A 'hideous rout': Wordsworth's 'Thanksgiving Ode' in Context

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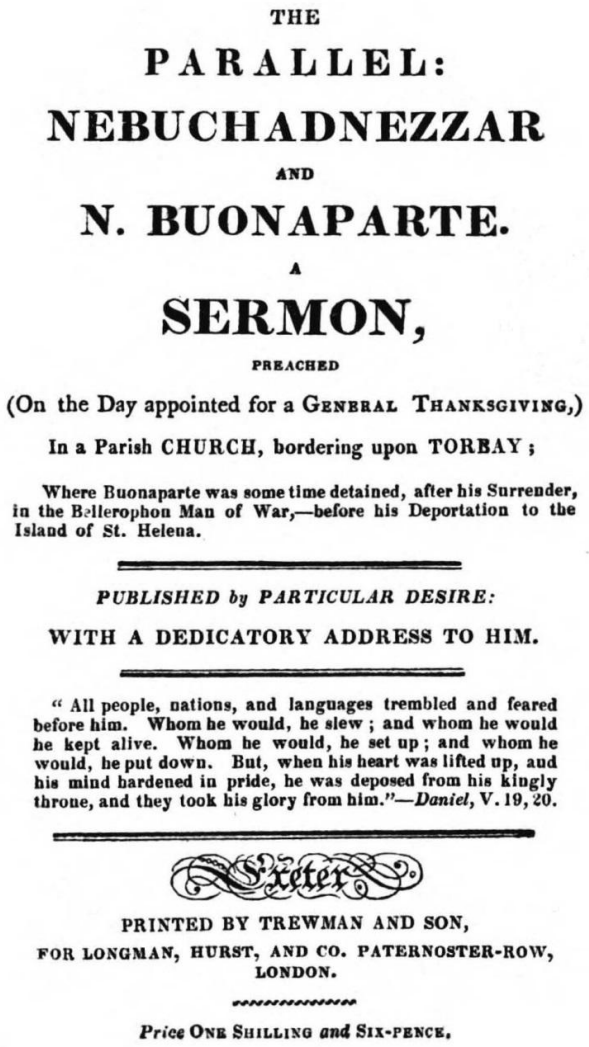

THE

PARALLEL:

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

AND

N. BUONAPARTE.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED

(On the Day appointed for a GENERAL THANKSGIVING,)

In a Parish CHURCH, bordering upon TORBAY;

Where Buonaparte was some time detained, after his Surrender, in the Bellerophon Man of War,—before his Deportation to the Island of St. Helena.

PUBLISHED by PARTICULAR DESIRE:

WITH A DEDICATORY ADDRESS TO HIM.

"All people, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he slew; and whom he would he kept alive. Whom he would, he set up; and whom he would, he put down. But, when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him."—*Daniel*, V. 19, 20.

Exeter

PRINTED BY TREWMAN AND SON,

FOR LONGMAN, HURST, AND CO. PATERNOSTER-ROW, LONDON.

Price ONE SHILLING *and* SIX-PENCE.

Whom he would, he slew; and whom he would, he kept alive. Whom he would, he set up; and whom he would, he put down. But, when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Daniel, 5. 20/21.

DANIEL'S 'HE' IS NEBUCHADNEZZAR, but 'Who does not almost suppose', the Rev. Luke Booker asked his Devon congregation when preaching on this text on Thanksgiving Day, 'that we are speaking of a Man, and of Transactions, in recent days?'. 'In yonder spacious bay' he went on, Napoleon

'was detain'd a prisoner', sheltered by a navy he had designed to destroy, and attracting numerous admirers. So, Booker asks:

> When ye viewed the vanquished Tyrant imprisoned upon the Deep, did ye view him with the eye of empty curiosity?—Or did ye look upon him as an extraordinary Being,—out of the common course of Nature, that should fill your minds with Horror at this Character, and with grateful sentiments for vast *Deliverances* from his power?[1]

'Grateful sentiments for … vast deliverances' is the keynote of all sermons on 18 January 1816, as of Wordsworth's contiguous meditation, and their authors drew parallels between the backslidings of God's ancient people (the Israelites) and those of God's new people (the English). In such parallels—the Bible being a typological guide to history—Napoleon appears as an avatar of Nebuchadnezzar, or Sennacherib, or indeed as a Pharaoh—that is, as God's chosen instrument for punishing an ungrateful people.

