CHAPTER 3

Thanksgiving after War

England in 1815

Between war's end and war's end the battle goes on. To be followed by: illuminations, exhibitions, songs, poems, bonfires, fireworks, concerts, pantomimes, panoramas, dioramas, thanksgiving sermons, topographical descriptions, expository guides, equestrian displays, celebratory dinners, subscriptions for a national monument, subscriptions for commemorative prints, subscriptions for the wounded, prayers for the dead. After the desperate uncertainty of the hundred days, the war was now truly at an end.

And so, peace at last.

Only, for the residents of Rydal Mount, the sense of an ending left much to be desired. On 15 August, writing to Catherine Clarkson, Dorothy bemoans 'the adulation, the folly, the idle Curiosity' that has attracted sightseers to the Bellerophon before, once again, accusing Napoleon of cowardice for failing to take his own life. In the same letter, lamenting the poor sales of *The White Doe*, Dorothy proclaims: 'I now perceive clearly that till my dear Brother is laid in his grave his writings will not produce any profit' (*MY* II. 244–5), a statement echoed soon after by Wordsworth: 'as to Publishing I shall give it up, as no-body will buy what I send forth' (*MY* II. 334); 'I write chiefly for Posterity' (*MY* II. 292). Thus, thoughts of money, death, and failure of accomplishment circulated wildly in the Wordsworth household, the hope for belated recognition as a great national poet qualified by the adverse reaction to the poet's claims, in the 1815 preface and supplementary essay, to be the worthy successor of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. Over the next eight months, Wordsworth would attempt to make ground on several fronts: attending to the family's financial security by successfully petitioning for a bond to cover his and Dorothy's share of the old Lowther debt; preparing the groundwork for posterity by writing an impassioned defence of the character of Burns; composing poems intended to secure his right to speak on

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behalf of the nation. In between these activities, slights on the character of the Duke of Wellington, the sanity of Lord Byron (*MY* II. 283 and 304),[1] the moral shortcomings of the radical Whigs (*MY* II. 304), and the literary worth of Hunt's *Defence of Liberty* (*MY* II. 273), as well as the efforts of Hunt's fellow Cockney rebel John Hamilton Reynolds (*MY* II. 345–6), came to the fore. Meanwhile, Caroline Vallon's wedding, and the prospect of a reunion in London, came and went – a meeting that would not take place for another five years. By 11 June 1816, Wordsworth, alarmed by the rise of civil tensions at home and in France, was revisiting his interest in Pasley's plans for the establishment of 'scientific military establishments' (*MY* II. 323) and declaring, just a few weeks later, his disgust with those members of the opposition who, the previous year, had sought to negotiate with Napoleon for peace (*MY* II. 334).

The revenants of peace that haunted *The Excursion* and *The White Doe*, and that drifted through the pages of *Poems by William Wordsworth*, appeared now to have been exorcised. The year's work of piling up resentment against Byron and the Cockney School, whose poetry drew inspiration from the first-generation poet's early radical artistic, political, and erotic leanings, was crisply expressed in Wordsworth's dismissive advice to Reynolds, whose poem 'The Naiad: A Tale' (1816) had clearly touched a raw nerve: 'Your Fancy is too luxuriant, and riots too much upon its own creation' (*MY* II. 346). Though at first Wordsworth remained silent in the months after Waterloo, progress towards the establishment of a body of work that would mark a decisive breach with the poetry of Fancy and that would, whether intentionally or not, sever ties with the rising generation of cultural Napoleonists began to assemble in the late autumn – first with a cluster of Miltonic sonnets published in the *Champion* and the *Examiner* and then with the undertaking of an 'irregular Ode' (*MY* II. 284). With the publication the following May of the slender octavo volume titled *Thanksgiving Ode, January 1816. With Other Short Pieces Chiefly Referring to Recent Public Events*, Wordsworth appeared resolute in his determination to speak on behalf of 'those who were resolved to fight it out with Bonaparte' (*MY* II. 334). Thus, Wordsworth sought to be the voice of the nation, if not as the official poet of state – that title had recently been ceded to Southey – nor as the favoured poet of the public – a role for which Scott and Byron were competing – then as 'The Muses' 'Page of state', a designation applied to 'that gentle bard', Spenser,[2] a poet whose work transcended the 'depression', 'party fury' (*MY* II. 292), and degraded 'appetite' (*MY* II. 334) of a war-torn nation in ways that Wordsworth hoped to emulate.[3]

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Despite some recent efforts to rehabilitate the poem, the 'Thanksgiving Ode' has maintained its reputation as an embarrassing anomaly in Wordsworth's canon. Following publication, the poem, despite making very little impression on the poetry-buying public,[4] raised the ire of Shelley, Byron, and Hazlitt, confirming a view, seeded among second-generation readers of *The Excursion*, that Wordsworth had betrayed his early radical promise. As Duncan Wu has pointed out, parodic derivations of the politically inflammatory lines ascribing the 'carnage' of Waterloo to the 'daughter' of God set the seal on Wordsworth's status as a 'lost leader', tarnishing his reputation among progressive poets and thinkers for many years to come.[5] And yet, when regarded in the light of those other poems in which Wordsworth declares a fascination with the destructive power of war, the ode's apparent endorsement of 'carnage' might not seem anomalous; moreover, when considered alongside other competing pro- and anti-war discourses circulating at the time of its composition, and, more controversially, when read through the lens of those biographical circumstances that, at the outbreak of war, prevented Wordsworth from formally acknowledging his daughter and that, in war's aftermath, led to their veiled and somewhat awkward reunion, the lines might well take on a different, more nuanced meaning. Still further, should the lines in which 'Imagination, ne'er before content,/But aye ascending, restless in her pride […] Stoops before that closing deed magnificent' (ll. 163–6) be taken as a sign of the poet's retreat from the militant artistry of *The Prelude*?[6] And even if this point is conceded, might that retreat be read not so much as 'an apocalypse of the "Imagination"' but as an invitation to resume the peaceful work of Fancy, rediscovering in this transient and gentle faculty a possibility of peace, unfettered by the warlike pursuit of self-definition?[7]

To address these questions this chapter begins with a consideration of newspaper reports and sermons that, in the aftermath of the battle, attempted to justify the shocking toll of victory – an estimated 50,000 dead and wounded – as an act of God.[8] Wordsworth's Waterloo poems, I argue, with their focus on the pleasures and pains of conflict, may be read both as a mode of self-revision and as a contribution to contemporary theological debates about the relations between slaughter, sacrifice, and divine providence. I then move on to read the echoes of Spenser's *Epithalamion* in the 'Thanksgiving Ode' – the former, imitating the ancient Greek extended lyric in praise of a bride and groom to be sung at the door of the wedding chamber; the latter, a 'dramatised ejaculation', 'composed or supposed to be composed on the morning of the thanksgiving, uttering the sentiments of an individual upon that occasion' (*MY* II. 324) – in

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relation to Wordsworth's long-delayed reunion with Annette and Caroline Vallon. In the concluding section, the chapter looks closely at the verses Wordsworth composed in the immediate aftermath of the ode, showing how these poems draw on the Fancy, in disregard of the poet's reservations about the adoption of this creative faculty by members of Hunt's circle, to pursue a path beyond Imagination and its involvement with the vicious circle of war and peace. Though the gentle, yielding tones of *The White Doe* would seem to have been silenced, with Wordsworth, in anticipation of renewed hostilities in Europe, expressing support for a revival of those 'martial qualities' that 'are the natural efflorescence of a healthy state of society' (*MY* II. 323), the still small voice that represents the victims of war and that looks forward to the cessation of conflict can yet be heard. That, in 1816, the founding of The Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace should pass unrecorded by Wordsworth is of note, but notwithstanding the allusions to Cintra and Pasley that re-emerge in correspondence from this year, echoes of that non-violent counter-spirit continue to resound.

