

From Revolutionary to Conservative: The Political Evolution of William Wordsworth and Its Reflection in The Prelude (1805 vs 1850)

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Abstract— The career of William Wordsworth (1770–1850) is usually told as the story of a great nature poet, yet it is equally the story of a remarkable political journey. In his early twenties Wordsworth travelled through revolutionary France, formed close friendships with republican soldiers, and in 1793 openly counted himself among "that odious class of men called democrats." Half a century later he was a Tory, a salaried official of the Crown, a critic of parliamentary reform and of Catholic emancipation, and the nation's Poet Laureate. Earlier critics, from Hazlitt to Browning, tended to explain this change either through biography or through the moral language of "apostasy." This paper proposes another approach. It reads *The Prelude*, the long autobiographical poem that Wordsworth kept revising for more than forty years, as a political record in its own right. The poem survives in two major forms: a thirteen-book version finished in 1805 and a fourteen-book version printed after the poet's death in 1850. Placing these versions side by side, and drawing on the vocabulary of political theory, the study examines revisions in the French books, the poet's handling of Godwin and Burke, and the more religious colouring of the closing book. It then tests these findings against three of Wordsworth's prose writings: the *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* (1793), *The Convention of Cintra* (1809) and the *Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmorland* (1818). The study concludes that Wordsworth's development is better described as a change of foundations than as a plain betrayal. His lifelong concern with liberty, community and moral order remained, but its grounding moved from abstract reason to history, custom and faith. The argument has wider value for the study of political conversion, for the relation between literature and ideology, and for the use of revised texts as evidence in intellectual history.

Keywords— Conservatism, Edmund Burke, French Revolution, Romantic Politics, Textual Revision, *The Prelude*, William Godwin, Wordsworth

I. INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth's life offers one of the clearest examples in English literature of how closely poetry and politics can be bound together. He was born at Cockermouth in 1770, lost both parents while still a boy, and studied at St John's College, Cambridge. His adulthood began at exactly the moment when the French Revolution was transforming the way Europeans thought about power, rights and the people.

In the summer of 1790 he walked across France while the country was celebrating the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. During 1791 and 1792 he lived in Orléans and Blois, and there his friendship with Michel Beaupuy, an army officer of noble birth who had joined the popular cause, turned a vague enthusiasm into a considered political position. Late in 1792 he came back to England, leaving behind Annette Vallon and their baby daughter Caroline. Within a few months Britain was at war with France, and the young poet found himself, as he would later admit, an Englishman who secretly took comfort in his own country's military defeats.

The Wordsworth of later years looks very different. In 1813 he accepted the office of Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland, a government post he owed to the influence of the Lowthers, the leading Tory family of the region. In 1818 he worked actively for the Lowther interest in an election against the Whig reformer Henry Brougham. He resisted Catholic emancipation, spoke against the Reform Bill of 1832, and in 1843 became Poet Laureate. Shelley and Byron saw in him a man who had deserted the cause of freedom, and Victorian liberals such as Browning made him the model of the radical who had lost his way. Even Hazlitt, who honoured his genius, observed that his poetic Muse had begun as "a levelling one," formed by the egalitarian spirit of the revolutionary years.

Explanations of this transformation have been offered for some two hundred years. Most of them, however, have depended on letters, events in the poet's life and his shorter lyrics. This paper suggests that the most revealing single source is *The Prelude*, and that its value lies precisely in the fact that it exists in more than one version. Wordsworth completed the poem in thirteen books in 1805. He then went on revising it until the late 1830s, but never published it. After his death in April 1850 his widow Mary brought out the revised poem in fourteen books and gave it the title by which it is now known. When Ernest de Selincourt printed the 1805 text next to the 1850 text in 1926, scholars were offered a rare chance to observe one writer describing the same political events at two distinct points in his intellectual life.

This material is of particular interest to the student of political ideas. The Prelude does much more than record the poet's emotions about the Revolution. It reflects at length on how political judgments are formed, on the competing claims of reason and tradition, on the bond between the individual and the community, and on the process by which revolutionary hope gives way to disappointment. These were exactly the questions argued over in the 1790s by Burke, Paine and Godwin. By reading the two versions together we can see how a sensitive witness of those events moved among these positions, and how he reshaped the story of his own past to fit the convictions of his maturity.

