WORDSWORTH'S *PRELUDE*, THE ETERNAL CHILD, AND THE DIALECTICS OF BILDUNG

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[ABSTRACT]

Franco Moretti argues that inherent in the *Bildungsroman* is a tension between youth as an energetic emblem of modernity and change, and adulthood, which signifies stoppage, stasis, and finality. However, Wordsworth's *Prelude* complicates this binary, as the Romantic resistance to the adult order renders childhood and youth a dialectical image of rebellion, stasis, and finality. *The Prelude* has been read as a formation narrative that influenced the English *Bildungsroman,* yet Wordsworth's representation of childhood within a frozen temporality indicates how the *Prelude's* telos of progress and growth becomes a conflicted matter. The dialectic of growth that informs the work subverts the linearity of the story of development and at the same time produces anxiety about the difficulty to grow up. The *topos* of the child who does not grow up captures the inherent ambiguity surrounding the *Bildung* ideal, while the morbidity associated with this *topos* reveals the dark side of the idealization of childhood.

KEYWORDS *William Wordsworth, The Prelude, Childhood, Growing up, Bildungsroman*

The *topos* of the child who lingers outside of time, in an eternal childhood, is one of the intriguing motifs in the work of William Wordsworth. The idea of a timeless childhood is part of the massive idealization of the childlike condition in English Romantic poetry. At the same time, the highly popular subgenre of the novel in nineteenth-century Britain, the *Bildungsroman*, which upheld an opposite ethos – one based on growth and maturation – can also be traced back to the influence of Wordsworth. It is mostly in Wordsworth's *Prelude, or, Growth of a Poet's Mind* in its various versions (the 1799 draft, the 1805 version, and the 1850 published edition) that we may observe some of the complexity regarding these clashing ideals and realize how, as of its inception, the concept of *Bildung* was fraught with inconsistencies.

Seemingly endorsing a rigid teleology favouring maturation, the formation narrative is intrinsically dialectical. While manifesting a deep interest in childhood, the *Bildungsroman*'s central generic prerequisite is that the childlike condition is merely a phase to be outgrown. Rather than prolonged childhood, mature

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socialization and the consolidation of a unified bourgeois subject represent the desirable fulfillment of the momentum of progress that the genre is designed to portray. As Franco Moretti argues, inherent in the *Bildungsroman* is a tension between the fascination with youth as an energetic emblem of modernity and change, and the striving toward a telos of adulthood, which signifies stoppage, stasis, and finality. Moretti claims that this tension, embedded in the genre, erupts more explicitly in later works that express some modernist discontent with the closure of the traditional *Bildungsroman*.[1]

Indeed, the collapse of *Bildung* assumptions since the end of the nineteenth century is evident. Modernist narratives of formation undermine traditional *Bildung*, sometimes by reverting to the *topos* of the child who does not grow up. Yet a close examination of the function of this *topos* in some of the first *Bildung* narratives reveals how early the subversion of the genre's professed assumptions was already at work. Furthermore, this *topos* complicates the youth/adulthood binary that Moretti offers, as it associates childhood, rather than adulthood, with stasis and finality. The figure of the child who does not grow up thus captures Wordsworth's ambiguity regarding the *Bildungsroman*'s telos of growth.

This essay argues that *The Prelude* is trapped between two opposing temporalities, one regressive and circular, the other linear and progressive. The speaker's dilemma about growing up – his wish to evade the active sphere of social life, and at the same time his guilt about this wish – is embodied in the *topos* of the eternal child. Wordsworth treats this figure dialectically; it is both appealing and sinister. The poem's drive toward *Bildung* and its commitment to a narrative of progression undermine Wordsworth's inveterate idealization of childhood and reveal his unease about the ethical, mental, and poetic deficiencies of the childlike position. This unease underlies the narrative of his growth.

An Anti-*Bildung* Trajectory

The narrative form of *Bildung* emerged in Germany and soon made an almost simultaneous appearance in England. However, *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's great autobiographical poem, which was the early major narrative of formation written in English, contained its own inversion. Like the first and formative *Bildungsroman*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796), but more conspicuously, Wordsworth's poem depicted growth not as linearly progressive but as an uncertain and equivocal dynamic. This intrinsic inconsistency is related to the contradictory concept of temporality and history in Romantic culture. On the one hand, as Gerald Bruns notes, the idea of growth was central for Romantic and Victorian writers, for whom categories of progress and development, which 'originated in the tradition of "organicism," with its explanatory metaphors of growth and decay', were dominant.[2] Works that depicted individual growth, like *Wilhelm Meister* and *The Prelude*, thus acquired a central cultural position.[3] On the other hand, the Romantics were inclined to adopt transcendental and timeless points of view toward history and to 'locate the ground of intelligibility in an or-

der beyond time . . . in a world of archetypes'.[4] This duality is fundamental to the *Bildungsroman*. Since Rousseau and through the writing of Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, Romantic writers admired the pre-social qualities of the child, its imagination, and moral innocence. Such idealization collided with the concept of *Bildung*, whose very telos was predicated on the discarding of childlike attributes in favour of the bourgeois order of practical adults.

Early readers of *The Prelude* defined it as a model *Bildung* text soon after its posthumous 1850 publication. Frederick Denison Maurice was probably the earliest critic to regard it this way. In an 1851 letter to Charles Kingsley he suggested that Wordsworth's poem was the clearest English expression 'of all that self-building process in which, according to their different schemes and principles, Byron, Goethe, Wordsworth, the Evangelicals … were all engaged', a process that Maurice saw as central to the spirit of the nineteenth century.[5] Later critics agree that *The Prelude* was a major influence on the English *Bildungsroman* and became part of the narrative tradition of autobiography. M. H. Abrams, for example, defines it as 'a fully developed poetic equivalent of two portentous innovations in prose fiction, of which the earliest examples had appeared in Germany only a decade or so before Wordsworth began writing his poem: the *Bildungsroman* . . . and the *Künstlerroman*'.[6] Cyrus Hamlin regards *The Prelude* as a *Bildungsroman*, part of the tradition of 'autobiography or self-confession, in which an individual narrates the history simultaneously of its development as self and of the development of its self-understanding'.[7] Jerome Buckley emphasizes *The Prelude*'s influence on the British *Bildungsroman* and argues that novelists borrowed its techniques, which inspired them to look for early experiences in order to understand the adult mind.[8]

Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, Thomas Carlyle's 1824 translation of Goethe's novel, was to become pivotal in the genesis of the Victorian *Bildungsroman*, alongside the influence of Wordsworth's great poem, written soon after Goethe's novel. The Wordsworthian focus on the childlike phase may have contributed to the English *Bildungsroman* (e.g. in novels by Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy) its particular attentiveness to the regrettable loss of the rich childlike perspective that maturation and socialization entail.