Thoughts and Prayers: Waterloo and the Rhetoric of Sacrifice

On Friday, 19 April 1793, two months after Britain's entry into the war against revolutionary France, devout church-goers, in observance of a decree issued by King George III for a day of fasting and national 'humiliation', uttered prayers 'for the pardon of our sins' and for God's 'Blessing and Assistance on THE ARMS OF HIS MAJESTY, by Sea and Land'.[9] Wordsworth emerges in this period as a complex, contradictory, and shadowy figure: at the beginning of the year he had published two volumes of verse with the liberal publisher Joseph Johnson and had come dangerously close to outing himself as the 'Republican' author of an incendiary attack on the Anglican clergyman and former revolutionary sympathiser Richard Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff.[10] At the same time, in need of funds to support the French mother of his illegitimate child, Wordsworth had petitioned his uncle William Cookson for a curacy in Harwich, Essex, a petition that his uncle declined on account of his nephew's near-treasonable infatuation with republican politics. It was this rejection that most likely prompted the composition of Wordsworth's attack on Watson.

That the poet would have joined in with the prayers for victory in the spring of 1793 seems unlikely, yet the counter-factual image of a young man, recently installed in a provincial parish, imploring divine aid in 'our

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warfare against an Enemy to all Christian Kings, Princes and States' is perhaps not so difficult to imagine.[11] Certainly the role of parish priest was easy enough for Wordsworth's fellow traveller in France, and possible fellow republican, Robert Jones to adopt. When, in the early autumn, Wordsworth visited Jones in Plas-yn-Llan, Wales, he would have heard his friend intoning state-sanctioned prayers for the triumph of legitimacy over atheism and republicanism. How the radical author of the *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* might have responded to such prayers, delivered in the region presided over by the detested subject of this letter, is recorded in Book 10 of *The Prelude*:

> It was a grief,
> Grief call it not, 'twas anything but that,
> A conflict of sensations without name,
> Of which he only who may love the sight
> Of a Village Steeple as I do can judge,
> When in the Congregation, bending all
> To their great Father, prayers were offered up
> Or praises for our Country's Victories,
> And, 'mid the simple worshippers, perchance,
> I only, like an uninvited Guest
> Whom no one owned, sate silent, shall I add,
> Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come?[12]

The shift in perspective, from the ardent Jacobin who, in the wake of the Duke of York's defeat at the Battle of Hondschoote on 6 September, 'Exulted in the triumph of my soul/When Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown' (ll. 260–1) to the shamed recollection of one who 'sate silent' when 'prayers were offered up' for 'victories' (l. 270–3) and who, more alarmingly at a time of regular calls for collective fasting, *fed* on the prospect of 'vengeance', drives home the point that 'conflict' (l. 265) was an internal matter for Wordsworth. Like that other 'uninvited guest', the ancient mariner who, in Coleridge's poem, loiters on the margins of a ceremony in which individuals pledge allegiance to each other and to God, the poet is presented here as a man at odds with himself and with the world. Perhaps too, as Kenneth Johnston has suggested, there is a memory here of that missed and, for national, religious, and political reasons, impossible ceremony – the wedding service that would have united the English Protestant radical, William Wordsworth, with the French Catholic royalist, Annette Vallon. When in February 1793, as *The Prelude* records, Britain joined in the war against France, the 'ravage of this most unnatural strife' (X, l. 249) was thus experienced by Wordsworth as 'a civil war dividing his own family'.[13]

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Considering the connection established between the outbreak of war and the observance, or lack of observance, of prayers in 1793, it seems fitting that Wordsworth should choose to commemorate the end of war in 1815 with a poem intended for a day of national thanksgiving. Wordsworth, by now a confirmed supporter of the Anglican establishment, may well have attended St Oswald's Church in Grasmere on 2 July 1815 joining in with prayers for the 'Glorious Victory obtained over the *French* on Sunday the Eighteen of June, at Waterloo'. Six months later, on Thursday, 18 January 1816, the day set aside for a general national thanksgiving, the former republican may also have uttered '*Amen*' in response to calls for the 're-establishment […] of legitimate authority and moral order among the distracted nations of Europe'.[14] Wordsworth, no longer a silent witness to collective expressions of triumph, appears on the basis of this evidence and on the sentiments of joy expressed in his 'Thanksgiving Ode' and its accompanying shorter poems to be ardent and assured in his enthusiasm for the defeat of imperial France.

A no less pressing concern for Wordsworth was the troubling matter of the battle's devastating human costs. Whereas the Duke of Wellington's dispatch estimated that around 14,000 British and Hanoverian soldiers were killed, wounded, or missing, subsequent reports stated that the resulting toll was near double this figure.[15] Writing in the wake of William Cobbett's denunciation of the 'delirium' of the victory celebrations and his related attacks on the establishment press,[16] the *Morning Post* on 11 July 1815 averred that 'the magnitude of the loss is eagerly laid hold of by certain factious writers […] in order to dim the lustre of the triumph, and damp the general joy', adding further that 'If our sacrifices have been great, the splendour of our triumph, and the benefit to be derived from it, correspond well with their magnitude'. For the writer in the *Morning Post* metaphors of light and scale, derived from the rhetoric of the sublime, work to efface the efforts of radical scepticism to 'frown', in a calculated redeployment of Samuel Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, 'on war's unequal game/Where thousands bleed to raise a single name'. Substituting the affective charge of 'thousands bleed' for the politically contentious 'wasted nations' in the original poem, the writer affirms that, contra Cobbett, 'the gallant men whose loss we deplore have not died on glory's barren bed'.[17] Outside the metropolis, a related sense of coming to terms with the blood toll of victory is demonstrated by a statement from the *Caledonian Mercury* on 26 June: 'Such a victory could not, of course, be purchased, without a great sacrifice of men.'[18] Like the *Morning Post*'s insistence that 'sacrifice was unavoidable'

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the *Mercury*'s 'of course' gives an indication of the extent to which the principle of giving up life for a higher purpose provided a rationale for the shocking consequences of war.

What is revealed by such statements is the equivocal position of the dead soldier in myths of national integrity. As *homo sacer* (Agamben: the person who may be killed yet not sacrificed) and as scapegoat (Girard: the one who bears the burden of societal violence), the body of the violated soldier both conceals and reveals the principle of exclusion on which civil society is founded.[19] To adapt Neil Ramsey's analysis of the destabilising tendencies of the military memoir, in the as yet unpublished 'The Discharged Soldier', the depiction of 'the soldier as a suffering individual', rather than as the 'idealised and sacrificial representative of the nation', risked exposing the principle of exclusion on which the myth of the nation as fortress home is founded.[20] In the summer of 1815, as thousands of wounded and destitute servicemen wandered by the towns and villages of Britain in search of hospitality, the face of the excluded other became all too apparent, in consequence of which a discourse was needed to ensure that the demand for recognition did not overstep the bounds of propriety. As a measure of the effectiveness of sacrificial ideology in helping individuals to embrace the 'lustre of the triumph', and as a sign of how far the Wordsworths' sympathies had evolved since the 1790s, it is useful to consider a statement of Dorothy Wordsworth, from a letter written on 28 June on the day that news of Waterloo reached Grasmere. In the first part of the letter, composed in the afternoon, Dorothy writes: 'The particulars of the battle of the 18th are dreadful. The joy of victory is an awful thing, and I had no patience with the tinkling of our Ambleside bells upon the occasion'. By 11 o'clock at night, however, Dorothy's initial recognition of the stark contrast between dreadful 'particulars' and heedless 'tinkling' has been replaced by a clear expression of alignment with the dominant national mood: 'Before I go to bed I must tell you that, saving for the lamentable loss of so many brave men, I have read the newspapers of tonight with unmingled triumph' (*MY* II. 242). With dread qualified by the effects of parenthetic displacement ('saving for'), soothing alliteration ('lamentable loss'), and adjectival assurance ('brave men') the on-message reader is at last able to sleep.