The paper therefore pursues two connected aims. The first is to establish, by careful comparison of chosen passages, what kind of political change separates the 1805 text from the 1850 text and in which direction it runs. The second is to interpret that change with the help of political theory, and so to weigh the familiar accusation of "apostasy" against the possibility that Wordsworth's thought developed while preserving an underlying unity.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Responses of Contemporaries and Victorians

The first readers to comment on Wordsworth's politics were his own contemporaries. In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) [11] William Hazlitt linked the poet's early work with the democratic and levelling energy of the 1790s, while regretting that his sympathies had later contracted. Shelley's sonnet "To Wordsworth" (1816) and the dedication to Byron's *Don Juan* voiced a more bitter sense of desertion. Browning's "The Lost Leader" (1845), whose application Browning afterwards softened, fixed in the Victorian mind the picture of a radical who had exchanged principle for official reward. Together these responses created the "apostasy" model that governed criticism for well over a century.

B. Biography and Textual Editing

The most important scholarly turning point was Ernest de Selincourt's edition of *The Prelude*, which set the two texts on facing pages (1926; revised by Helen Darbishire in 1959) [7]. De Selincourt maintained that many later changes reveal the older poet's increasing religious orthodoxy and political caution, and that the 1805 version gives in several respects a truer account of his youth. The Norton Critical Edition prepared by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (1979) [22], which printed the 1799, 1805 and 1850 versions together, brought this comparison to a broad academic audience. Biographies by Stephen Gill (1989) [8] and Kenneth R. Johnston (1998) [12] then reconstructed the radical period in fine detail.

Johnston in particular explored the poet's possible links with underground political networks and recalled that government agents watched Wordsworth and Coleridge at Alfoxden in 1797.

C. Historical and Political Studies

Nicholas Roe's *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (1988) [19] traced the two poets' contacts with London radicals, with Godwin's circle and with the reform societies, and demonstrated that their early commitments were serious and well informed. James K. Chandler's *Wordsworth's Second Nature* (1984) [6] argued influentially that the mature Wordsworth thinks in Burkean terms, relying on habit, custom and "second nature" rather than on pure reason, and that this Burkean outlook appears earlier in his work than critics had generally supposed. Writing as a social historian, E. P. Thompson, whose essays were gathered in *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (1997) [21], described a "disenchantment" that affected a whole generation of English radicals. Marilyn Butler's *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981) [5] situated Wordsworth among the many political positions represented in the literature of his time.

D. New Historicism and the Critique of Ideology

During the 1980s the New Historicists began to read Wordsworth's poems as places where political conflict is displaced. Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) [16] proposed that Romantic poetry typically converts historical struggle into the language of nature, imagination and transcendence. Marjorie Levinson (1986) [13], Alan Liu (1989) [14] and David Simpson (1987) [20] extended this claim through detailed readings, presenting the poet's retreat into nature and inner experience as itself a political withdrawal. Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991) [2] answered this critique by arguing that Wordsworth's care for nature and for particular places amounts to a constructive political tradition, an early "green" politics of locality, rather than a conservative escape.

E. Philosophical and Intellectual-Historical Approaches

Geoffrey Hartman (1964) [10] and M. H. Abrams (1971) [1] approached Wordsworth mainly through the history of consciousness and the secularisation of religious ideas. Abrams especially interpreted *The Prelude* as a story of breakdown and restoration in which the hopes of revolutionary millenarianism are turned inward and become the drama of a single mind. David Bromwich's *Disowned by Memory* (1998) [3] went back to the poems of the 1790s to show that Wordsworth's moral imagination continued to bear the marks of his radical experience long after he had renounced its open politics.

F. Gaps in Existing Research

In spite of this large body of work, three gaps can be identified. To begin with, scholars generally approach the political question either through biography, examining what Wordsworth did and said, or through textual study, examining what the revisions reveal; they rarely bring the two together in a systematic way by checking the evidence of the poem against the poet's political prose. In addition, literary critics have made limited use of the categories of political theory, such as the contrast between rationalist and traditionalist conservatism or between abstract and historical theories of rights, when classifying the revisions. Finally, much of this scholarship is not widely known in Indian universities, where Wordsworth is taught almost entirely as a poet of nature and hardly at all as a political thinker. The present study tries to respond to each of these gaps.

III. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

A. Objectives

- To identify the main phases of Wordsworth's political development, from radical commitment (1791–1795) to settled conservatism (1815–1850).
- To compare politically significant passages in the 1805 and 1850 versions of *The Prelude*.
- To establish whether the revisions correspond to the public political positions expressed in Wordsworth's prose writings.
- To interpret this development with reference to the Godwinian, Burkean and Painite traditions of the 1790s.
- To assess the "apostasy" thesis against an alternative thesis of underlying continuity.

B. Hypotheses

- H1: Between 1805 and 1850 the revisions move the poem's political language steadily away from abstract rationalism and toward tradition, religion and organic community.
- H2: The direction and approximate timing of these textual changes match the changes observable in Wordsworth's political prose.
- H3: Behind the shift in political loyalty there remains a lasting concern with liberty, moral independence and the life of small communities, so that the development is more accurately described as a re-founding than as a reversal.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Design of the Study

This is a qualitative and interpretive study that crosses disciplinary lines. It brings together comparative textual analysis, a standard tool of literary scholarship, and the contextual method of the history of political thought associated with the Cambridge School, which treats a text as an act performed within a particular political and linguistic setting.

B. Sources of Data

The primary sources fall into three groups. The first consists of the 1805 and 1850 texts of *The Prelude* as given in the Norton Critical Edition (1979) and in the de Selincourt–Darbishire edition (1959). The second consists of Wordsworth's political prose as edited by W.J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* (1974) [17]: the Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff (1793), *The Convention of Cintra* (1809) and the Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmorland (1818). The third consists of the key political works of the 1790s with which Wordsworth was in conversation, namely Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) [4], Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791–92) [18] and Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) [9]. The secondary sources are the biographical, historical and critical works discussed in the review of literature.

C. Procedure of Analysis

The analysis was carried out in three steps. First, passages concerned with France, revolution, political theory, authority and religion were located in both versions, with special attention to Books IX and X of 1805, Books IX, X and XI of 1850, the Burke passage in Book VII of 1850, and the final book of each version. Second, each pair of passages was examined for additions, omissions, shifts of emphasis and changes in political vocabulary, and the results were sorted into four categories: (i) judgment of revolutionary events; (ii) attitude toward abstract reason and political theory; (iii) attitude toward tradition, custom and established institutions; and (iv) religious framing of political experience. Third, these results were set against the positions found in the political prose, presented as a case study in Section 7, in order to test hypothesis H2.

D. Limitations of the Study

The study is selective and makes no claim to completeness; a full line-by-line collation of the two texts has already been carried out by textual editors.



Since the 1850 version contains layers of revision made between about 1816 and 1839, it is not always possible to date an individual change exactly. The study also rests on qualitative interpretation and does not offer statistical measurement of vocabulary, although the trends it identifies could be tested quantitatively in later work.

V. HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The years in which Wordsworth's political views took shape were dominated in Britain by what historians call the "Revolution controversy." In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Edmund Burke condemned the French effort to rebuild society on abstract doctrines of natural right. Against it he defended the inherited constitution, the practical wisdom stored in custom and prejudice, and the living partnership that links past, present and future generations. Thomas Paine replied in *Rights of Man* that the dead have no authority over the living and that a government is legitimate only when it rests on the present consent of reasoning citizens. William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) carried the argument further still, predicting that the advance of reason would one day make government unnecessary and insisting that private loyalties of affection and gratitude must give way to impartial benevolence.

Wordsworth's own views in early 1793 can be read in his Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, composed as a reply to a sermon in which Bishop Richard Watson had denounced the execution of Louis XVI. Wordsworth there defended republican government, rejected hereditary monarchy and aristocracy, and conceded that a revolution might need a passing period of violence. He never published the letter, very probably because writers of such opinions risked prosecution during the government's drive against sedition. The text reveals a young man whose thinking at that moment stood close to Paine's.

In the following two years, while the Terror spread through France and the British government suspended habeas corpus and brought radical leaders to trial, Wordsworth went through a severe intellectual crisis. Seeking shelter from the ruin of his revolutionary hopes, he turned to Godwin's rationalism, only to discover that it could not support a living moral life. His gradual recovery, helped by his sister Dorothy, by his friendship with Coleridge and by his return to the rural landscape of the Lake District, became the core story of *The Prelude*. The later phases of his conservatism formed against the background of the Napoleonic Wars, the Peninsular campaign, the growing demand for parliamentary reform and the fast pace of English industrialisation.