According to Charles Babenroth, *The Prelude* reveals how deliberately Wordsworth evolved a 'philosophy in which childhood is the fundamental consideration', and his use of the language of religion reflects 'the sacredness of childhood'.[9] Babenroth suggests that for Wordsworth, maturation spoils the child's intuitive, primitivist powers of natural morality and leads to a loss of the 'sense of unity' that in childhood is not yet 'disturbed by the interposition of reason'.[10] John Hiers challenges this assumption and the view that Wordsworth's vision rests in childhood, and argues that Babenroth ignores Wordsworth's belief in 'the vital functions of childhood in the visionary powers of the man' – a belief that parallels the German concept of *Bildung* as a mature fulfillment of the early potential of the child.[11] Childhood for Wordsworth, Hiers maintains, is 'largely

the first phase in the growth of the mind'.[12] The child's transcendental mind and imaginative powers 'allow [him or her] to rise above the objective world of nature [and] in turn provide the man with visions into the eternal beauties of life'.[13] My reading mediates between these two opposed interpretations of *The Prelude* by observing Wordsworth's inherent ambiguity about *Bildung* and growth.

Despite the famous antipathy between Goethe and Wordsworth, and the seeming lack of mutual influence between them, critics have traced intriguing parallels, most notably between *Faust* and *The Excursion*, *Faust* and *The Prelude*, as well as *Der Wandrer* and 'The Ruined Cottage'.[14] One similarity that has escaped notice, though, concerns the way in which both poets' *Bildung* narratives contain internal inversion, or an alternative telos, embodied in figures of children who do not grow up. It is mostly through Goethe's Mignon and Wordsworth's Boy of Winander, as well as several other child figures in *The Prelude*, that the two works express their resistance to the ethos of self-cultivation. This resistance reflects on the protagonist's career and on the central narrative of personal growth for which *The Prelude* and *Wilhelm Meister* are so famous.

The Boy of Winander shares several attributes with Goethe's Mignon. Neither of them matures biologically because of early death; but prior to that, they are both retained in the realm of pre-social relations due to their cognitive and psychological condition. Arrested growth seems to make their early death inevitable; they are incapable of entering the adult world.

In Book V of the *Prelude* Wordsworth writes:

> There was a boy – ye knew him well, ye cliffs
> And islands of Winander – many a time
> At evening, . . . would he stand alone
> Beneath the trees or by the glimmering lake,
> And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
> Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth
> Uplifted, he as through an instrument
> Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls
> That they might answer him. And they would shout
> Across the wat'ry vale, and shout again,
> Responsive to his call . . . And when it chanced
> That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,
> Then sometimes in that silence, while he hung
> Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
> Has carried far into his heart the voice
> Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
> Would enter unawares into his mind
> With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
> Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
> Into the bosom of the steady lake.
> This boy was taken from his mates, and died
> In childhood ere he was full ten years old (V. 389–415).[15]

Based on a draft written in 1798, during Wordsworth's sojourn in Germany, this passage describes a prototypical Wordsworthian child. Removed from human society, the Boy of Winander derives immense pleasure from his communion with nature's creatures. His mode of communication is not verbal; he speaks the language of owls so well that they mistake him for one of their own. Emblematically, this child has not entered the world of adult discourse. However, like his arrested social development and the premature termination of his biological growth, the 'hooting' relationship is soon checked, too. The Boy's 'shock of mild surprise' at the owls' silence is textually followed by his sudden death. Unable or unwilling to grow beyond the all-engulfing pre-verbal stage, yet not entirely embraced by the now-silent natural scene, the Boy cannot continue in any direction. Not just his death but also his very distance from the human realm makes him an incongruous element in the *Bildung* narrative; he cannot become part of the sequence of this poem of formation.

Nonetheless, it is intriguing that in the first draft the Boy was meant to be exactly that, i.e. an inseparable part of the autobiography, a stage in the poet's development. 'And they would shout / Across the wat'ry vale, and shout again, / Responsive to my call . . . / And when it chanced / That pauses of deep silence mocked my skill, / Then often in that silence, while I hung / Listening, a sudden shock of mild surprise / Would carry far into my heart the voice / Of mountain torrents'.[16]

We should consider the significance of Wordsworth's revision of this passage. The original first-person version had been an isolated fragment, disconnected from the 1799 draft, yet intended for insertion into the larger framework, as indeed it was by 1805. Wordsworth nevertheless rewrote the passage in the third person, with the noteworthy addition of the Boy's death. William Galperin argues that the Boy's affinity to the poet in the earlier draft, contrasted as he is to the Infant Prodigy of Book V, expresses a retrospective 'disaffection with *The Prelude* that his example now – its enlistment in the argument against education – curiously confirms'.[17] The Boy, in other words, is meant to embody a resistance to the progressive model of *Bildung* founded on education and socialization. No longer acknowledged as a version of Wordsworth himself in the 1805 and 1850 versions, the Boy is gradually distanced from the autobiographical speaker and serves as an 'other', a part of the poet that has to be displaced in order for the *Bildung* plot to proceed.[18]

Seemingly a minor character in *The Prelude*, the Boy is deeply important because he serves as the protagonist's double, one to whom *Bildung* is both impossible and unwelcome. Allowing the protagonist to displace his suppressed resistance to the coercion to grow up, this figure captures an implicit dialectic that lies at the heart of Wordsworth's construction of his formation narrative. This reading follows Kim Blank's claim that Wordsworth's 'inner child is arrested and lost', yet kept alive in the imagination as part of the poet's mature subjectivity.[19] In the 'Lucy' poems, Blank maintains, the child is 'a projection of Wordsworth

himself'.[20] The Boy of Winander, like Lucy according to Blank's reading, is a figure of 'the subjectivity of Wordsworth', an embodiment of his 'lost inner child'.[21]

Interrogating the Value of Growth

The Prelude's dialectical attitude to growth is strongly reflected in its representation of the French Revolution, a decisive event in the poet's development that is related to dilemmas surrounding issues of maturation. This theme evokes two interrelated questions that inform the following discussion. First, there is the question of the ambiguity surrounding the figurative 'age' attributes attached to the revolutionary dynamic: Wordsworth portrays the Revolution as a positive ideal of admirable youthfulness, while the Revolution's failure is analogous to the moral decline that accompanies maturation. Childhood and youth, then, are favoured over adulthood. Nevertheless, in depicting the events in France and explaining his apostasy, the speaker disparages his early adolescent naivety, praising the more astute political comprehension that comes with age and allows for a balanced handling of social reality.[22]

The second and no less important question concerns the centrality of the Revolution and its aftermath for the staging of the *Bildung* process in the poem. Various readings regard the shifting emotions of hope, thrill, and disappointment that surround the events in France as underlying Wordsworth's depiction of individual growth. Although it is a shaping event for the development of political, poetic, and moral sensibilities, the essay questions the overall control of the revolutionary events over the narrative. The *topos* of eternal childhood reveals the representation of universal rather than historic-specific aspects of childhood and maturation in *The Prelude*. The Revolution is part of Wordsworth's broader interrogation of these topics. Childhood and adulthood, and the conflict regarding the coercion to grow up, are indeed strongly influenced by the events of the 1790s, yet they serve as more than mere signifiers of his response to the political processes. The following analysis, then, although sometimes referring to the Revolution, regards the depiction of the speaker's growth in broader terms and follows Buckley's observation that Wordsworth describes his development as 'representative as well as idiosyncratic' and his 'I' may therefore 'speak for all humanity'.[23] Wordsworth's concern about the allegedly positive value of growing up has universal aspects related to psychological and ethical issues.