In addition to the establishment press, Dorothy's notice of the sound of church bells gives indication of another means by which the state sought to translate the stark acknowledgement of slaughter into the ardent satisfaction of sacrifice. During the months of July and August churchmen across the nation, sermonising in support of the Waterloo

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Subscription, the charitable fund created to assist the 'families of the brave men killed, and of the wounded sufferers', were keen to remind their congregations of 'how dearly their deliverance has been bought, and what sacrifices have been made to obtain it'.[21] The majority of Anglican sermons delivered in this period typically adopted the dominant Tillotson sermon model of exordium, exegesis, and peroration: a finely wrought, argumentative style intended to guide congregations to a shared conclusion.[22] Key to this model was the creation of a sense of identification with the victims of war in which anaphoric imperatives, supported by subordinate declarations of unity between contrasting pronouns, issue in terminal demonstrations of possessive unity, as shown in the following extract from a sermon by Daniell Mathias, delivered at St Mary's Church, Whitechapel, on 13 August:

> And for God's sake, let not us of the same kindred—let not us, nearly allied as we are, proudly allied as we are, to those who have achieved the victory, which will give the *world* repose, and *us* immortal honours; let not us, of the same blood, at any time, much less of this time, when their heroic deeds are present to our eyes—let not us, of the same household, be forgetful of what our brothers were obliged to suffer and endure on that signally auspicious and yet wound-inflicting and life-destroying day.[23]

Having constructed a syntactical and grammatical 'alliance' (p. 18) between 'us' and 'our brothers', Mathias goes on to draw attention to the plight of those left injured, bereaved, and destitute as a result of the battle. Significantly, at the forefront of the clergyman's mind are the proposals presented in Parliament to raise an appropriate monument to the British dead and wounded. Sensitive to the possibility that such a monument might, if unaccompanied by acts of charity, encourage widows, orphans, and wounded soldiers to meditate on the sharp disparity between their feelings of grief and privation and the jubilatory mood of their fellow citizens, Mathias ventriloquises the character of a 'mutilated' veteran, standing before a 'towering column' or 'wide-expanding arch' (p. 19): 'to erect these trophies I fought and bled: they are cemented by my blood, and they are made thus conspicuous by the loss of my precious limbs—and I have gained nothing but infirmity, poverty, and vagrancy!' (p. 20). As one might expect, given the charitable focus of the sermon, Mathias's solution to this exposure of the human costs of Waterloo is couched in the language of debit and credit: 'you owe it to them who are no more, to heal and assuage the wounds and the sufferings, which this memorable day has inflicted! It is the debt of gratitude […] which it is your bounded duty to

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repay!' (p. 20). Having established syntactical commonality with the dead and wounded of Waterloo the rector concludes his sermon by assuring his flock that the resulting 'Peace', which 'they' delivered, will provide 'exemption from all the distresses, vexations, and expenses, which are incident to a state of warfare!' (pp. 20–1).

Representative of the reach of this understanding of wartime sacrifice as the exchange of life and limb for a collective purpose is the Reverend Peter Roe's assurance to his Yorkshire congregation that 'many who fell at Waterloo were translated to heaven […] for ever to celebrate a victory, not of a temporal nature, but over the world, the Devil, and the flesh!'[24] In similar vein the Scottish Episcopalian minister Robert Morehead argued that just as the suffering of those killed and wounded at Waterloo had 'elevated our country to her highest pinnacle of success and glory' so it 'becomes us to dissipate private sorrow in public triumph, and in the triumph of greater things beyond mortality!'.[25] Warning against the 'selfishness of grief' Morehead paints an exulted, sublime image of the British dead, inhabiting 'lofty' offices in heaven from which they will 'delight […] to fan the fires of patriot daring' (pp. 205–6). In what amounts to a synthesis of the liturgical and secular understandings of the equation of height and majesty Morehead makes much of the raising up of those who 'fell' at Waterloo, arguing that just as 'Their names will ever remain inscribed on the pillar of their country's renown' so 'it becomes us to lift the character of our souls to the level of that majestic height on which our country stands, and to the still higher level of the Gospel' (pp. 206–7). The outcome of Waterloo, in this case, goes beyond the mercantile and, as some commentators observed, perniciously secular peace envisaged by Mathias to embrace the principle of the Church militant: a globalised Anglican mission delivering truth and salvation to the oppressed peoples of the world.

The sense in which the ravages of battle were placed in the service of church and state was cemented further on Thursday, 18 January 1816, the day set aside for a service of general national thanksgiving. Despite the fact that the prayer forming the centrepiece of this service requested that 'the remembrance of past injuries be blotted out by mutual good offices', and that 'the miseries of War be forgotten in the charities of reconciliation',[26] recollections of suffering nevertheless played a key role in forging a sacrificial understanding of Waterloo as, in Whitehall, William Howley, the Bishop of London, superintended the placing of captured Imperial Eagles at the foot of the altar in the Royal Chapel by an escort of guardsmen 'yet pale from the wounds received in the field of glory'. Alluding at once

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to the spoils of war as well as to the symbolic status of the men's injuries the Bishop concluded that in the 'trophies of these brave men' the country 'may justly be said to have obtained […] from the mercy of Heaven an adequate compensation' for its 'privations', 'labours', and 'losses'.[27] In more rapturous vein, Archibald Alison exhorted his congregation to give thanks to God for guiding the nation to a victory made 'rich in glory by the blood of the faithful and the brave'. Pursuing the evangelising message of his fellow Episcopalian and sometime protégé Robert Morehead, Alison concluded his sermon with a plea to the Lord to accept the faithful's 'sacrifice' and to make of them 'the asserters of thy eternal *justice*' and the 'messengers of thy *mercy* to the world!'.[28]

Though generally well received, pro-Waterloo sermonising was not immune to criticism. In November 1815, a hostile review of Daniell Mathias's sermon asserted that 'of all the topics for discussion which lie within the widely-extended circle of politics, there are none, most unquestionably, so diametrically repugnant to the plain tenants of the sacred profession, as war and its concomitant horrors'.[29] Echoing Cobbett's critique of the baleful consequences of the Allied victory, the writer condemns Mathias for 'dazzling' his congregation with the 'pseud glories of the combat, and by the glare of victory, to divert the attention from the gross infringement of national rights which was the original cause of its achievement' (p. 524). Recognising the ease with which the rhetoric of the sublime and the poetics of romance conspired to shield the public from the sordid realities of conflict, some preachers did, in fact, come dangerously close to questioning the state-sanctioned understanding of the Allied victory as an act of divine Providence. In a thanksgiving sermon entitled 'Thoughts on Universal Peace', one of the leading Scottish churchmen of the nineteenth century, the Reverend Thomas Chalmers, warned that 'there is a feeling of the sublime in contemplating the shock of armies' and that literature assists in the aggrandisement of war; poetry, in particular, is singled out for lending 'the magic of its numbers to the narratives of blood' and for throwing 'treacherous embellishments' over scenes 'of legalized slaughter'.[30] Those clergymen who, in their Waterloo and thanksgiving sermons, utilised the language of the sublime were, in Chalmers's view, guilty of perpetuating a bellicose ideology founded on the misapprehension of legalised slaughter as holy sacrifice. That such opinions would remain unheeded by those in power who wished to capitalise on Waterloo's status as a symbol of national unanimity is confirmed when one considers the 600 or so 'Waterloo Churches' raised in thanks to God for Britain's victory over Napoleon following the Church Building Act of 1818.