VI. ANALYSIS: A COMPARISON OF THE TWO VERSIONS

A. *The Dawn of Revolution*

The best-known political lines of *The Prelude* are found in both versions. Looking back on the first days of the Revolution, the poet declares:

*Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!*

These lines were printed on their own in Coleridge's journal *The Friend* in 1809, under a heading that described the Revolution as it had seemed to its early enthusiasts. That they remain in the 1850 text, where they stand in Book XI, deserves attention. The aged Wordsworth chose not to wipe out the record of his youthful delight. He also kept the striking passage that follows, which insists that the hopes of those years were aimed not at some dreamland but at the actual world:

*Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all!*

This element of continuity bears directly on hypothesis H3. Even in his conservative years Wordsworth holds that political hope has to be fulfilled within real human communities. What alters between 1805 and 1850 is therefore not the memory of enthusiasm but the setting in which it is placed. In the later version the French books are rearranged so that the last of them carries the title "France (concluded)," which gives the episode a feeling of finality and of judgment already passed. The enthusiasm increasingly appears as a phase in the growth of a mind that went astray, and less as an insight that still holds good.

B. *Beaupuy and the Ethical Roots of Republicanism*

Book IX of both versions describes Wordsworth's friendship with Michel Beaupuy, the officer of aristocratic family who had committed himself to the people's cause. Its most memorable scene shows the two men coming upon "a hunger-bitten girl" leading a heifer down a country lane. The sight of such rural poverty moves Beaupuy to say that this very misery is what the revolutionaries are fighting against. Here Wordsworth traces his republican faith not to political doctrine but to pity for real and visible suffering.

The scene is kept largely intact in 1850, and this tells us that Wordsworth's early radicalism rested on ethical and humanitarian feeling rather than on dogma. The point matters for political theory.

A republicanism rooted in compassion for the poor and in respect for the worth of ordinary lives could, in a changed situation, be reshaped into a conservative defence of the independent smallholder and the village community against the upheavals of commerce and industry. In this sense the Beaupuy episode holds the germ of both stages of Wordsworth's political life.

C. The Crisis of Godwinian Reason

The description of Wordsworth's mental crisis after 1793, which occupies Book X in 1805 and Book XI in 1850, is where the poem engages most openly with political philosophy. The poet recalls how he tried to rest every moral judgment on reason alone, requiring strict proof for each belief, until he was "Sick, wearied out with contraries," and "Yielded up moral questions in despair." Godwin's name does not appear, yet the portrait of a philosophy that would cut morality off from the passions and from inherited affections clearly points to Political Justice.

Both versions present this crisis as an illness from which the poet is eventually healed. They differ in the cure they describe. In 1805 healing comes mainly from nature, from Dorothy, and from the renewing power of memory and imagination, and the language reflects a natural piety indebted as much to eighteenth-century theories of the mind as to Christian teaching. In 1850 the same process is coloured more heavily by appeals to divine providence and religious belief. Expressed in the terms of political theory, the 1805 text replaces Godwin's rationalism with a psychology of feeling and habit, whereas the 1850 text increasingly places that psychology beneath the authority of revealed religion and settled belief.

D. The Address to Burke

The most obvious political insertion in the 1850 text is the tribute to Edmund Burke added to Book VII, the book that recounts Wordsworth's life in London. It opens with the lines:

*Genius of Burke! forgive the pen seduced
 By specious wonders*

Nothing corresponds to this passage in the 1805 version. The new lines depict Burke as a wise counsellor warning his countrymen against theories that would sweep away the gradual growth of institutions in the name of abstract rights, and they honour his defence of custom and of the enduring force of social ties handed down through time. The phrase about a pen "seduced by specious wonders" works as an open confession that the young poet was wrong to neglect Burke.

This addition gives strong support to hypothesis H1. In 1805 Wordsworth criticised rationalism in his own psychological vocabulary; in the later revision he names Burke as the authority under whose banner that criticism should be read. The poem is made to state its loyalty openly. Chandler's view that Wordsworth's thinking had a Burkean shape from the late 1790s explains why the passage sits so comfortably in the poem: the older poet is not adopting a new philosophy but naming the source of one he had long since made his own.

E. The Religious Recasting of the Final Book

Each version ends with a book (XIII in 1805, XIV in 1850) that opens with the climb up Snowdon and a vision of the mind as a power that both shapes nature and is shaped by it. Critics since de Selincourt have observed that the later revisions give this climax a more orthodox Christian tone, ascribing the mind's highest powers more plainly to God and toning down the earlier version's near-worship of imagination and nature. This has political consequences. In 1805 moral and social order is founded on the common experience of nature and of the human heart, a basis open to everyone and in that sense democratic. In 1850 it rests more and more on a religious order passed on through the church and through the established institutions of English society.