Although he is writing a formation narrative, Wordsworth rejects the most basic tenet of the *Bildungsroman* – the endorsement of growth, which he treats skeptically as part of his massive idealization of childhood. However, there is a double ambiguity at work here. Ambivalent as he is about the value of maturity, Wordsworth is also, somewhat surprisingly, divided about his admiration of childhood. His need to write a *Bildung* poem is not necessarily the result of his embracing of maturity, as much as it is the result of his realization that as appealing as the childlike state may be, its ongoing prolongation carries dangers. *The Prelude* depicts the childlike condition as charmingly naïve and harmonious, but

at certain moments it is also associated with personal and collective irresponsibility, solipsism, nihilism, and death.

The image that most powerfully captures Wordsworth's ambivalence about the value of prolonged childhood is that of the child who does not grow up. He separates the child-protagonist, who does grow up and must become a man, from other child figures who do not mature; onto these other figures is displaced the autobiographical subject's reluctance to grow up. The eternal child is thus the central dialectical image that reveals the poem's concern about arrested development. The trajectory ahead of Wordsworth's autobiographical subject leads him toward the social sphere that he has intuitively avoided in early life. He must gradually qualify his solipsistic attachment to the imagination, because as a mature man he should not go on talking to birds: in the world of practical adults such playfulness is a useless expression of the interiority that blocks one's productive, masculine, social activity.

According to Carolyn Steedman, a dominant feature of the understanding of the self in nineteenth-century culture and science was a perception of childhood, or the early phases of the organism's development, as lost. Steedman shows how in many fields of inquiry, e.g. physiology (especially cell theory), evolutionary biology, and developmental linguistics, 'childhood as scientifically described was always about that which was temporary and impermanent', and was always described as a lack felt in adult life. Steedman adds that Wordsworth had a particular influence on these 'profoundly romantic' scientific formulations.[24]

Articulating his awareness of this loss as part and parcel of his depiction of maturation, Wordsworth indeed produces a poem of growth that contains a repressed conflict. *The Prelude* gives expression to the ideal of formation, and at the same time evokes a timeless childhood that the speaker refuses to regard as lost. This latter aspect, prominent in Wordsworth's short lyrical poems, is more equivocal in this longer work. In numerous poems, from *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) onward, notably in 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' (1803–1806), Wordsworth depicts prelapsarian childhood as an epitome of emotional and aesthetic perfection, while envisioning maturation as a dismal fall from grace. To grow up is to witness, sadly, the passing away of 'glory from the earth' (l. 18), a loss that occurs as soon as the '[s]hades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing Boy' (ll. 65–69). The youth then learns to 'fit his tongue / To dialogues of business, love, or strife . . . / As if his whole vocation / Were endless imitation' (ll. 98–108). The earlier 'My Heart Leaps Up' (1802) – whose famous seventh line, 'The Child is father of the Man', serves as motto to the 'Immortality Ode' – registers maturity and the loss of the childlike vision as worse than death. Praising his childhood's still-lasting freshness of sensibility, the speaker declares: 'So be it when I shall grow old, / Or let me die!' (ll. 5–6).[25] As Charles Babenroth claims, for Wordsworth, man should 'look back to childhood as the ideal state: to realize his highest hopes, man must become again a child'.[26]

In *The Prelude*, however, as in the Lucy poems, morbidity casts its shadow on the image of the eternal child. The sinister aspect of this *topos* is connected to

Wordsworth's ambivalence about the *Bildung* form of *The Prelude* and to the problem of retaining his idealization of childhood within a poem of growth. The decision to compose a formation narrative exposes the underside of eternal childhood; the dialectic that informs the work reveals Wordsworth's anxiety about the refusal to grow up. As much as adulthood is a contested condition, *The Prelude* shows continuous childhood to have its drawbacks, too. The insertion of the eternal child into a *Bildung* narrative leads Wordsworth to access the dark side of this *topos* more directly than in any of his shorter verse.

Despite the common view that *The Prelude* is a *Bildungsroman* in blank verse, there are readings that observe an opposed dynamic in the poem, resulting in an inconsistent temporal movement.[27] These readings focus on the ambivalence regarding the telos of adulthood, whereas my claim is that the ambiguity does not concern only the *Bildung* ideal but to no lesser degree the Romantic ideal of timeless childhood. In this respect, frozen or non-progressive temporality is also a source of anxiety in the poem.[28] This ambivalence produces a dual representation of temporality, which concerns the *topos* of childhood as much as that of adulthood.

Two Opposed Temporalities

The *Prelude*'s speaker asserts his wish to discuss 'the growth of mental power' (1799, l. 257). This is his major theme, as the subtitle 'Growth of a Poet's Mind' indicates. Nevertheless, the poem's preoccupation with temporality reveals some of the complexity involved in the attempt to construct a teleological narrative of development. Instead of linearity, the poem produces an inconsistent discourse of progress, repetition, and return. Both a *Bildung* and an anti-*Bildung* text, the entire *Prelude* in all its versions incorporates two opposed, yet interrelated, temporalities. One is descriptive of development and growth; the other is circular and reiterative, sometimes static, replete with child figures and lingering spots of time. The tension between these two temporalities is largely repressed, but when it surfaces it reflects ambivalence about the avowed aspiration to produce a mature protagonist who achieves social integration while relinquishing the solipsistic childlike state.

According to Scott Harshbarger, Wordsworth's condition in *The Prelude* is one of Neoteny. A term borrowed from developmental biology to depict psychological growth, Neoteny is a condition in which the subject retains juvenile traits in adulthood. This description may explain 'why the adult Wordsworth, in order to overcome a creative malaise . . . in the wake of the French Revolution, set about retrieving particular memories of his childhood'.[29] Out of this condition of Neoteny, mixed as it is with a narrative of growth and development, emerges a dialectical account of conformity and socialization on the one hand, individualism and imaginativeness on the other. This duality, which underlies *The Prelude*, is manifest in the treatment of the childhood-versus-adulthood theme.

In spite of the poem's chronological structure, the speaker keeps complaining

about its meandering and halted movement. Wishing to produce a progressive narrative, the speaker finds himself time and again drawn to timeless images of youthful scenes. Already at the outset the speaker is apologetic about dwelling so long on his childhood, and ends the First Book of the two-part *Prelude* with the following defence:

> I began
> My story early, feeling, as I fear,
> The weakness of a human love for days
> Disowned by memory . . .
> Meanwhile my hope has been that I might fetch
> Reproaches from my former years, whose power
> May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
> To honourable toil. Yet should it be
> That this is but an impotent desire –
> That I by such inquiry am not taught
> To understand myself, . . . – need I dread from thee
> Harsh judgements if I am so loth to quit
> Those recollected hours that have the charm
> Of visionary things, . . . that throw back our life
> And make our infancy a visible scene
> On which the sun is shining?
> (1799, I.442–64)

As befits a self-declared narrative of growth, the speaker adopts the utilitarian discourse of progress and productivity, harnessing the potential power of the early scenes to 'spur' him on, as he is 'in manhood now mature, / To honourable toil'. He formulates the connection between young age and maturity as one of stimulation, and feigns to disregard childhood's intrinsic value and merely use its creative energies for a successful adulthood.