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'Thanksgiving Ode, January 18, 1816': The Poetics of Sacrifice

When, in the closing months of 1815, Wordsworth began to compose poetry inspired by the Battle of Waterloo, the problem of how to square the appalling realities of combat with the sublime abstractions of providential theology would prove no less pressing. In the same issue of the *Critical Review* in which the attack on Mathias appeared, a review of Walter Scott's *The Field of Waterloo* made much of that poem's failure to portray 'that scene of melancholy magnificence, that gorgeous Golgotha of the nineteenth century' (p. 457) with 'befitting state and dignity' (p. 459). The poetry that Wordsworth went on to produce in the autumn and winter of 1815–16 is distinguished by a sharp awareness of the extent to which Waterloo placed pressure on the ability of the poet and, indeed, of poetry itself to pronounce on the excessive violence of modern conflict.[31] Those bards who, like Scott and the laureate Southey, attempted to place a providential gloss on the devastation were, as most contemporary reviews confirmed, unintentionally exposing the limitations of their creative abilities whilst also undermining their claims to cultural authority.

The sonnets that Wordsworth composed for John Scott's journal *The Champion* give ample demonstration of how concerned the poet was to avoid making the same mistakes. As these poems, with their interest in questions of permanence and in the transcendence of everyday life, confirm, Wordsworth wished to avoid charges of cultural opportunism. Thus, 'The Bard, whose soul is meek as dawning day', bases its claim to 'worthily rehearse the hideous rout' (l. 12) on the poet's sense of removal from the contradictory freight of 'our time' (l. 9), finding support for its assertion of authoritative disengagement in the self-abnegating poetics of Edmund Spenser, while its companion piece, 'Intrepid sons of Albion!—not by you', finds in the notion of the soldier's wilful embrace of death a related sense of release from quotidian self-interest. The latter poem opens with a declaration of praise for those British heroes who, distinguished by their love of life from 'that impious crew', nevertheless embrace 'death […]/When duty bids you bleed in open war' (ll. 7–8). The sestet builds on the octet's delicate negotiation of the perils and pleasures of the British soldier's being for death – a satisfaction with extinction that touches on the life-denying callousness of Gallic materialism – by qualifying its opening claim, 'Heroes, for instant sacrifice prepared' (l. 8), with the assurance that such men are 'Yet filled with ardour, and on triumph bent,/Mid direst shocks of accident' (ll. 10–11). Life, in other words, persists amid annihilation, ensuring that

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those soldiers who might otherwise be perceived as the passive objects of 'slaughter' (l. 12) are shown labouring, even unto death, for a noble cause. The sense in which such men 'slight not life' (l. 5) yet offer themselves gladly for the sake of their country is given further liturgical significance in the closing image of the 'sacred Monument', the raising of which, echoing Christ's words on the cross (John 19.30: 'it is finished' or *consummatum est* in the Latin Vulgate),[32] is said to 'consummate the event' (ll. 13–14).

The purported marmoreal support for these lines deserves some additional consideration. By conceiving the sestet as an inscription for a monument Wordsworth entered a debate that had preoccupied the country since the news of Waterloo was announced in late June. Although in Parliament general support was given to Lord Castlereagh's proposal for the raising of a 'triumphal arch or pillar […] in honour of the splendid victory of Waterloo', there remained some uncertainty as to which individuals should be commemorated by such a monument, with opinion polarised between those who, like Prime Minister Lord Liverpool, believed that the focus should fall exclusively on the Duke of Wellington and those opposition members, such as Charles Watkin Williams Wynn, who wished to see 'the name of every man who had fallen […] inscribed on the monument'.[33] Outside of Parliament a Committee of Taste, led by Charles Long, Richard Payne Knight, and Sir George Beaumont, was convened to assess plans and designs for a monument; among the more outlandish plans submitted to the Committee was Andrew Robertson's proposal for a vast, granite Parthenon, to be erected on Primrose Hill near the Regent's Park Canal. The Parthenon was to show Minerva and Neptune contending for 'who shall produce the greatest heroes for great Britain', with Minerva vying for Wellington and Neptune for Nelson. The structure included a cemetery for veterans, a cenotaph for the fallen, and space for the names of every serviceman killed in the conflict. In the end, the commission was awarded to William Wilkins and John P. Gandy's plan for an 'ornamental Tower' in Regent's Park – an ambitious plan that failed, due to financial constraints, to materialise.[34]

Whether Wordsworth, through his connection with Sir George Beaumont, was motivated by ambitions to see his work literally inscribed in stone is unclear, but the fact that plans for the tower were abandoned confirms the sense in which Wordsworth's national voice was at a remove from the culture it would govern. Like the numerous common soldiers, whose 'sacrifices' would also remain unrecorded in the general clamour of 'victory sublime',[35] the failure of the sonnet to gain official recognition would serve as an unfortunate reminder of the poet's marginal status. When the poem

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was eventually published in *The Champion* on 4 February 1816 the debate in Parliament had fractured further as, amid the calls for towers, parthenons, and pantheons, some ministers speculated as to whether the building of a new church, dedicated to the memory of the fallen, should not make a more fitting tribute. When, on 18 January, congregations gathered to give thanks to God for the defeat of French imperialism, calls for an ecclesiastical tribute to the Waterloo dead had begun to gather pace.

It was during this period Wordsworth began work on a more ambitious Waterloo poem, a lengthy 'dramatised ejaculation' 'supposed to be composed, on the morning of the thanksgiving, uttering the sentiments of an *individual* upon that occasion' (*MY* II. 324). The resulting 'Thanksgiving Ode' gave voice not only to a developing sense of poetic authority gained, paradoxically, as a result of cultural exclusion but also to a vexed sense of the disjunction between private and state-sponsored perspectives on the deprivations of war. Unlike Castlereagh, whose assurance to Parliament of the unprecedented nature of this 'transcendentally bright' victory included scant admission of its devastating human toll,[36] Wordsworth, extending the theological concerns of his recently completed sonnets and mindful, perhaps, of the apparent ease with which fellow poets, such as the high-minded laureate Southey and the populist Scott, had described the scale of death and wounding as the unfortunate but necessary cost of British triumph, was careful, in this determinedly contemplative poem, issued from a 'low and undisturbed estate' (l. 342), to give apt expression to just how hard won that triumph had been.

Accordingly, the ode begins by distinguishing itself from those voices that would seek to portray Waterloo as the exclusive result of British military prowess, ungoverned by divine intent. Asserting that Britain has won not 'By the vengeful sword' but 'by dint of Magnanimity' (ll. 57–8), Wordsworth downplays the executive role of the Duke of Wellington that, to date, had formed the focus of most Waterloo poems, parliamentary speeches, and quite a number of thanksgiving sermons. As the ode strives to remind its audience, 'the sole true glory' (l. 83) belongs to God to whom thanks are due not that 'we have vanquished—but that we survive' (ll. 90–1). In the cautiously expressed lines that follow, Wordsworth, recalling the scenes of wartime devastation evoked in the 'Salisbury Plain' verses of the early 1790s, ascribes the blame for 'Wide-wasted regions—cities wrapped in flame […] desolated countries' and 'towns on fire' (ll. 98–103) to French impiety before adding, by way of a veiled critique of his youthful contributions to radical anti-war sentiment, that the real violation enacted by the 'impious crew' ('Intrepid sons of Albion!', l. 8) was not on persons

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and property but on 'the life of virtue in mankind' (l. 106). Writing in 1816 as an avowed patriot, far removed from the radical of 1793 who sat in estranged silence when prayers were first raised for English victory, the poet expresses pride in the efforts of his countrymen but only to the extent that such efforts proclaim the will of God. Echoing Mathias's allusion to Genesis 31:3 ('And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers […] and I will be with thee'), the poet frames patriotic pride within the discourse of divine submission. Alluding further to Isaiah 37:35 ('For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians') Wordsworth implies that God granted Britain the '*exterminating sword*' as a reward for its steadfastness in the prosecution of 'Evil'.[37] In representing itself as the humble instrument of divine 'Providence' the nation is protected too from 'these lingerings of distress' – economic, social and political deprivations, as well as traumatic recollections of death and injury – that would threaten to 'veil' the splendour of this great 'moral triumph'; but 'obedience to spontaneous measures', with its implicit reminder of the unregulated form of the ode, also has a role in persuading a people to abandon 'Guilt and Shame' and 'Woe' and so to don 'the radiant vest of Joy' (ll. 125–36; *passim*).