In one sonnet in his *Thanksgiving Ode* volume—published, like Booker's sermon, by Longman's of Paternoster Row—Wordsworth, too, meditates on the difficulty of treating the meaning of history aright. To the bard 'whose soul is meek as dawning day', he writes, Waterloo is a 'hideous rout', yet it is welcomed by a choric shout of 'blest Angels'. Such conjunction of the divinely ordained yet humanly insupportable, is comprehensible only to those conversant with 'holy fear' and 'trained to judgments righteously severe', who read history as a record of 'Almighty sway'. Learning to do so, is the burden, even the drama, of Wordsworth's 'Ode. THE MORNING OF THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A GENERAL THANKSGIVING. JANUARY 18, 1816'.

Days of Thanksgiving

The tradition of Days of Thanksgiving went back at least to Queen Elizabeth and the Armada. In 1707 there was a General Thanksgiving for 'the happy union of England and Scotland'); and another in 1746 ('for the suppression of the late unnatural rebellion' the Jacobite rising). There was one in 1789 for George II's 'happy recovery' from the first of his periods of insanity.[2] In wartime, days of General Thanksgiving and Days of Fast and Humiliation alternated according to news from the front. There were Thanksgivings for the Battle of the Nile (1798), the peace of Amiens (1802), and Trafalgar (1805).

In February 1812, though, George Eyre & Andrew Strahan, printers to His Majesty, distributed around the kingdom 'A Form of Prayer … for a General FAST and Humiliation before Almighty God, to be observed in the most

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[1] Luke Booker, *The Parallel: Nebuchadnezzar and N Bonaparte*. For the source, see above. This paper was prepared for a collection essays in celebration of Robert Langbaum, to whom with great affection, I dedicate it now.

[2] In February 1789, the Regency Bill, authorising the Prince of Wales to act as regent, was introduced and passed in the House of Commons, but before the House of Lords could pass the bill, George III recovered – thus saving the ministry of William Pitt.

devout and solemn Manner, by sending up our Prayer and Supplications to the Divine Majesty', with a triple objective:

> *For obtaining Pardon of our Sins, and for averting those heavy Judgments which our manifold provocations have most justly deserved; and imploring His Blessing and Assistance on the Arms of his Majesty by Sea and Land.*

The prayers were efficacious. In the first half of 1812, Wellington secured victories in Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz and Salamanca, and on 25 July 1813 there was issued 'A Form of Prayer and Thanksgiving to Almighty God; for the repeated successes obtained over the French Army in Spain by the Allied forces under the command of the Most Honourable Arthur, Marquess of Wellington; and especially for the signal Victory obtained on the 21st Day of June, in the Neighbourhood of Vittoria'.[3] On 3 July, the Spanish army of Enrique José O'Donnell took Pancorbo, and the allies reached the Pyrenees that month. In 1814 there was a premature Thanksgiving for the end of the war—Napoleon having been banished to Elba after the Battle of Toulouse. Another on 2 July 1815 marked the victory of Wellington and Blücher at Waterloo, and once it became clear that this really *was* the end, a second order of service, on 18 January 1816, giving thanks to God for 'putting an End to the War in which we were engaged against France'.

As Mary Favret pointed out in *Grasmere 2011* the last day of General Fast and Humiliation was in 1857 at the start of the Indian Mutiny.[4] Likewise, the last Day of General Thanksgiving was on 1 May 1859—for the 'success granted to our arms in India'. The discontinuance of the tradition a century and a half ago (perhaps from misgivings about making God responsible for the bloody consolidation of the British Raj) may be why nobody who has written on the 'Thanksgiving Ode', even those who have recognized its religious discourse, has seen fit to place it in that specific context.