Nevertheless, this surrender to the classic *Bildung* ideology – which sees childhood as a mere stage toward future development – is brief. The speaker soon maintains that even if this projected advantage is proven false and he fails to 'understand [him]self' through recovering childhood scenes, still there is much value in recapturing those 'recollected hours' whose 'charm / Of visionary things' he is 'so loth to quit'. For the speaker, 'our infancy [is] a visible scene / On which the sun is shining'. Concerned about the censure of Coleridge, the 'friend' he is addressing, he is worried that his readers might lose patience with his constant returns to childhood. This concern, however, also reflects an internal tension, because the poet genuinely aspires to produce a narrative of development toward responsible maturity. In the different versions of *The Prelude* produced over the years, Wordsworth gradually diminishes the emphasis on childhood.[30]

We may observe the process at work if we compare the same passage just quoted as it appears in the 1805 and 1850 versions. In 1799, Wordsworth offers

the inspiring vision of childhood more clearly and unequivocally than he does in later years: the sun of childhood, forever 'shining' in present progressive in the 1799 text, allows the past to live on in an eternal present, so that 'our infancy' can still be imagined in collective terms. This certainty is weaker in 1805, when Wordsworth adds one qualifying word: 'And *almost* make our infancy itself / A visible scene on which the sun is shining' (I.662–63, emphasis added). A further revision that appears in the 1850 version retains the word 'almost', yet replaces the formulation 'our infancy' with an emphatically distancing adjective: 'And almost make *remotest* infancy / A visible scene, on which the sun is shining' (I.635–36, emphasis added). Undermining the former resoluteness about the lingering quality of childhood, the two later versions increasingly adhere to the dictates of *Bildung*.

Wordsworth thus gradually tones down the presence of childhood and revises the reiterative and circular temporality of the 1799 descriptions into a more linear sequence. But in spite of this gesture, the triumph of the progressive mode is only partial. This is shown, for example, in the 'two consciousnesses' passage (II.27–33), an image that appears in all versions of *The Prelude* and depicts the speaker as split forever between the mature self of today and the childlike self that still has 'such self presence in [his] mind' (II.30). Another central metaphor that captures the poem's non-linear temporality is the famous 'spots of time' image, which had first appeared in 1799 and was expanded in 1805 (with minor alterations in 1850). Like the two consciousnesses, the spots of time metaphor suggests the contemporaneous quality of childhood and adulthood:

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> Which with distinct preeminence retain
> A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
> By false opinion and contentious thought,
> . . . our minds
> Are nourished and invisibly repaired —
> A virtue, . . . [t]hat . . . enables us to mount
> When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
> . . . Such moments . . .
> Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
> From our first childhood ... Life with me,
> As far as memory can look back, is full
> Of this beneficent influence.
> (XI.257–78)

The spatial allocation of these temporal 'spots' renders them timeless and unchanging instances of a lingering presence. Ann Rowland observes that Wordsworth 'makes childhood memory into a literary genre – the "spot of time" – lyrics embedded within the longer autobiographical narrative which repeatedly stage the interior life of the child as impressed upon and inhabited by exterior, material forms. The significant form of these memories persist and acquire a perma-

nence in the adult mind'.[31] Childlike subjectivity is an unending resource that overcomes external, transitory reality. The spatial imagery surrounding these spots, associated with heights, mounting, but also with falling (ll. 266–67), subverts the *Bildung* paradigm of maturation as a progressive ascent. But with their intermittent quality, the spots make a merely fragmentary appearance in the life of the adult; they thus capture the ongoing duality of *The Prelude*, whose speaker produces an account of his development while yearning for an arrested temporality.

Bespeaking a dialectical sense of growth, this inconsistent movement challenges the speaker in all versions of *The Prelude*. He thus voices a negative view of growth, and a resistance to the formation of social identity reminiscent of the shorter poems, when he expresses his desire to shake off 'the burthen of my own unnatural self' (I.23; 1850, I.22). It is not just the relative value of early years that he upholds, but what he perceives as childhood's timeless quality: 'Our childhood sits, / Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne / That hath more power than all the elements. / I guess not what this tells of being past, / Nor what it augurs of the life to come, / But so it is' (V.531–36; 1850, V.507–12). Written in the present tense, these lines convey not merely a sense of childhood as venerated, but as mysteriously permanent. Howver, almost in the same breath the speaker recognizes the importance of growth:

> But so it is; and in that dubious hour,
> That twilight when we first begin to see
> This dawning earth, to recognise, expect —
> And in the long probation that ensues,
> The time of trial ere we learn to live
> In reconcilement with our stinted powers,
> To endure this state of meager vassalage
> (V.536–42).

Here, the speaker endorses and undermines the conventions of *Bildung* at the same time. He adopts the view of childhood as preparation for adulthood, a time of 'probation' and 'trials', but his description suggests a downward rather than upward movement. The 'dubious hour' when our maturation begins is figuratively associated with 'twilight'; to grow up is to become reconciled to 'our stinted powers' and to the need to endure our 'meager vassalage'.

A significant moment of self-doubt about his ability to leave childhood behind occurs again at an advanced stage, in Book IX, as the speaker is still dissatisfied with his lack of progress in telling his life story. He declares that it is now due – if not overdue – to proceed more decisively, thereby betraying his reluctance to do so. The opening lines of Book IX in the 1805 *Prelude* invoke a river metaphor, to which is added a traveller in the 1832 revision (as appears in the 1850 text), both providing images of turning back when one should be moving forward:

Even as a river, — partly (it might seem)
Yielding to old remembrances, and swayed
In part by fear to shape a way direct,
That would engulph him soon in the ravenous sea—
Turns, and will measure back his course, far back,
Seeking the very regions which he crossed
In his first outset; so have we, my Friend!
Turned and returned with intricate delay.
Or as a traveller, who has gained the brow
Of some aerial Down, while there he halts
For breathing-time, is tempted to review
The region left behind him; and, if aught
Deserving notice have escaped regard,
Or been regarded with too careless eye,
Strives, from that height, with one and yet one more
Last look, to make the best amends he may:
So have we lingered.
(1850, IX.1–17)

The 'ravenous sea' of line 4, toward which the river is afraid to proceed (a 'devouring sea' in the 1805 *Prelude*), echoes the snow storm that came on 'before its time' and killed the young defenceless Lucy Gray, who was not ready yet to face the adult world.[32] The stormy sea represents the threatening phase of adulthood; the later addition of the traveller, though illustrating the same pattern of return, somewhat softens the anxiety of the earlier simile. Unlike the river, the traveller does not feel threatened by the coercion to continue; he merely regrets to leave behind all the precious spots he has seen on his way, and wants to cast another look. This is another example of the increasing distance from childhood and diminishing resistance to *Bildung* in the 1850 version. But the attachment to childhood remains part of the complex poetics of temporality even in the final version.

This imagery is expressive of Wordsworth's concept of progress as accompanied by retreats and withdrawals. In 1809, writing for Coleridge's periodical *The Friend* under the section 'Advice to the Young', Wordsworth contends with the notion of progress as exclusively linear by using a river metaphor. He argues there that the progress of the species neither is nor can be like that of a Roman road in a right line. It may be more justly compared to that of a river, which . . . is frequently forced back towards its fountains by objects which cannot otherwise be eluded or overcome; yet with an accompanying impulse that will insure its advancement hereafter, it is either gaining strength every hour, or conquering in secret some difficulty, by a labor that contributes as effectually to further it in its course, as when it moves forward uninterrupted in a line, direct as that of the Roman road with which I began the comparison.[33]

In this passage, the river's halted progress and frequent retreats are merely strategic, ensuring 'its advancement hereafter'; no fear of moving forward is ex-

pressed. But in 1805, growing up is still considered threatening, as the devouring sea metaphor indicates. The poet's apprehension that the poem lacks direction concerns not merely the structure of representation but also the quality of the represented, i.e. autobiographical growth itself. The anxious wish to complete a *Bildung* plot is biographical and emotional as much as it is poetic.