F. Table of Selected Revisions

TABLE I
SELECTED REVISIONS IN THE PRELUDE (1805 AND 1850)

Passage / Feature	1805 Version (13 Books)	1850 Version (14 Books)	Political Meaning
Books on France	Books IX and X	Books IX, X and XI ("France (concluded)")	Episode presented as finished and judged
"Bliss was it in that dawn"	Present (Book X)	Kept (Book XI)	Memory of revolutionary hope preserved
Beaupuy and the "hunger-bitten girl"	Present (Book IX)	Largely kept	Ethical, humanitarian roots of early radicalism
Crisis of Godwinian reason	Healing through nature, feeling and memory	Healing tied more closely to faith and providence	Basis of order moves from psychology to religion
Tribute to Burke	Not present	Added in Book VII	Open declaration of Burkean conservatism
Final vision (Snowdon)	Mind and nature as sources of moral order	More orthodox Christian tone	Authority shifts from shared experience to religious tradition



**VII. CASE STUDY: TESTING THE POEM AGAINST THE
POLITICAL PROSE**

To find out whether the changes in *The Prelude* reflect genuine shifts in Wordsworth's public politics, and not only in his private religious life, this section examines three prose works written at separate stages of his career.

A. Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff (1793)

This letter is the clearest expression of Wordsworth's radical period. In it he sides with the "democrats," supports the French Republic, attacks hereditary privilege and the British constitution, and accepts that liberty may have to be won through a stage of violent conflict. Its vocabulary of natural rights, equality and popular sovereignty is very near to Paine's. No passage of the 1805 *Prelude* states such views so directly, which suggests that even in 1805 Wordsworth was already recalling his past through the lens of later disappointment.

B. The Convention of Cintra (1809)

Wordsworth's pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra was written to protest against the treaty that permitted a beaten French army to withdraw from Portugal on generous terms. It represents a stage of transition. The pamphlet defends liberty with great fervour, but the liberty in question is the national freedom of the Spanish and Portuguese peoples resisting a foreign tyrant, and Wordsworth roots it in the moral strength of entire nations, in their history, their faith and their love of their native land. The language has shifted from universal rights to the spirit of a nation. In this respect the pamphlet is close to the 1805 *Prelude*, keeping the moral intensity of the radical years while placing it within communities shaped by history.

C. Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmorland (1818)

The Westmorland Addresses, composed to support the Lowther candidates against Brougham, display the fully conservative Wordsworth. He defends the political influence of the great landowning families, warns of the levelling effects of reform, and treats the existing constitution as the safeguard of social peace. His language of property, rank and inherited influence is thoroughly Burkean. The revisions to *The Prelude* that bring in Burke and deepen the poem's religious framing belong to the same years as these political loyalties.

D. Outcome of the Case Study

Taken together, the three prose works show a clear progression: from universal rights in 1793, through historically grounded national liberty in 1809, to the defence of established property and rank in 1818.

The 1805 *Prelude* stands nearest to the middle stage, while the 1850 revisions match the final one. Hypothesis H2 is therefore confirmed. The changes in the poem run parallel to the poet's public political writings, and the revisions may properly be treated as political evidence.

VIII. DISCUSSION: APOSTASY OR RE-FOUNDING?

To accuse Wordsworth of apostasy is to say that he gave up his principles for personal gain. The evidence examined in this study points to a more complicated reality. At least three features of his political thinking remain clearly recognisable on both sides of his change of loyalty.

The first feature is his concern for moral independence. As a young man Wordsworth welcomed the Revolution because it seemed to promise ordinary people release from humiliating dependence. As an old man he defended the "statesmen," the small hereditary farmers of the Lake District, on very similar grounds, and he criticised the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 as an attack on the self-respect of the poor. What altered was his view of which institutions could best protect such independence: at first a republic built on reason, later a traditional society grounded in property, place and religion.

The second feature is his belief that feeling and experience must take precedence over theory. When Wordsworth rejected Godwin, he rejected the effort to base morality on abstract calculation. That position, which ranks custom, affection and lived experience above deductive reasoning, is the very foundation of Burkean conservatism. Having accepted it, Wordsworth arrived at Burkean politics by a kind of internal logic. Seen in this way, his conservatism did not betray his poetic principles so much as carry them into the field of politics.