Days of General Thanksgiving and those of Fast and Humiliation sound radically polarised. In practice they overlap. Here is the central prayer from services conducted on 18 January 1816 throughout England and Wales:

> *In the Excellency of Thy Strength, Thou hast again overthrown a wicked and rebellious People, and restored to Europe, Peace, Order and Security.*
>
> *Give us grace O God! Rightly to understand these thy inestimable blessings, and to use them, as the means of purifying our hearts from every evil and corrupt affection; from national pride, inordinate ambition, bitter animosity, and relentless hatred. Let the remembrance of*

[3] This Anglo-Spanish-Portuguese victory also occasioned Beethoven's worst and most triumphalist composition, his 'Battle Symphony' for piano and two cannon.

[4] Mary A. Favret, 'The General Fast and Humiliation', in *Grasmere, 2011: Selected Papers from the Wordsworth Summer Conference* (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2011) 128–50.

> *past injuries be blotted out by mutual good offices; let the miseries of War be forgotten in the charities of reconciliation; and if it may be, o God! Let the spirit of Peace and good will, and brotherly love prevail over the great Family of Christian Nations, now and for ever.*

The Royal provenance of the order of service is detectable in the references to 'a rebellious People' and the restoration of 'Order and Security', but the prayer for purification of motive and for the charities of reconciliation are surprisingly millennial. So indeed, is Wordsworth's own Thanksgiving volume, in which three of its longer poems—two further odes and the Elegiac Verses—employ quasi-Shelleyan celestial machinery. These poems lament the spirit of conquest, and celebrate the binding of discord and the inauguration of global peace, as envisaged in the Thanksgiving prayers. Wordsworth's sonnet on visiting Waterloo four years later also imagines a winged goddess hovering above the 'far-famed spot' though what one remembers of this poem is its craving for absent 'meanings', and its moving confession of what Wordsworth, Mary and Dorothy felt on the occasion. Its last three lines

> we felt as Men *should* feel,
> With such vast hoards of hidden carnage near,
> And horror breathing from the silent ground![5]

are surely among the best written on the 'hideous rout' of Waterloo.

'The hymn of a high and well-tuned soul'

Wordsworth's *Advertisement* to his 1816 volume is almost as troubled as the poem itself. He half apologises for averting his eyes from 'the present distresses under which this kingdom labours' yet feels constrained to celebrate what he perceives to be a great 'moral triumph'—sufficient to atone for the moral turpitude of the *Convention of Cintra*. Arguing for the cultivation of military virtues, Wordsworth nonetheless expresses relief that Britain relies chiefly on 'a species of armed force [the navy] from which her own liberties have nothing to fear'. Liberties are always threatened by large standing armies, as in France, where Napoleon's power base, from his initial coup d'état in 1799 to the 'hundred days' of 1815, was his army. Elsewhere Wordsworth prays 'as a Patriot' that Britain should never be without enemies powerful enough to keep her honest—as it were—and to discourage imperial adventures.[6]

The Ode's greatest admirer was John Scott, editor of *The Champion*, who wrote to Wordsworth:

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[5] *The Poems of William Wordsworth: Collected Reading Texts from the Cornell Prelude*, ed. Jared Curtis, 3 vols (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2009), 3: 429. This edn hereafter cited as *CWRT* and volume number.

[6] See Wordsworth's critique of the expansionism implicit in Captain Pasley's work on military policy (*MY* 2.1,478–2): especially 'Woe be to that country whose military power is irresistible! I deprecate such an event for Great Britain scarcely less than for any other Land'. If England's maritime supremacy were matched by supremacy on land 'the extinction of all that it previously contained of good and great would soon follow' (480).