The call for self-limitation in the aftermath of victory extends also to the private sphere. In what amounts to a shocking disavowal of the assertion of poetic creativity over the militant power of Napoleon, as described in the crossing of the Alps passage in *The Prelude*, 'Imagination, ne'er before content,/But aye ascending, restless in her pride […] Stoops to that closing deed magnificent,/And with the embrace is satisfied' (ll. 163–7).[38] Though the heavily stressed 'Stoops' goes some way to reclaiming some of the Imagination's lost potency it fails to distract from the overarching drive to self-effacement in the face of a higher power. When these lines are read in the light of the youthful poet's assertions of praise for the power of imagination, it is hard not to regard them as a form of creative sacrifice, a gesture akin to the numerous corporeal sacrifices enacted on the field of battle. Yet, as the lines that follow make clear, Wordsworth strives also to show that loss for the sake of a noble cause leads to a greater gain: the incorporation of that which was lost within the inexhaustible frame of the divine. As the conclusion to the poem insists, for a being of 'sovereign penetration' (l. 296), the sight of victory 'Though sprung from bleeding war, is one of pure delight' (l. 305).[39] This emphasis on the sublimation of war's material foundation extends to the effacement of the poem's origins in a system of cultural production. Having seemingly abandoned previous efforts to

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see his verse inscribed in stone, Wordsworth now conceives his country's praise and, by extension, his own poem as a 'transcendental monument' (l. 213), a 'work' not 'of hands' but of 'the soul', an immaterial trophy reaching 'To highest Heaven' (ll. 215–16). More cannily, perhaps, the poem refers here to those calls in Parliament for the building of a new church, 'A pile that grace approves, and time can trust' (l. 229), while also deferring to those favouring the observance of regular thanksgiving ceremonies in Westminster Abbey. Turning from the trope of light to the power of sound, the poem envisages, with a glance towards Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, how within such sacred space bonds of 'sweet and threatening harmony' (l. 244) will unite 'The living generations with the dead' (l. 240), transforming unwholesome memories of death and wounding (l. 254) into 'potent symphonies' of 'victory and praise' (ll. 251–2).[40]

As if prompted by these disturbing echoes of the underlying matter of war, Wordsworth turns in the next section of the ode to a sustained justification for the losses of Waterloo. Drawing on Jeremiah 27:8 ('that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand'), the poem reminds its audience that it is God who 'guides the Pestilence', the 'Earthquake', and 'the fierce Tornado' (ll. 260–71; *passim*).[41] The effects of sublime devastation, in other words, are authorised by the divine. 'But', the poem goes on notoriously to assert, 'thy most dreaded instrument/In working out a pure intent/Is Man—arrayed for mutual slaughter, —Yea, Carnage is thy daughter!' (ll. 279–82). William Hazlitt, writing a review of a performance of *Coriolanus* published in December 1816 in the *Examiner*, just a few months after the appearance of Wordsworth's poem, seized upon the grammatically ambiguous pronouncement as evidence of how 'the language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power' (*CWWH* IV. 347–8). Hazlitt's somewhat stunned appreciation of Shakespeare's depiction of the seductive excitement of tyranny may therefore be understood as an attempt to come to terms with Wordsworth's public endorsement of the triumph of 'Legitimacy'. For Hazlitt, the shock occasioned by the publication of the 'Thanksgiving Ode' makes sense if the 'principle' of poetry is conceived as *naturally* 'aristocratical', 'anti-levelling', 'dazzling', and excessive. Quoting Shakespeare and Wordsworth in succession he writes:

> It shows its head turreted, crowned, and crested. Its front is gilt and blood-stained. Before it 'it carries noise, and behind it leaves tears'. It has its altars and its victims, sacrifices, human sacrifices. Kings, priests, nobles are its train-bearers, tyrants and slaves its executioners. — 'Carnage is its [*sic*] daughter.' — Poetry is right-royal. (*CWWH* IV. 347–8)

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Hazlitt's respectful yet troubled response to Wordsworth's demonstration of the language of power was counteracted in 1819 by Shelley's savagely parodic *Peter Bell the Third*:

> Then Peter wrote odes to the Devil; —
> In one of which he meekly said: —
> 'May Carnage and Slaughter,
> Thy niece and thy daughter,
> May Rapine and Famine,
> Thy gorge ever cramming,
> Glut thee with living and dead!'[42]

A few years later Lord Byron, less shocked and perhaps less surprised by manifestations of Lakean apostasy, recalled the offending lines in a passage on the Battle of Waterloo in *Don Juan*:

> 'Carnage' (so Wordsworth tells you) 'is God's daughter:'
> If *he* speak truth, she is Christ's sister, and
> Just now behaved as in the Holy Land.[43]

In a note to the passage Byron comments: 'this is perhaps as pretty a pedigree for Murder as ever was found out by Garter King at Arms. — What would have been said, had any free-spoken people discovered such a lineage?'[44] Defending Byron's critique of Wordsworth's lines in an essay published in *Fiction, Fair and Foul* (1880), John Ruskin would conclude that 'the death of the innocent in battle carnage' is not 'His "instrument for working out a pure intent," as Mr. Wordsworth puts it; but Man's instrument for working out an impure one'.[45] That Wordsworth was himself troubled by 'Carnage is thy daughter' is implied by the alteration of the lines in the 1845 *Poems* to the doctrinally inoffensive

> But Man is Thy most awful instrument,
> In working out a pure intent;
> Thou cloth'st the wicked in their dazzling mail,
> And for thy righteous purpose they prevail.[46]

As well as providing a less contentious account of the relations between wartime suffering and divine providence, by cleverly identifying the agents of destruction with the forces of impiety the revised lines perform the additional trick of obviating the Allies from the slaughter of Waterloo. Thus, while falling short of an outright volte face, the ode's final incarnation facilitates the providential rationale for carnage that, in 1816, largely because of maladroit expression, had been a cause of such justifiable outrage.