Alan Liu associates the river imagery in Book IX with the Revolution, suggesting that the river represents the revolutionary self, while the devouring sea signifies the violence of the Terror. This interpretation equates the speaker's loss of childlike innocence with the failure of the Revolution.[34] *The Prelude* indeed records the shock that the speaker's early resistance to social injustice suffered as a result of the Revolution's failure to bring justice and fraternity; in many respects, the brutal aftermath had been the source of the crisis that was the starting point of the poem. As a result, Liu argues, Wordsworth's younger self experiences a 'perpetual confusion about the *kind* of thing the Revolution is and the kind of language appropriate to describe it'; the protagonist lacks the ability to understand the overwhelming, vertiginous revolutionary events.[35] My reading of the river-and-sea metaphor complements this interpretation by recognizing a similar signified – an anxiety about growing up – embedded in these lines, nonetheless the signification here seems broader than the shock caused by the Revolution. A shaping event in Wordsworth's life and a major theme in *The Prelude*, the Revolution is nevertheless not the exclusive parameter of maturation. The autobiographical speaker's conflicted construction of this process also bears universal implications. The wish not to grow up, implicitly hovering over the river-sea image and occasionally resurfacing in *The Prelude*, involves the fantasy of not having to witness the Revolution's violent aftermath, yet bespeaks a broader desire to preserve one's invaluable childlike sensibility regardless of specific histories, private or collective.

This desire is manifest in the underlying question of *The Prelude*, 'Was it for this' (I.274; 1850, I.269), which served as the original opening line of the 1799 version. This question, too, is tied up to river imagery ('Was it for this, / That one, the fairest of all rivers, lov'd / To blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song . . .', 1–3). It voices a crisis that the act of composing *The Prelude* was meant to solve. However, the question with the belittling label, 'for this' that sums up succinctly the achievements of maturation, challenges the very telos of *Bildung* that seems to motivate the poem. The elaborate answers offered invest the process of growth with much value, but the question itself remains a permanent source of anxiety. Was it 'for this'? Was it worth it to give up the splendid world of childhood for this, our anticlimactic adult life? Should I, the speaker-poet, or any of us, have consented to grow up? Could I, or any of us, have avoided it? This doubt reflects an existential sense of anti-climax that surrounds the present. In 'The Internalization of Quest-Romance', Harold Bloom suggests that *The Prelude* roughly follows a chronology of the poet's life 'down to the middle of the journey, where it . . . leaves him in a state of preparation for a further greatness that never came'.[36] Bloom identifies in Wordsworth and in other Romantic poets a reluctance to

abandon 'the child's vision of a more titanic universe' and a clinging to an immature Promethean stage that is expressed in a rebellious attitude to social injustice and repression.[37] As the Romantic quest continues, it leads the poet away from the crises of revolutionary activism and directs him back toward 'the self and its ambiguities',ever prepared for a greatness that never comes.[38]

The retreat toward the self is to some degree equivocal, and the belated clinging to the immature phase carries misgivings. Bloom, Liu, and others identify the childlike self in Wordsworth with the prerevolutionary innocent condition, and point out the retrospective yearning to outdo the violent revolutionary aftermath. Wordsworth indeed expresses a desire to regress to the childlike condition. But it is partly in its preoccupation with the Revolution that *The Prelude* also conveys the dangers of the naïve position and adopts some of the tenets of the *Bildungsroman*, not so much out of admiration for growth, but because of an implicit recognition of the threatening quality of a lingering childlike condition. The dark side of the coveted childlike ideal is suggested most strongly in Book VII, where the depiction of two child figures introduces the familiar notion of growing up as a fall, yet the enviable ability to evade maturation is staged as morbidly sinister.

The Ambiguous Blessing of Arrested Growth

The first child that the speaker recalls in Book VII will never grow up because it died as a newborn. The mother is Mary of Buttermere (Mary Robinson, Wordsworth's childhood friend), whose baby 'sleeps in earth . . . fearless as a lamb / That thither comes from some unsheltered place / To rest beneath the little rock-like pile / When storms are blowing. Happy are they both, / Mother and child!' (VII.355–60). The storms, 'blowing' above the child's grave in the 1805 version, are still 'raging' there in 1850 (VII.328). They echo the storm in 'Lucy Gray' and anticipate the river and devouring sea metaphor of Book IX discussed above. Once again, the storm signifies the risks and instability of adult life. Sparing Mary's little child the turbulence of mature existence, early death is considered a blessing. The speaker regards the little grave as a cozy shelter, and somewhat jarringly declares both deceased infant and bereaved mother 'happy' – for they must be happy that the infant has achieved eternal childhood. This premature death, with the pastoral little grave that visually renders it a repeated presence, brings to mind the Boy of Winander, who, having 'died / In childhood' now rests in the churchyard that 'hangs / Upon a slope above the village school', on a green hill amid the fair woods, a spot that the speaker is fond of (V.415–19).

The feelings aroused by the dead infant in Book VII remind the speaker of yet another mother-child pair he has seen in London. The depiction of this pair again brings to the surface the fantasy of preserved childhood:

I am crossed
Here by remembrance of two figures: one
A rosy babe, who for a twelvemonth's space
Perhaps had been of age to deal about
Articulate prattle, child as beautiful
As ever sate upon a mother's knee;
The other was the parent of that babe—
But on the mother's cheek the tints were false,
A painted bloom. 'Twas at a theatre
That I beheld this pair; the boy had been
The pride and pleasure of all lookers-on
In whatsoever place, but seemed in this
A sort of alien scattered from the clouds.

. . . I behold
The lovely boy as I beheld him then,
Among the wretched and the falsely gay,
Like one of those who walked with hair unsinged
Amid the fiery furnace. He hath since
Appeared to me ofttimes as if embalmed
By Nature – through some special privilege
Stopped at the growth he had – destined to live,
To be, to have been, come, and go, a child
And nothing more, no partner in the years
That bear us forward to distress and guilt,
Pain and abasement.
(VII.347–406)

Not just the purport, but the location of the passage is important. Forming a rather lengthy digression, these lines interrupt the main narrative of *The Prelude* just when the speaker was about to pursue a linear path of progression, having declared that he was heading, at last, toward the story of his mature development. As soon as he states this intention, he again abandons the growing-up plot and indulges in this memory of a 'rosy babe' who becomes the epitome of the childlike. Fresh childhood serves here not merely as a contrast to the fallen, false state of adulthood but also – given the structural position of the passage – as an alternative plot that has an irresistible power over the speaker, diverting him from the *Bildung* narrative and potentially thwarting its telos. The child signifies incorruptible purity; his 'hair unsinged / Amid the fiery furnace' of vulgar adults, he embodies a self that is immune to any change that may be effected through experience. The false tints, curses, and corrupt behaviour of the adults cannot touch him; the child becomes an emblem of isolation, enclosed in a hermetic shelter that protects him from the contamination of social interaction. This vision of a child untouched by experience is stretched into the future, as the speak-

er fantasizes that this child may be blessed by nature to have its growth stopped and forever remain 'a child, and nothing more'.