> I read your Ode with delight,—and acknowledge its gift from the author, with a truly proud pleasure.… It is the hymn of a high & well-tuned soul, the poetic harmonies of which have been called into play by the ardour of patriotic affections.… other Poets who have taken Waterloo for their theme have totally failed: a gentleman wrote favourably of Mr Southey's Pilgrimage in The Champion but I confess it appears to me poor.[7]

The poem has a tone, Scott also said, that is 'professedly contemplative and abstracted'. This, apart from the theological thrust of the poem, is in itself surprising when one thinks of how Dorothy Wordsworth had watched the close of the war and the conduct of the Allies. She wrote thus to Catherine Clarkson on 28 June 1815 about the abdication of Napoleon:

> I do not like the word abdication, What right has he to abdicate? or to have a word to say in the business? I am only afraid that the armies have stopped too soon, as they did before. … I confess I dare not hope that matters will not again be mismanaged. The particulars of the battle of the 18th are dreadful. The joy of victory is indeed an awful thing, and I had no patience with the tinkling of our Ambleside bells upon the occasion; nor with the Prince Regents message—recommending remuneration of the Duke of Wellington instead of mourning the gallant Duke of Brunswick. (*MY*, 2: 242)

Dorothy snubbed Wellington again on 15 August: 'Would that all the English had Prussian hearts and that our Generals and Councillors had the will of Blucher. Then we should not have seen the Jacobins lift up their audacious heads' (*MY*, 2: 244). In April she had written to Catherine Clarkson in an especially pugnacious spirit: 'God grant that if [the Allies] have once again the Sword and the Victory in their hands no puny relentings of mercy may stop the slaughter till the Tyrant is taken and his wicked followers completely subdued.'

Compared with these bloodthirsty sentiments, William's poem is quietly self-interrogative: its keynote—as Hazlitt, Shelley and Byron all failed to notice—is the meditative 'say not that we have vanquished—but that we survive' (*PW* 3.158). Wordsworth's stance is perhaps that of Francis in *The White Doe*: 'Thousands see, and One / With unparticipated gaze'—and it is surely significant that this, Wordsworth's only real 'war poem', while it contributes to the romance genre popularised by Southey and Scott, takes for its hero and heroine a *pacifist* brother and sister. Read most often as a piece of strident pro-war rhetoric, repellent to war-weary readers at the time and to most of its few readers since, the Thanksgiving Ode becomes much more interesting if one starts from a recognition that while parts of the poem verge on the declamatory, its presiding tone is not that of public rhetoric, still less a

[7] Dove Cottage: DC WLMS a / Scott, John / 3, 29 May 1816, my italics.

celebration of a battle whose 'particulars', as Dorothy noted, were 'dreadful', but that of private meditation.

Its principle action is an account of a poet, in his garden, aligning himself with the ecclesiastical discipline of thanksgiving and, at its close, listening to the church bells summoning him to St Oswald's. However far the ode may be from the poetry of 1798 and 1800 it is still by the dramatic poet whose work looms so large in Robert Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience*, and it is quite as capable of surprise and development if it is read for its inwardness and introspection—its confession. It is, in effect, Wordsworth's primary act of reconciliation with the Church in England, whose history he would soon celebrate in the 102 *Ecclesiastical Sketches* published in 1822.

Wordsworth's Compeers

Neither Wordsworth's poem nor his volume have much in common with the poetic 'celebrations' of Waterloo, such as Scott's *The Field of Waterloo*, or Southey's interminable *Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo*. The one war poet in whose work one might find something Wordsworthian is Felicia Hemans, whose twin poems, *England and Spain,* and *War and Peace* (both written in 1808, aged 14) share Wordsworth's basic argument: the war was a necessary prelude to an honourable and lasting peace. Wordsworth's compeers on the morning of 18 January 1816 were not the poets, but numerous ecclesiastics, five of whom (whose sermons survive) I will briefly introduce.