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But while opposition writers were understandably exercised by the poem's manifest callousness, it should be borne in mind that the ascription of carnage to the will of God was not out of line with church doctrine. In 1794, the Reverend Samuel Humfrays, referring his congregation to Isaiah 34.6 ('The sword of the LORD is filled with blood'), had declared: 'This then is the true Faith, that we believe and confess, that War with all its train of Miseries, Rapine, Conflagration, and Carnage is the *Act of God*'.[47] More immediately the text was invoked in the course of a thanksgiving sermon by the Scottish Canadian minister John Bethune:

> He himself put the sword into their hands, he regulated their marches, he breathed courage and ardour into their soldiers, made them indefatigable in labour, invincible in battle; and caused terror and consternation to go constantly before them. The Christian, walking in the meridian light of the Gospel, perceives the hand of God conducting these conquerors through fields of blood and carnage.[48]

As the rousing cadences of Bethune's prose demonstrate, religious justifications for wartime suffering came perilously close to evoking that 'something' in war that 'the heart enjoys'. Though far removed from the 'treacherous embellishments' condemned by Thomas Chalmers, Wordsworth's apparent endorsement of the violence of battle nevertheless bears a disturbing family resemblance to the euphoria of destruction evoked in religious discourse. That Wordsworth was, throughout his career, fascinated by his own propensity to seek delight in scenes of destruction is shown also in the resemblance between the bracing disclosure of 'Yea, Carnage is thy daughter!' and those passages, previously discussed, in which the prospect of dissolution is linked with the sublime. Yet, even as he is drawn to the annihilating threshold of human imagining, Wordsworth does not lose sight of that other 'something' that reins in destructive desires. In 'Home at Grasmere', 'The Recluse', and *The White Doe of Rylstone*, deliverance from over-identification with violence is found in the sanctification of nature; in the ode, as we have seen, it is found exclusively in God: the 'current of this matin song' lies 'deeper […] Than aught dependent on the fickle skies' (ll. 53–5).

What is often overlooked in readings of the ode's apparent endorsement of carnage is how other poems in the Thanksgiving volume attempt to address the human costs of war. In the collection's concluding poem, 'Elegiac Verses', a heavenly spirit, while taking account of 'Unpitied havoc' and 'Victims unlamented' (l. 14), promises to 'wash away' the 'stains' of a 'perturbèd earth' (ll. 1–4). The spirit accordingly sprinkles 'soft celestial

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dews/Thy lost maternal heart to reinfuse!' and, 'Scattering this far-fetched moisture from my wings', cleanses the 'secret springs […] stained so oft with human gore' (ll. 23–6).[49] Like Horace's Bandusia, mortal stains are temporary; through divine intervention blood is turned to water and the sacred river is rejuvenated. In 'Ode. Composed in January 1816', which follows the title poem, an epigraph from Horace's ode to Censorinus reaffirms the lasting worth of poetry, while the verse itself envisions a post-war era of bucolic calm and 'festive beauty' (l. 28).[50] Wordsworth's fantasia portrays a peaceable realm in which warriors with 'crimson banners proudly streaming,/And upright weapons innocently gleaming' (ll. 45–6), are attended by white-robed maidens. The vision recedes, but the poem goes on to imagine unfading tributes of the 'silent art' (l. 81), 'expressive records of a glorious strife […] Trophies on which the morning sun may shine,/As changeful ages flow' (ll. 94–8). Whereas conflict belongs to the turbulent course of history, art resides with eternity. But greater still than the tributes provided by sculpture are the transcendent records of elevated writing. Thus, the ode concludes with a hymn of praise to the 'Pierian sisters' and, in particular to Mnemosyne, for too long an exile from 'consecrated stream and grove' (l. 102), and a hope that 'I, or some more favoured Bard' (l. 115) may, from 'some spotless fountain' (l. 111), write verse that will secure a lasting memory of Britain's martial triumphs.

In Chapter 5 I return to the consideration of how the image of the sacred fount provides a debateable source of restitution in the aftermath of war, but here we should note how the volume's return to classical sources casts the image of lasting peace as dreamy and fanciful, a vision of national concord rendered dubious as a result of its promiscuous comingling of the sacred and the profane – St George and the Muses vying for authority in a disenchanted world. A counterpart to the 'Thanksgiving Ode', 'Ode. Composed in January 1816' is intended to sweeten that poem's grim affirmation of providential suffering and to consolidate the poet's authority; but just as, in relation to the former, the vision of bodily resurrection is held in delicate tension with the awareness that the prospect of 'martyred Countrymen' garlanded in 'amaranthine wreathes' (ll. 42–4) cannot be maintained outside 'Fancy in her airy bower' (3), so, in relation to the latter, at the poem's close an admission of temporal impermanence and a sequence of conditionals ('for a moment meet my soul's desires/That I […] may hear [and] may catch' the 'noblest' of Mnemosyne's 'lyres'; ll. 113–17) qualifies the poet's bid for national recognition.

This last point returns us to consideration of the poem's form. In March 1816, Wordsworth informed John Scott that he had composed an 'irregular

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Ode' upon the subject of the Thanksgiving, 'the longest thing of the Lyrical Kind, I believe except Spenser's Epithalamion, in our language' (*MY* II. 284). In a subsequent letter to Southey, Wordsworth explains that because the ode is meant to express the feelings of an individual on this occasion rather than 'the sentiments of a multitude', a regular stanza was rejected. Making a virtue of his position as a poet declaiming on national affairs from the cultural margins, Wordsworth notes that formal irregularity may be excused 'where the occasion is so great as to justify an aspiration after a state of freedom beyond what a succession of regular Stanzas will allow' (p. 284). Having placed in tension the Pindaric and Horatian impulses that animate the English ode, thus torn between uttering the voice of a multitude and aspiring after a state of freedom, the verse, on account of the fact that the 'occasion' *is* informed by 'the sentiments of a multitude', becomes the vehicle for an alienated, self-baffling lyric 'I'. That sense of self-contestation is deepened when one considers how the 'Thanksgiving Ode's allusion to Spenser's wedding song is sustained not merely at the level of formal irregularity but also in terms of the poem's temporal organisation, which like the *Epithalamion* follows the course of the sun's rising and setting. Observing the nation's celebratory rituals from a distance, the poet is at once a part of this time yet excluded from it, able to reflect the events that occur on this day yet unable to fully inhabit them. One might go further and recall the similarities with the position of the speaker in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. In both instances, the liturgical ceremony that would heal the catastrophic disruption of God and Man is overshadowed by a figure who, having sundered himself from that communion, is condemned to watch from outside.

For over thirty years the 'Thanksgiving Ode' performed an uncertain role in Wordsworth's self-fashioning. In Chapter 5 I will have more to say about the significance of the placing of the ode and its attendant verses in Wordsworth's collected poems, but to round off this discussion of how the ode's formal qualities are linked to the poet's personal concerns it is worth paying some attention to how the poem came to be revised. In 1820 the poem was divided into fourteen irregular stanzas, perhaps in hope of mitigating the effects of the expressive freedom that, in 1816, had stood as a marker of the poet's cultural disenfranchisement. In appearance, the newly sequenced ode drew the verse into the ambit of hymnal regularity, thereby lending the ode the illusion, at least, of uttering sentiments representative of a multitude. Placed in the four-volume 1820 *Miscellaneous Poems* as the concluding poem of the Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty, the 'Thanksgiving Ode' could now be read as the culmination of a twenty-year sequence of

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patriotic verses providing ample justification of the poet's claim to speak, as Milton and Spenser had before him, on behalf of the national interest. The bid to be accepted as the voice of authority was resumed again in the early 1840s when the decision was taken to remove lines 163–288, recasting them as a separate poem titled 'Ode. 1815'. Opening with the image of 'Imagination' stooping before 'the Victory, on that Belgic field', and including the redacted version of the lines assigning carnage to the will of God, the new poem effectively takes on the burden of containing the expressive instability that, in 1816, had prevented the 'Thanksgiving Ode' from attaining the status of a public pronouncement on Britain's triumph at Waterloo. In its significantly curtailed form, the 1845 'Thanksgiving Ode', which followed 'Ode. 1815' as the finale of the 'Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty', no longer bore the imprint of those affecting personal transgressions that, at the time of the poem's composition, gave proof of the poet's separation from the affairs of state. Now, as poet laureate, having dispersed those uncomfortable reminders of an identity at odds with itself, Wordsworth could at last be assured of his right to speak on behalf of a multitude.