To remain a child and nothing more is 'some special privilege' (I.401). The parallel passage in the 1850 *Prelude* revises this fantasy into an outright prayer that the little one may be allowed to remain a child:

> Charms and spells
> Muttered on black and spiteful instigation
> Have stopped, as some believe, the kindliest growths;
> Ah, with how different spirit might a prayer
> Have been preferred, that this fair creature, checked
> By special privilege of Nature's love,
> Should in his childhood be detained for ever!
> But with its universal freight the tide
> Hath rolled along, and this bright innocent,
> Mary! May now have lived till he could look
> With envy on thy nameless babe that sleeps,
> Beside the mountain chapel, undisturbed.
> (1850, VII.370–81)

The lovely child, surrounded as it is by 'the wretched and the falsely gay', must be allowed to retain its purity. And thus, merged with Mary's 'sleeping' infant, the speaker implicitly wishes him dead, too, so that he may be peacefully sheltered from the 'universal freight [of] the tide' that rolls along. Infant death is better than experiencing the fall into adult life.

As the urge to write a *Bildung* poem testifies, however, this yearning for eternal childhood is conflicted. Beyond the dreamy vision of a-temporality, it is clear that the refusal to grow up carries some disturbing implications. On both the subjective and the social level, the eternal-childhood track is haunted by morbid possibilities, as shown in the desire for premature death that surrounds the child figures of Book VII and projects backwards onto the Boy of Winander. That he is somewhat aware of these darker possibilities is suggested by the speaker's praeterition in the 1850 passage, when he mentions by way of contrast those 'charms and spells' that are 'muttered on black and spiteful instigation' in order to stop 'the kindliest growths'. By this he betrays his realization that a child's early death is more a curse than a blessing.

The image of Mary Robinson's buried infant, happily sheltered from an unsafe maturity, brings together the topoi of the dead child in nature (as used, for instance, in the Boy of Winander episode and in 'Lucy Gray') and of the eternal child. The two are blended into one image that the speaker insists is a blessed one. The admirable little child from London, whose memory serves the poet as an emblem of his own resistance to maturity, extends the image of the Boy of Winander and further reveals the morbidity of this figure. In both Book VII and Book V, as also in 'Lucy Gray', Wordsworth depicts the child's residing in a differ-

ent temporality as a charming yet trapped state, a *cul-de-sac*, a return to non-being. These children operate as poetic images of petrified innocence that must be left behind in order for the narrative of development to continue. As with the demise of Goethe's Mignon – the girl who, like the Boy of Winander, cannot grow up – the death of the child is a figurative expression of the protagonist's attempt to deal with his inability to undergo a healthy separation from his own childhood. Ongoing childhood thus becomes both a celebrated and sinister matter, and the longing for it – or the fantasy of freezing temporal progression – is represented as a self-destructive impulse. In Wordsworth, the child who dies always seems to return to nature, and is mythologized as rolling round in earth's diurnal course, or scampering over the hills, never looking behind. It thus does not depart, but remains in and around the world of the living as an unfulfilled alternative.

Ultimately, the refusal to grow up signifies a death wish; it is articulated, however, as potentially harmful not only on the individual but also on the social level. This is revealed in the speaker's dejection and apathy described at the outset. A major example of the construction of the childlike condition as inadequate for a meaningful social life is Wordsworth's censure of his own youthful political naivety. As part of his conflicted attitude to the major historical event around which he spins the second half of *The Prelude* – the Revolution – his identification of youth with political simplicity complicates the poem's largely idealizing representation of the childlike. Describing his 1790 European excursion, he refers to his then-limited political understanding in belittling terms: 'A stripling, scarcely of the household then / Of social life, I looked upon these things / As from a distance' (VI.693–95). No longer regarded as a position of intuitive moral sensibility, the 'stripling' label renders young age a state of lesser comprehension, lesser social responsibility, and lesser moral judgment. Rather than admirable, the youth's naivety amounts to incompetence, detachment, and political insignificance. Here, as at various other points in the poem, Wordsworth embraces the view of the *Bildungsroman* that growth means the desirable acquisition of greater moral sensibilities and the acceptance of social responsibilities.

Wordsworth surrounds his depiction of the Revolution with inconsistent statements about the childlike. Comparing the spirit of Revolution to youth's natural impulses, which unwisely dethrone 'habit, custom, law' as no-longer trusty guides in political matters (X.613), Wordsworth goes on to mock his own naïve simplicity back then and refers to his youthful zeal as those 'juvenile errors [that] are my theme' (X.641). Intriguingly, he connects childhood not just with ideas of liberation and justice but also with their opposite, likening the Terror to child's play in Book X (335–45). Richard Gravil argues that 'Wordsworth's aim is to show how a youthful mind can be betrayed by its idealism into complicity with atrocious guilts' like those that formed the aftermath of the Revolution.[39] As Ann Rowland observes, Wordsworth identifies here innocence with a violence that does not know what it does, for example in children's tendency to destroy things, and declares that violence may take on shades of innocence, and innocence take on shades of violence.[40] This is one additional indication that Wordsworth's crav-

ing for a permanent childlike state is qualified. Not only does the fantasy of eternal childhood contain morbid elements, it is also to be doubted whether the pre-social, intuitive capabilities of the child (or the immature individual) can be trusted as expressions of sound morality. Eugene Stelzig argues that *The Prelude* is somewhat ambivalent at certain points 'about the nature of human nature'.[41] Indeed, if innocence can be destructive and children might be unknowingly cruel, then human nature needs refinement and improvement. This is the underlying assumption of the *Bildungsroman* and its major teleology.

Following the violent aftermath of the Revolution, Wordsworth retreats back to the self, signalling a break from the adult, sociopolitical realm. Escaping towards his earlier, pre-revolutionary self, he reasserts once again the purity of the apolitical childlike condition. Signifying adult detachment, however, the regression to childlike simplicity is a solipsistic, active evasion of the social. In this context it is useful to cite John Rieder's reading of the word 'this', in the famous 'Was it for this' question, as referring to Wordsworth's anxiety of indolence, a term that denotes social passivity: ' "This" is being a poet – someone gifted with a special constitution, peculiarly attuned to the essential passions which bind together mankind, and yet, seemingly by virtue of the same gift, doomed to be irresponsible, a wanderer, unable to form a rational plan and carry it through to the end'.[42] Such passivity and irresponsibility are associated not only with the role of the poet, but also with the childlike position.