First, the one with whom I began, the Reverend Luke Booker, LL.D, F.R.L.S. (1762–1837), Vicar of St Thomas's Dudley**,** and Chaplain to George IV. An early contributor to the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, his political stance was conservative (one sermon offers '*an historical review of providential interpositions in favour of the British Empire*' and another pamphlet is '*An address to the common people, &c. on the subject of riots*). His poems include *Malvern, a descriptive and historical poem* (1798); it is no 'Tintern Abbey', but it shares the eloquence of his sermon. Next**,** the Bishop of London, William Howley (1766–1848).[8] Howley presided over the deposit in the Royal Chapel of the eagles taken at Waterloo (they were carried to the altar by guardsmen wounded in the battle). A high churchman, he became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1828, crowned William IV in 1830, and entertained Wordsworth at least twice in the 1830s (Moorman, *LY*, 468, 530). His daughter Mary Ann became Lady Beaumont by marrying Sir George Beaumont's successor to the baronetcy.

Third, a Catholic polemicist, John Milner (1752–1826), Vicar Apostolic in the Midland District from 1803 to 1826, who began his ministry in Winchester in 1779. Milner's pamphlets on Catholic emancipation, were kept in print throughout the 19th century. His works on ecclesiastical architecture and

[8] William Howley, *A Sermon Preached on Thursday January 18, 1816, being the Day appointed for a General Thanksgiving*. Published by command of H. R. H. the Duke of York. London, 1816.

Catholic revival were vital influences on one Augustus Welby Pugin.[9] Milner's sermon falls into two parts: half is on the dangers faced by his auditors both as British subjects and as Catholics; half is a pugnacious argument—well larded with terms of opprobrium for the ignorance and hypocrisy of his opponents—for Catholic emancipation. Milner views the war as fought to end persecution of the church, especially the clergy (on whose travails see, *inter alia*, James Gillray and Charlotte Smith).[10]

Fourth, a Scottish Canadian, John Bethune (1791–1872), recently ordained, and later Dean of Montreal. His father, a military chaplain and founder of the Presbyterian church in Canada, was born on the Isle of Skye, where *his* grandfather was involved in the escape of Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1746 (the family tree includes the Jacobite heroine Flora McDonald). The younger Bethune fought in the war of 1812 and his father, a loyalist in the War of Independence, was captured at the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge in February 1776.[11] Fifth, and perhaps most interestingly, the Rev Thomas Jervis (1748–1833), a Unitarian.[12] Educated for the ministry in London, partly by Helen Maria Williams's mentor, Andrew Kippis, Jervis was also a protégé of Richard Price, and an associate in the 1780s of Joseph Priestley. In 1808, having ministered in Southwark since 1783, he was adopted by the Unitarian congregation at Mill Hill, Leeds. His stance is exactly what one might expect of a Unitarian, and in many respects, of Wordsworth. Messrs Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, who published Booker, Wordsworth and Jervis, may well have felt that they belonged in the same stable. My commentary on the poem will be punctuated by contributions from these five clergymen, whose works might support a much subtler discrimination of religious positions than I offer here.

'Not unrejoiced I see thee climb the sky'

Wordsworth's most notorious poem opens with a thirty-five-line address, an 'elaborate aubade', Eric Walker has called it,[13] to the slowly climbing sun:

> Hail, universal Source of pure delight!
>
> …—Well does thine aspect usher in this Day;
> As aptly suits therewith that timid pace,

[9] See Rosemary Hill, *God's Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain* (Penguin Books, 2008), 141, 547 nn.

[10] John Milner, *A Discourse delivered in the Roman Catholic Chapel of St Chad, Birmingham, on January 18th 1816, being the Day appointed for a General Thanksgiving for the Peace*. Birmingham, 1816.

[11] Dr John Bethune [Rector of Augusta], *A Sermon preached at Brockville, Upper Canada on the 18th day of June 1816, being a Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for his great goodness in putting an end to the war in which were engaged against France*, Montreal, 1816. Is 'June' a misprint? In January 1816 Montreal was frozen.