The third feature is his devotion to the small community. The village, the shepherd's household and the tie between people and their surroundings recur throughout his work, from "Michael" (1800) to the *Guide to the Lakes*. In the 1790s this devotion could fuel a radical attack on commercial society; by the 1830s it could support conservative resistance to industrial and political change.

In the language of political theory, Wordsworth moved from a rationalist and universal idea of liberty to a historical and community-based one. Karl Mannheim's analysis of conservatism [15] helps here. Mannheim argued that conservative thought becomes conscious of itself only when the traditional way of life it takes for granted comes under threat. Wordsworth's conservatism grew explicit and articulate at exactly the time when reform and industrialisation endangered the society he cherished.

The revisions to *The Prelude*, and the tribute to Burke above all, mark the point at which this unspoken conservatism became aware of itself and acquired a name.

None of this cancels the genuine costs of the change. By opposing Catholic emancipation and the widening of the franchise, the later Wordsworth set himself against the main movement of democratic advance, and the New Historicists are correct that his poetry sometimes exchanges historical conflict for a soothing vision of nature and the mind. Nevertheless, treating the change as the re-founding of enduring values on new ground accounts for more of the evidence than the bare charge of betrayal.

VIII. MAJOR FINDINGS

- The comparison of the 1805 and 1850 versions reveals a steady shift in political language away from abstract rationalism and toward tradition, religious faith and inherited institutions (H1 confirmed).
- The single clearest sign of this shift is the tribute to Burke added to Book VII of the 1850 version, which has no equivalent in 1805.
- Even in 1850 Wordsworth preserved both the memory of revolutionary joy ("Bliss was it in that dawn") and the humanitarian roots of his early republicanism (the Beaupuy episode), choosing to reframe his radical past rather than delete it.
- The development of his political prose between 1793 and 1818 runs in the same direction as the revisions of the poem, which justifies reading those revisions as political evidence (H2 confirmed).
- His enduring concern with moral independence, his preference for experience over theory, and his attachment to small communities support the view that his development was a re-founding rather than a simple reversal (H3 confirmed, with qualifications).

IX. CONCLUSION

The Prelude holds a special place in the history of political thought, for it is an autobiography of political conversion that its author wrote twice. The 1805 version tells the story of revolution and disillusionment from the standpoint of a man who had abandoned rationalist radicalism but had not yet embraced an explicit conservatism. The 1850 version, the product of many years of revision, tells the same story from the standpoint of a Burkean Tory and a member of the Church of England, who confesses his youthful mistakes, names his new guide, and sets the entire narrative within a providential design.

Comparing the two versions shows that revising a literary work can itself be a political act. In reshaping the account of his early life, Wordsworth was doing more than polishing his style; he was presenting a model of how a sound political mind ought to mature, moving from generous but misguided enthusiasm to a settled respect for tradition. Yet by keeping the great passages of revolutionary hope, he left inside the poem the very evidence of what he had given up, so that the 1850 *Prelude* still carries a voice that quarrels with its own conclusions.

For political scientists, Wordsworth's case shows that political conversion frequently rearranges lasting values instead of discarding them, and that the failure of a revolution can give birth to conservative thought from inside the radical tradition. For literary scholars, it shows that a text's political meaning may be found as much in its revisions as in its final shape. For both, *The Prelude* remains an essential witness to the meeting between the individual imagination and the great political upheaval with which the modern age began.

XI. FUTURE PROJECTION AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- Computer-assisted analysis of the vocabulary of the 1805 and 1850 versions could measure changes in political and religious language and test the qualitative conclusions reached here.
- A comparative study of political conversion among Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey would show how far Wordsworth's path was typical of his generation.
- Wordsworth's defence of the independent smallholder could be related to present-day debates on agrarian distress, land rights and rural communities, including those in India, opening a field for interdisciplinary work in political ecology.
- The Convention of Cintra could be read alongside later theories of nationalism, including Indian anti-colonial nationalism, as an early argument for liberty grounded in national history and culture.
- Indian universities, where Wordsworth is taught mainly as a nature poet, could introduce the political Wordsworth into courses on literature and political thought, encouraging interdisciplinary teaching and research.

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International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 09, September 2026)

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