Love in the Time of War

Carnage remains, however, stubbornly resistant to bardic transformation, sullying alike the prospect of peace, the belief in a God of justice and mercy, and the right of the poet to pronounce on matters of state. Of those contemporaries who took issue with the ode's seeming endorsement of the destructive power of the divine it is Byron who offers perhaps the most illuminating perspective: '"Carnage" (so Wordsworth tells you) "is God's daughter":/If *he* speak truth, she is Christ's sister.'[51] What Byron's satire draws out, in stressing the peculiarity of the gendering of carnage, sheds additional light on Wordsworth's early fascination with the pleasures and pains of war. In Book 10 of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth follows the account of his uneasy responses to Anglican victory prayers with an extended description of how, in France, 'Domestic carnage now filled all the year' (l. 329). He then goes on to describe the effects of the Terror in terms that seem to have, as Kenneth Johnston suggests, a deep, personal resonance: like William and Annette, in line 331 the 'maiden' is separated 'from the bosom of her love' and, in the following line, in anticipation of the possible fate of Annette and Caroline, 'the mother' is taken 'from the cradle of her babe'.[52] In lines 327–45 the image of the motherless child is sustained in the description of the revolutionaries

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as children of 'heinous appetites', toying with a 'windmill', which, 'at arm's length', they 'front against the blast […]/To make it whirl the faster'. Since Wordsworth was not present for the birth of his child, one wonders to what extent the poem's earlier allusions to the 'solid birth-right' of a republic 'Redeem'd according to example given/By ancient Lawgivers' (ll. 186–8) is informed by feelings of guilt and concern for ensuring the legitimacy of his progeny. Might illegitimacy, in both the familial and the political senses of the word, be responsible for conflict at all levels of society? By way of an answer to this question Wordsworth's 'Thanksgiving Ode' contends the illegitimate child is, nevertheless, a daughter of God and that when viewed from a providential perspective the devastation she wreaks upon on the world may be understood as the 'working out' of 'a pure intent' (l. 280).

The connections between marriage, restoration, and peace that the ode's echoes of the *Epithalamion* facilitate have, of course, their personal dimensions. Eric C. Walker has speculated that Wordsworth, in alluding to Spenser's poem, may well have wished to tacitly acknowledge the recent wedding of Caroline Wordsworth-Vallon. Born in December 1792, on the cusp of hostilities between Britain and France, Caroline could well have figured in the poet's mind as an emblem of domestic discord, one that extended to the division between Britain and France.[53] Despite the fact that Wordsworth failed to attend his daughter's wedding (echoes here of the failed act of union with Annette) the marriage that took place on 28 February 1816 might have appeared as symbolic confirmation that the traumatic breaks and missed encounters of 1792–3 had at last been healed. When, in 1820, some years after peace was concluded with France, the Wordsworths at last made their journey to France, reuniting father and child, and the never-to-have-been husband and wife, might there have been a moment in which Wordsworth looked on his daughter, now herself a wife and mother, as at once the bearer of conflict *and* as a principle of restitution? In the sonnet 'After Visiting the Field of Waterloo', written in the same year, the poet announces: 'We felt as Men should feel,/With such vast hoards of hidden carnage near,/And horror breathing from the silent ground' (ll. 12–14).[54] Here, Wordsworth appears to compensate for his previous unfeeling response to the carnage of Waterloo. But there is, I think, a deeper resonance to the poet's sobering response to the gross matter of war. As noted previously, in 1793 Wordsworth experienced 'a conflict of sensations' (*Prelude* Book X, l. 265) as church congregations uttered prayers for the vanquishing of a nation that once had offered the promise of liberty, fraternity, and equality. As the friend of a Girondist,

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and as the lover of a royalist, the returnee 'felt/The ravage of this unnatural strife' (ll. 249–50) as a form of internal warfare, crossing the boundaries between revolution and legitimacy, loyalty to the cause and loyalty to the nation. Amidst this whirlwind of feelings, Wordsworth remembers how he 'Exulted in the triumph' of his soul 'When Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown' (ll. 260–1). When, twenty-two years later, the poet made his visit to the scene of the French Revolution's defeat, the encounter with the ground that literally blurred the boundaries between bodies, nations, and ideologies no doubt provoked a memory of these earlier, treasonous affects. But in addition to addressing feelings of 'Guilt' at having once gloried in the spectacle of war, when these lines are read in light of the Horatian ascription of violence to carnal desire (*Nam fuit ante Helenam cunnus taeterrima belli causa*) it is possible that Wordsworth speaks no less of the 'Shame' (ll. 127) issuing from acts of love.[55]

In that same year, Wordsworth returned to 'Laodamia', intending to revise that poem's troublesome conclusion. In the first printed version of the poem, Laodamia, thwarted in her efforts to detain the shade of her departed warrior husband, is 'Delivered from the galling yoke of time/ And these frail elements to gather flowers/Of blissful quiet mid unfading bowers' (ll. 161–3).[56] Urging readers to judge 'gently' of one 'who so deeply loved' (l. 158), the poem was altered in 1820 to preclude the exercise of 'weak pity' for one who had loved 'in reason's spite', leaving the widow 'doomed to wander in a grosser clime,/Apart from happy Ghosts'. As recounted by Benjamin Robert Haydon, who was party to a reading of the poem following Wordsworth's return from the Continent, the alteration was prompted by Mary who persuaded her husband that Laodamia 'had too *lenient a fate* for loving her Husband *so absurdly*'.[57] We may speculate on the extent to which Mary's 'petition' was driven by feelings aroused by the no doubt awkward encounter with Annette Vallon just a few weeks before. Did the fate of *that* abandoned woman rekindle thoughts of how love should submit to duty in times of war? If so, what are we to make of Mary's response to the reading of the poem? According to Haydon while Wordsworth repeated the verse in 'his chaunting tone, his wife sat by the Fire quite abstracted, moaning out the burthen of the line, like a distant echo. I never saw such a complete instance of devotion, of adoration'.[58] Satisfaction may be found in self-abnegation, and there is a sense in which Mary's moans speak at once of the burden of pleasure as well as the burden of suffering, but the inarticulacy echoes too the inability of the poem to resolve its feelings towards the woman who, out of desire for her husband, seeks his restoration. If, in 1820, Laodamia is roundly condemned

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for her failure to love as a woman should love during war, the verse yet retains a shadow of sympathy for those who cannot submit wholly to the silencing of desire. Something of that lament for rebellious human will survives in the poem's closing image of the 'spiry trees' growing from the warrior's tomb, which, 'when such stature they had gained/That Ilium's walls were subject to their view,/The trees' tall summits wither'd at the sight;/A constant interchange of growth and blight!' (ll. 171–3). In Pliny's *Natural History*, from which the account derives, the long-lived trees testify to Protesilaus's bitterness towards his fate, a manifestation of discontent at odds with the ascription of selfless devotion to a higher cause. In Wordsworth's poem they serve too as a reminder of the gulf between natural life and the 'unfading bowers' of eternity and as a figure for the love that persists in reason's spite.