Judith Plotz argues that as part of its idealization, the Romantic child has come to serve 'as a buffer against the vicissitudes of the public sphere. By *growing down*, the adult can insulate himself as a child self from the shocks of history'.[43] Indeed, the post-revolutionary, mature self that *The Prelude*'s speaker becomes evokes the childlike self that was associated with nature, rural simplicity, interiority, and the imagination. In Book I, the dejected speaker is describing the crisis that leads to the poem's composition and complains about his aimless life, drifting from day to day in 'mockery of the brotherhood / Of vice and virtue', his humility and awe to act 'serving often for a cloak / To a more subtle selfishness, that . . . lock[s] my functions up in blank reserve' (I.239–48); he longs to 'stray about / Voluptuously through fields and rural walks / And ask no record of the hours given up / To vacant musing, unreproved neglect / Of all things, and deliberate holiday' (I.254–58). The speaker regresses to a secluded self with no sense of social obligation; prolonged childhood thus amounts to a powerless, irresponsible position. As much as this retreat signifies a death-wish – as demonstrated by the admirable child of Book VII, who should have died rather than fall into adulthood – it is also damagingly self-centred on a social and ethical level. Seeing that there is still 'Much wanting – so much wanting – in myself / That I recoil and droop, and seek repose / In indolence from vain perplexity, / Unprofitably travelling toward the grave, / Like a false steward who hath much received / And renders nothing back' (I.267–73), Wordsworth's discontented autobiographical voice delineates the movement back from the devouring sea of adulthood as selfishly unprofitable. While flowing back toward the clear water of childlike simplicity, the river

cannot forget what it already knows. The speaker is thus uneasy, split between his desire for passive innocence and the guilty realization that psychologically and morally, he cannot and should not sojourn in childhood forever. This split is a major motivation for formulating his story of development.

Sacrificing the child

The child has to die, then, but not only in order to preserve its precious, unchanging innocence. It is also required that the *Bildung* protagonist leave this figure behind. The *topos* of the dead child signifies both a refusal to grow up – showing us a child who never does – as well as its opposite, the speaker's separation from the eternal child that haunts him in order to move onward to adult life.

This is no easy separation, but Wordsworth's speaker enacts it. The admirable little child of Book VII, who hopefully did not have to grow up, appears just when the speaker's story of maturation reaches a crucial phase. Blessing this baby with an early death, the speaker attempts to freeze time and enact a fantasy of arrested growth, while separating himself from this childlike being. This and other child figures may haunt him at times; but, lying coffined in the ground, they are held back in order for the *Bildung* process to take place.

That much has to be sacrificed in order for the protagonist to grow up is evident in the staging of the child's death. The preoccupation with the markers of this death signals the ongoing difficulty to move on. In Book V, the speaker repeatedly lingers mute by the Boy of Winander's grave, a spot to which he becomes strongly attached, commenting that 'pre-eminent in beauty is the vale / Where he was born and bred', and where he is also buried:

> Fair are the woods, and beauteous is the spot,
> The vale where he was born; the churchyard hangs
> Upon a slope above the village school,
> And there, along that bank, when I have passed
> At evening, I believe that oftentimes
> A full half-hour together I have stood
> Mute, looking at the grave in which he lies.
> Even now methinks I have before my sight
> That self-same village church: I see her sit . . .
> On her green hill, forgetful of this boy
> Who slumbers at her feet, . . .
> And listening only to the gladsome sounds
> That, from the rural school ascending, play
> Beneath her and about her.
> (V.417–32)

This description is echoed in Book VII, where the speaker once again expresses his attachment to a child's burial ground. Once more, he envisions the site as a safe haven. In Book V, however, the quiet grave is contrasted to the 'gladsome sounds' heard 'from the rural school ascending'. The children at play, with their lively sounds, are mere background to the encounter between the 'mute' speaker and his buried, no longer hooting, likewise mute, inner child. The gladsome sounds of the living signify a separation from the frozen figure of the solitary autobiographical child in favour of life, continuation, and socialization. The school, though typically not part of Wordsworth's idealized childhood imagery because perceived as inimical to childlike bliss, serves here as a source of gladness. This positive imagery associates childhood with companionship and social institutions – traditional features of a *Bildung* plot – and not with a solipsistic withdrawal to the interiority. There is, then, a consoling alternative to the refusal to grow up.

The death of a child, a recurring motif in Wordsworth, symbolically bespeaks the poet's thwarted and ever incomplete separation from childhood.[44] Sacrificing the figure that represents the refusal to grow up, Wordsworth kills off the inner child on the verge of adolescence. Dying at ten in the 1805 *Prelude*, the Boy of Winander reaches 12 in the 1850 version. Passing away at this age, he terminates his career as the protagonist's double whose arrested growth would have interfered with the telos of growth. James Holt McGavran states that in the demise of the Boy of Winander, the adult poet – the man – 'commits a sort of inner suicide, killing the boy he once was by writing him out of the text'.[45] But the ambiguity remains, and the eliminated children of Books V and VII maintain a haunting presence. Like the dead Lucy Gray, each of them, poetically speaking, is still 'a living child' ('Lucy Gray', l. 58), only mildly differentiated from the adult speaker.[46]

The need to provide a positive closure leads *Bildung* narratives toward their own negation. According to Moretti's analysis, there is a contradiction at the heart of the *Bildungsroman* between the ideal of restless youth and the achievement of stable maturity at the end. The protagonist, who initially interrogates social conventions and inborn identities, gives up this apparent freedom and integrates into the existing social order. Both individual life and historical processes are thus made to stop at a harmonious, a-historical point, where all problems are seemingly solved. But childhood and youth do not exclusively serve as markers of constant movement and search, as Moretti contends. The child/adult binary is complicated by the representation of a childhood that does not lead to maturation but rather stands for arrested movement and frozen temporality. That is why both Goethe's and Wordsworth's *Bildung* protagonists undergo a splitting of their childlike and youthful qualities from their maturing selves. The internal conflict between these two states – the childlike and the mature – is displaced onto the loss of a dead child, who is separated from the protagonist in order to preserve the refusal to grow up as mere suggestion, an alluring and at the same time sinister possibility that cannot be realized.

Notes

1 Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000), 5–10.

2 Gerlad Bruns, 'The Formal Nature of Victorian Thinking', *PMLA* 90, no. 5 (1975): 904–18, quotation on 905, doi: 10.2307/461475.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Quoted in *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, H. M. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1980), 560.

6 M. H. Abrams, 'The Design of *The Prelude*: Wordsworth's Long Journey Home', in *The Prelude*, ed. Wordsworth, Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1980), 585–98, quotation on 586.

7 Cyrus Hamlin, 'The Conscience of Narrative: Toward a Hermeneutics of Transcendence', *New Literary History* 13, no. 2 (Winter 1982): 205–30, quotation on 206, doi: 10.2307/468910. For a similar interpretation see also Peter Thorslev, 'Romanticism and the Literary Consciousness', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36, no.3 (1975): 563–72, doi: 10.2307/2708665.

8 Jerome Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 8.

9 Charles Babenroth, *English Childhood: Wordsworth's Treatment of Childhood in the Light of English Poetry from Prior to Crabbe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), 383.

10 Babenroth, *English Childhood*, 314.

11 John T. Hiers, 'Wordsworth's Vision of Childhood: A Call for Reexamination', *South Atlantic Bulletin* 34, no. 3 (1969): 8–10, quotation on 8. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3196709

12 Hiers, 'Wordsworth's Vision of Childhood', 9.

13 Ibid., 10.

14 This antipathy is shown in Wordsworth's view, expressed in a conversation, that Goethe was 'overrated' and 'a very artificial writer'. See Max Herzberg, 'William Wordsworth and German Literature', *PMLA* 40, no. 2 (1925): 302–45, quotation on 326, doi: 10.2307/457226. Goethe on his part 'avoided any acquaintance with Wordsworth, in spite of several attempts by a number of English visitors to act as intermediaries'. Rudolf Dirk Schier, 'The Experience of the Noumenal in Goethe and Wordsworth', *Comparative Literature* 25, no. 1 (1973): 37–59, quotation on 37, doi: 10.2307/1769768. On possible analogues and influence, see Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity: A Critical Study of Wordsworth's 'Ruined Cottage'* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 3, 92, 104–107, 261–263. He establishes Goethe's *Der Wandrer* as a specific source of *The Ruined Cottage*. Schier compares the crossing of the Alps scene in *The Prelude* to the first monologue in *Faust II*, stating that 'comparable similarities can be shown to underlie the [two] entire poetic works' (39). Otto Heller, in 'Goethe and Wordsworth', *Modern Language Notes* 14, no. 5 (1899): 131–33, traces parallels between *Faust* and *The Excursion*, maintaining that 'Goethe's and Wordsworth's thoughts . . . frequently flow[ed] in the same channel' (133).

