principle.

What is visible in this reading of *The Prelude* is a profoundly disparate sense of subject, society, and nature, yet these seemingly distinct entities are so connected as to impede the construction of a revolutionary, subjective discourse on any one of them. The subject’s will to overwrite nature and society in terms of his own consciousness, for example, or society’s influence on how the subject will read the external world are inextricable attachments that contaminate any singular attempt to revise thought. However, it is the attachment between the subject, society, and nature that first make possible recognition of the investments to which subjectivity is always subordinate. My consideration of the subject, his interplay with the social body, and the revolutionary possibilities that emerge in that exchange would be remiss indeed if I did not address the shifting role of nature in this dynamic. The poet, the Romantic subject, encapsulates the potential for revolution on the basis of subjective discourse and its capacity to revise consciousness both for the subject and a society comprised of subjects. As aforementioned, nature is the mirror by which the subject recognizes his historical social construction. Nature is not an external agent that inspires the mind of the poet to transcend his social constitution, but the projection of a subjectivity that the poet is

already struggling to interpret. The egotistical sublime thus becomes the catalyst by which the subject begins to consider the cultural investments of his own consciousness, for in the moment he attempts to overwrite nature in terms of subjectivity, he sees those very cultural investments reflected back to him. Thus, he necessarily grapples with the extent to which this likeness is the effect of a homogenization that has its root in his own mind.

The deluge is the most important moment of *The Prelude* not because it is a moment of nature's rejection of the social body, but because it is the moment the poet—the subject—rejects his own mind as the product of a cultural history. Nature has no agency in the poem except to reflect to the poet, on a scale too large for him to ignore, the nature of his own mind: his own formation as a product of history, a product of civilization. If the poem calls forth the annihilation of this configuration of the subject, it simultaneously calls forth a poetic mind that cannot begrudge society any moral flaws that result from the same historical development that *The Prelude* seeks to overwhelm in apocalyptic, revolutionary discourse. Nature is the source of "Love of Mankind" insofar as it is the medium through which the poet of *The Prelude* creates a vision of himself as a new subject and, thereby, a vision of society as an irreducible multiplicity. This process of revolutionary, radical subjectivity, because it is theoretically and chronologically discontinuous, highlights again the importance of revision. *The Prelude* represents the poet's relationship to nature and his relationship to the social body in such various and disjointed ways that the poem as a whole identifies the necessity of revision. The Den of Yordas passage offers its metaphorical representation of the city as the cave whose dimensions constantly "shift and vanish, change and interchange" (VIII. 722). This

description metonymically reflects the problem of *The Prelude* itself: the poem has no synchronic, cohesive theorization of the subject, the social body, or nature. All of these are "like specters" because they only have any shape in an instant of thought, in a moment of revision (VIII. 723). Revision is an infinite process that allows the individual subject the freedom to interpret all his experience however he should choose in the present moment. This agency to choose continually one's interpretation is *The Prelude*'s most compelling struggle for liberated consciousness and thus its greatest stake in the possibility of a socio-political revolution.

Returning to the poet's description of the Den of Yordas as seeming, for a moment, "exposed and lifeless, as a written book," I argue that this single line, within the interpretation of the passage as a whole that I have offered, is a metonym for *The Prelude*'s efficacy in engendering radical subjectivity for all individuals within society (VIII. 727). The final move of *The Prelude* is a tribute to itself and a suggestion of a didacticism that might quell whatever bold inventions it has already made in its new, subjective discourse:

> . . . we shall still
> Find solace in the knowledge which we have,
> Blessed with true happiness if we may be
> United helpers forward of a day
> Of firmer trust, joint-labourers in the work
> (Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe)
> Of [mankind's] redemption, surely yet to come (XIII. 435-441)

This passage, which goes on to employ terms such as “teach” and “instructing” has an almost missionary aim of winning minds to the Wordsworthian aesthetic, of showing all people the manner in which their minds might be restored and repaired (XIII. 443, 447). Taken as it stands, the passage would mark a grave failure for *The Prelude*, which takes such pains to prevent perspective from being reduced to an ordering system. However, if we consider the passage in conjunction with the “lifeless book” (VIII. 727) moment of the Den of Yordas scene, we may read the poet’s grand conclusion to this Romantic epic as the culmination of his own process of self-liberation, of what he reads as his own positive, but subjective social principle. For, by the end of the poem, love of nature has indeed led the poet to a love of mankind, has allowed the poet to envision a future when the “public” is collapsed along with culture, allowing “the people,” a pure, chaotic social collective to be created by the poet’s own discourse. From that, though, the poet is somehow stricken with an impulse to act as some kind of beacon of enlightened thought. Yet this moment of epic fulfillment, if read as parallel with the “lifeless book” (VIII. 727) turn of Book VIII, suggests that “a new quickening shall succeed.” *The Prelude* is, after all, a “lifeless book” (VIII. 727), but what it enables is an exploration of each subject’s potential for radical subjectivity—a venture into the multiplicity embodied within each subject. The poem, insofar as it is ultimately a fixed volume regardless of any student or editor’s work to arrange it to his or her taste, is revolutionary for its representation of the subject as something other than a reiteration of its historical formation.

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