The conflict between natural impulses and higher reason is sustained in 'Dion', a poem that shares with 'Laodamia' an origin in classical literature and complements that poem's interest in the relationship between *oikos* and *polis*. Furthering the paradox that the home, in order to be preserved, must be sacrificed on the altar of service to the state, Dion, the liberator of Sicily and student of Plato, is presented in Wordsworth's poem as aloof from sexual yearning and, at the same time, as curiously transgendered. Echoing the poem's beautiful opening description of a swan, gliding in luminescent splendour 'without visible Mate/Or Rival save the Queen of night' (ll. 16–17), 'Long-exil'd Dion' (l. 42) marches at the head of his triumphant army in 'still magnificence' (l. 23).[59] The image of heroic self-sufficiency is overshadowed, however, by intimations of domestic division. As Eric Walker observes, in Plutarch's *Lives* rumours abound that Dion 'liked not his marriage, and coulde not live quietlie with his wife', thus highlighting the 'incommensurability of marriage and the very peace it is taken to signify'.[60] Wordsworth, as if in recognition of this incommensurability, omits the scene of loving reunion that for Plutarch at least works partially to affirm the restoration of peace after war, preferring instead to consolidate the vision of Dion's swan-like, solipsistic austerity. Yet, as the poem goes on to affirm, the equation of peace and conjugality is not so much denied as transferred to another register. With no wife to greet him, Dion himself takes on the role of the bride as, 'crown'd with flowers of Sicily/And in a white, far-beaming, corslet clad' (ll. 43–4), the military procession is transformed into an event not a million miles away from the vision of happy espousal underwriting the 'Thanksgiving Ode'. Thus, married to the state, Dion through 'rites divine' (l. 53) is raised to the level of a 'very Deity' (l. 60). There is, perhaps, in a yet unwritten version

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of 'Dion' the potential for peace to be reimagined not as the gender-normative union of man and woman but as a fluid, or queered, state of perpetual self-invention. But in the poem that is to hand, the depiction of the warrior-hero as the virginal bride resonates only to the extent that it signifies, in Keatsian fashion, a mode of unravished self-government.

In its published form the poem proceeds to temper the image of pious autonomy by casting Dion as a leader whose 'self-sufficing solitude' is matched by 'majestic lowliness' (ll. 32–3), but the source material, which represents the hero as 'a sower man' beset by 'a certain hawtiness of mind and severitie', vies with this description. Moreover, as the poem goes on to reveal, the softening influence of Platonism has failed to prevent Dion from ordering the assassination of his rival Heraclides. From hereon the verse descends into nightmare as, manifested in the form of a vengeful phantom, Dion is confronted by the memory of his crimes. Presented as the obverse of Dion's ethereal beauty, the 'hideous' (l. 87) spectre, dressed in 'woman's garb' (l. 88), takes shape in the poem as a parodic representation of female domestic virtue, her compulsive sweeping a cipher for the failure of peace to eradicate the taint of bloodshed. With 'angry perturbations,—and that look/Which no philosophy can brook!' (ll. 119–20), Dion's dream of glory is brought to earth, providing the lesson that God defends only the statesman 'Whose means are fair and spotless as his ends' (l. 143). The poem's homiletic ending cannot, however, quite subdue the unsettling vision on which it is founded. The marriage that would bring an end to war is shown in 'Dion' to be fractured, jeopardised by the failure of the warrior-leader to prevent the return of the excluded feminine other as an avenging ghost. As a line from the unrevised fair copy confirms, in love after war 'Peace, even Peace herself, is fugitive' (l. 36).

Ceaseless Fire

An extract from a letter written by Dorothy Wordsworth in January 1817 provides ample proof of the extent to which the Wordsworths had become aware of the material hardships facing ordinary people in the aftermath of war. From her window in Halifax (Dorothy had been staying with the Rawsons since October 1816), she reflects on the extent to which the decline in manufacturing has affected the poor: 'Things cannot go on in this way. For a time whole streets—men, women and children may be kept alive by public charity; but the consequence will be awful, if nothing can be manufactured in these places where such numbers of people have been gathered together'. The sight of such distress brings to mind an

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observation of the Wanderer: 'I see "many rich sink down as in a dream among the poor"'.[61] Looking back on the deprivations of the 1790s the Wanderer looks forward no less to the socio-economic precarity of the late 1810s, deepening the sense in which, for rich and poor alike, war is experienced as the unexceptional condition of everyday life. In Chapter 5, through a reading of the River Duddon sonnets in relation to Peterloo, I will resume this discussion of Wordsworth's response to the maintenance of hostilities in post-war society, but to conclude this chapter I want to consider a final ode from the Thanksgiving collection.

Overlooked in critical accounts of the volume, 'Who rises on the banks of Seine' straddles the line in Wordsworth's classificatory system between Imagination and Liberty. Assigned to the former category in 1820 before being moved to the latter in 1827, the ode was originally placed as the penultimate poem of the Thanksgiving volume. What is interesting about the poem is how it utilises the resources of the irregular ode – variable rhyme and stress patterns, sudden turns and rapidly shifting imagery – to mimic the protean course of the French Revolution and the irresolution of its opponents. In its opening movement the Revolution is personified as a beguiling enchantress, promising peace, love, and joy to those attracted by the shelter of her 'wide-spread wings' (l. 4). By line 5, however, the abrupt movement from pentameter to trimeter, combined with the insertion of the qualifier 'But' and the enervating effects of the repeated present participles ('But they are ever playing,/And twinkling in the light,—/And if a breeze be straying,/That breeze she will invite', ll. 5–8), exposes the Revolution as a creature of fancy, a Miltonic temptress leading men astray. The effect of mass, hypnotic delusion is carried over into lines 9–11 through an anaphoric sequence of introductory conjunctions and simple present tense verbs ('And stands on tiptoe […]/And calls a look of love […]/And spreads her arms', ll. 9–11), which cause the assembled principalities to 'melt' (l. 13). Transformed by the end of the sequence into an armoured dragon, the Revolution poses a threat to the integrity of a series of morally charged abstract nouns. As Justice, Faith, and Hope seem to diminish in the face of her polluted sovereignty (ll. 33–6), history itself appears to succumb to the effects of the poem's narcotic repetition as shame following shame and woe supplanting woe become 'the only change that time can show' (ll. 39–40). Picking up on the mood of futility conveyed by these lines, the poet laments 'How long shall vengeance sleep? Ye patient Heavens, how long?' (l. 41), only to counter this complaint with the fierce denunciation of 'Nations wanting virtue to be strong' and 'daring not to feel the majesty of right!' (ll. 44–5).

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By the poem's midpoint the mood of despair at the cyclical insufficiency of the global resistance to France appears so pervasive as to preclude even the possibility of victory. Between lines 46 and 60 the desire of the nations to seek for external aid, whether from 'Saints above' (l. 52) or from quasi-pagan 'wishes' (l. 49), is condemned as the source of a kind of spiritual ennui. At this point, having exhausted the observance of national sloth and languor in the face of manifest evil, one might expect the ode to move into a final phase of righteous indignation before a final assertion of the triumph of the just and the true. However, what Wordsworth offers up by way of a conclusion to the poem falls significantly short of this expectation. Opening with a refutation of the power of the 'Supreme Disposer' (l. 61), Napoleon, to overturn the rule of law and justice held as a governing principle 'since the first framing of societies' (l. 64), the endorsement of the social contract that would defend mankind from 'the power of wrong' (l. 68) feels somewhat half-hearted. By far the most persuasive aspect of the ode is its preceding account of how nations succumb to the temptations of secular redemption and then, through failing to offer a coherent counter-response to that temptation, give way to despair. Placed before 'Elegiac Verses', 'Who rises on the banks of Seine' could be read as a contrivance of defeatism prior to that concluding poem's affirmative response. Yet in many ways it is the former poem that best captures the mood of social and political instability that prevailed in Britain following Napoleon's defeat. Mapping the rapid turns of post-war elevation and inertia onto its erratic rhetorical patterning and desultory conclusion, the ode perhaps served more fittingly than the 'Thanksgiving Ode' as a poem that spoke to and of the times.

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