15 Unless otherwise specified, all *Prelude* quotations are from Wordsworth's 1805 version in *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, H. M. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1980).

16 The passage was originally composed as part of the October 1798 manuscript drafts written for the 1799 *Prelude* (see Wordsworth et al. [1980]: 172n6 and 492, Appendix 1[d]).

17 William Galperin, 'Authority and Deconstruction in Book V of *The Prelude*', *SEL, 1500–1900* 26, no.4 (Autumn 1986): 613–31, quotation on 624.

18 According to Galperin, the Infant Prodigy and the Boy of Winander 'contest in different ways *The Prelude*'s progressive notion of growth, each by showing the extent to which progress in the poem, to avoid contradiction, is more accurately arrested development' (625).

19 G. Kim Blank, *Wordsworth and Feeling: The Poetry of an Adult Child* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1995), 170.

20 Blank, *Wordsworth and Feeling*, 155.

21 Ibid., 152, 157.

22 In his discussion of Wordsworth's apostasy, Nicholas Roe maintains that according to Book X of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's fear of the Terror was nurtured by association with a formative childhood trauma involving death and self-reproach: the loss of his father. The movement from 'enflamed' expectation to guilty self-implication in Book X is essentially the sequence of the spot in the 1799 two-part *Prelude*, which recalls how the schoolboy's 'anxiety of hope' succeeded by his father's death led to a sense of 'chastisement' for bringing the sorrowful event about. Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: the Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 74–5.

23 Buckley, *Season of Youth*, 6, 7.

24 Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 10.

25 The quotations are from William Wordsworth, *The Poems*, ed. John O. Hayden (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1981.

26 Babenroth, *English Childhood*, 378.

27 Paul Sheats detects an inconsistent movement in the poem, which counters its progress through retrogression; see 'Wordsworth's "Retrogrades" and the Shaping of *The Prelude*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 71 (1972): 473–90, quotation on 473–75. Galperin suspects the integrity of *The Prelude* and the 'structure it imposes on the poet's life', which calls into question 'the very nature of *The Prelude*'s progress' and contests the poem's 'overarching scheme in which childhood is a mere prelude to both the future and the present' (616, 622, 623). Eleanor Hutchens argues that despite its teleological aspects, *The Prelude* is also supradiurnal, 'placing its materials *sub specie aeternitatis* rather than *sub specie temporis*'; its style is therefore timeless. See Hutchens, 'Towards a Poetics of Fiction: The Novel as Chronomorph', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 5, no. 3 (1972): 215–24, quotation on 222, doi: 10.2307/1345279.

28 Although she does not refer to childhood, Laura Quinney makes an important point about how the Wordsworthian speaker is separated 'from the forward momentum of time', his 'disappointed figure [being] frozen, cut off from "the progress of life" '. See ' "Tintern Abbey", Sensibility, and the Self-Disenchanted Self', *ELH* 64, no. 1 (1997): 131–56, quotation on 144 and 148, doi: 10.1353/elh.1997.0008. Implying a counter-*Bildung* movement in the poem, Quinney's point about the speaker's relation to the future also describes his relation to the past.

29 Scott Harshbarger, 'Intimations of Neoteny: Play and God in Wordsworth's 1799 *Prelude*'. *Philosophy and Literature* 34, no. 1 (2010): 112–30, quotation on 112. doi: 10.1353/phl.0.0081.

30 For the early stronger emphasis on childhood, see Jonathan Wordsworth's claim that the 1799 version offers the vision of childhood as central inspiration more clearly than later Preludes. 'The Two-Part *Prelude* of 1799', in *The Prelude*, ed. Wordsworth, Abrams, and Gill (New York:

Norton, 1980): 567–85, quotation on 570. The transition from 1799 to 1805 'accomplishes a decisive transition from lyric retrogression to narrative progression' (Sheats, 477).

31 Ann Wierda Rowland, *Romanticism and Childhood: The Infantilization of British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 22, doi: 10.1017/CBO9781139024075.

32 Kim Blank suggests that in the Boy of Winander episode and in 'Lucy Gray' Wordsworth reenacts an 'emotional allegory': Lucy's 'halted tracks also suggest . . . childhood's end as a child. There is no real death, only a kind of disappearing act for the solitary child', expressive of Wordsworth's 'inner child' in whose 'survival and endurance' he needs to believe (170).

33 William Wordsworth, 'Advice to the Young: Answer to the Letter of "Mathetes" ' [1809], in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (London: Edward Moxon, 1876; repr. Cirencester: The Echo Library, 2006), 139. For more on this passage see Robert Langbaum, 'The Evolution of Soul in Wordsworth's Poetry', *PMLA* 82, no.2 (1967): 265–72, quotation on 271, doi: 10.2307/461297.

34 Alan Liu, ' "Shapeless Eagerness": The Genre of Revolution in Books 9–10 of *The Prelude*', *Modern Language Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1982): 3–28, quotation on 3–4. doi: 10.1215/00267929-43-1-3.

35 Liu, ' "Shapeless Eagerness" ', 5 (emphasis in original), 6, and 16.

36 Harold Bloom, *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1970), 19.

37 Ibid., 5, 19.

38 Ibid., 11.

39 Richard Gravil, 'Helen Maria Williams: Wordsworth's Revolutionary Anima', *Wordsworth Circle* 40, no. 1 (2009): 55–64, quotation on 60.

40 Ann Rowland, 'Wordsworth's Children of the Revolution', *SEL, 1500–1900* 41, no.4 (2001): 677–94, quotation on 681.

41 Eugene L. Stelzig, ' "The Shield of Human Nature": Wordsworth's Reflections on the Revolution in France', *Nineteenth Century Literature* 45, no.4 (1991): 415–31, quotation on 423. doi: 10.2307/3044995.

42 John Rieder, 'Wordsworth's "Indolence": Providential Economy and Poetic Vocation', *Pacific Coast Philology* 23, nos.1–2 (1988): 67–76, quotation on 75.

43 Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 39 (emphasis in original).

44 In many poems, the Lucy poems among them, Wordsworth envisions the child's death as her return to nature, rolling round in earth's diurnal course and so forth.

45 James Holt McGavran, 'Wordsworth, Lost Boys, and Romantic Hom(e)ophobia', in *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuations, Postmodern Contestations*, ed. James Holt McGavran (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 146.

46 Marshall Brown discusses the way in which Romantic idealization dematerialized childhood, so that the child was no longer treated as a 'condition outside adult humanity' but as a state within, 'no longer a place but only an aura'. See '*Frankenstein*: A Child's Tale', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 36, no.2 (2003): 145–75, quotation on 165, doi: 10.1215/ddnov.036020145.