[12] Thomas Jervis, *God the Author of Peace: a Sermon preached in the Dissenting Chapel at Mill-Hill, Leeds, on Thursday, January 18, MDCCCXVI, being the day appointed for a Public Thanksgiving on the Conclusion of a General Peace*. London: Longman Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1816.

[13] Eric C. Walker, 'Marriage and the end of War', *Marriage, Writing and Romanticism* (Stanford University Press, 2009) 78.

Framed in subjection to the chains
That bind thee to the path which God ordains
That thou shalt trace,
Till, with the heavens and earth, thou pass away!

…Once more, heart-cheering Sun, I bid thee hail!
Bright be thy course to-day, *let not this promise fail!*[14]

Thomas Jervis, remarking to his congregation on 'How small a portion of the life of the oldest person in this assembly has been cheered by the sun-shine of peace!' alerts one to the symbolic mode of this aubade. Jervis also uses the same metaphor of the impartial sun. But the entire opening paragraph of the poem is shot through with echoes of war: the haughty towers; the dazzled sight of those who gaze on tyrants; the 'utter stillness' of those 'frosty plains' hinting at the retreat from Moscow (to which two poems in the volume are devoted); the 'storms gone by', and above all, the unstable peace in 1814: 'Let not this promise fail'. So 'Not *un*rejoiced' is more exact than it seems. A second paragraph (ll. 36–56) recapitulates the aubade's deeper theme more pointedly, contrasting human waywardness with celestial laws ('the chains / That bid thee to the path that God ordains')—echoing the Ode to Duty's 'Thou dost preserve the Stars from wrong'—and insisting that our hope and refuge lies 'deeper far / Than aught dependant on the fickle skies.'

Lines 57 to 91 open the temporal topic, and promptly engage in multiple self-corrections. The first such self-correction is instantaneous:

Have we not conquered?—by the vengeful sword?
Ah no, by dint of magnanimity;

magnanimity sustained 'Along a track of most unnatural years'. The second correction is a characteristically Wordsworthian feint, whereby the incautious reader is invited to expect a eulogy to Wellington and doesn't get one:[15]

Who to the murmurs of an earthly string
Of Britain's acts would sing
He with enraptured voice will tell
Of One whose spirit no reverse could quell;
Of One that mid the failing never failed:

…Firm as a rock in stationary fight;
In motion rapid as the lightning's gleam;
Fierce as a flood-gate bursting in the night …
(67–71, 77–9)

[14] *CWRT*, 3: 82–92, lines 1–35. I cite the original and most daunting text as published in 1816. Wordsworth later divided it in two, and numbered the stanzas, creating breathing spaces, and indeed making the poem look much more like the *Intimations* Ode.

[15] See Eric C. Walker on Wordsworth's 'antonomastic rhetoric', his refusal to name Wellington, in 'Wordsworth, Wellington and Myth', in *History and Myth*, ed Stephen Berhrendt (Wayne State University Press, 1990), 100-15.

The lines pastiche recent poetic celebrations of Wellington (all except the great commander's clichéd 'eagle eye', which imperious organ is celebrated in numerous war poems from Croker's *Battle of Talavera* to Southey's *A Poet's Pilgrimage*) but the 'One' is twice identified as Britain, and the tell-tale pronoun, when it arrives, is feminine:

> Woe, woe to all that face *her* in the field!
> Appalled *she* may not be, and cannot yield. (81–2)

The lines are rather more than pastiche: the entire passage is ironized by the qualification with which it begins: a singer to a merely 'earthly string' might indeed thump the proverbial tub in such an 'enraptured voice', but to thump one's tub (the poem firmly insists) is to miss the point entirely.[16] In a version of Milton's 'so they relate, erring' tactic, Wordsworth promptly undoes this derring-do, and a new paragraph critiques his own pastiche:

> And thus is missed the sole true glory
> That can belong to human story!
> At which *they* only shall arrive
> Who through the abyss of weakness dive:
> The very humblest are too proud of heart:
> And one brief day is rightly set apart
> *To Him who lifteth up and layeth low;*
> For that Almighty God to whom we owe,
> Say not that we have vanquished—but that we survive.
> (83–91)

Relentlessly, the poem strips away the false, in search of what must be the spiritual focus of this 'brief day' of Thanksgiving. Line 89 (my italics) alludes to Luke Booker's text from Daniel, 5:20. Note also the performative syntactical rupture between lines 90 and 91: 'to whom we owe' what exactly? The verb promises a direct object, but none arrives. We simply owe. And with that thought, we arrive at the thesis of the poem: 'Say not that we have vanquished—but that we survive'.

The muted, non-celebratory celebration, by a man 'not *un*rejoiced', is sustained in the paragraphs that follow (92–124): here two strong points unfold. First, that certainly 'Who sees, and feels, must weep' at 'Wide-wasted regions—cities wrapped in flame', but '*the foundation of our nature shakes*' at warfare waged, as Napoleon's was, against 'the life of virtue in mankind'. Second, a lament for years of enfeebled British and allied policy which allowed the 'fatal web' of tyranny to extend its reach. The future Archbishop agreed: what prolonged the war, in William Howley's view, was 'corrupt policy on the

[16] As Simon Bainbridge put it, 'Wordsworth abruptly and unexpectedly discredits … the whole 'heroic', action-based, approach to Waterloo' *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) 173. For a thorough treatment of that 'action-based' tradition see Bainbridge's *British Poetry of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

part of statesmen, licentious cruelty on the part of soldiers, or general avarice'. (When Wordsworth and Howley struck up a friendship in the 1830s it was not solely on the basis of antipathy to reform.) Wordsworth, in 1816, still blamed the moral failure that he began analysing in his 'Peace of Amiens' sonnets, developed in *Concerning the Convention of Cintra*, and now summarised pithily as the government's—and the alllies'—'crouching purpose' and 'distracted will'.

With lines 125-62 the poem's pained retrospect concludes. It does so in a manner that is clearly autobiographical as well as public, making no explicit distinction between personal historical guilts (those dealt with in Books 9–11 of *The Prelude*) and national ones:

> No more—the guilt is banished,
> And with the Guilt the Shame is fled,
> And with the Guilt and Shame the Woe hath vanished,
> Shaking the dust and ashes from her head!
> —No more, these lingerings of distress
> Sully the limpid stream of thankfulness. (125–30)

'Thankfulness' is the issue, the spiritual condition to be aimed at on this day of reconciliation, a day for 'sacred pleasures'. Those pleasures include the warm glow of a non-chauvinistic patriotism as expressed in the Iberian and the Tyrolean sonnets—the patriotism that matures from childhood dreams of chivalry (139), through an association of his country with the evening star (line 147's 'celestial sign' looks back to the first of the Sonnets to Liberty), to advocacy of Risorgimento in Italy, liberation in Poland, nationhood in Germany, and of course a huge investment in the liberties of Portugal and Spain.[17]

It was Europe, the poem insists, that resolved to be free—' All States have glorified themselves' (157)—even if, in an extraordinary allusion to the Book of Isaiah,

> To Thee [Britain] the *exterminating sword* is given.
> Dread mark of approbation, justly gained!
> Exalted office, worthily sustained! (160–2)

This alarming trope (in Wordsworth's italics) is of great longevity but its original is surely that wielded by the Angel of the Lord at the raising of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem:

> 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

[17] Wellington had to wait until 1845 to receive the kind of tribute Wordsworth bestowed on Palafox, brave Schill, and Andreas Hofer.

> in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead.[18]

How does one 'justly gain' the 'exterminating sword', and how 'worthily sustain' the office of sword-bearer? Perhaps, in both cases, by exemplary restraint. Even Napoleon, that 'Soul of Evil … from Hell let loose' (l. 94), the ruthless avatar of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, was permitted to live. Britain's (relatively) disciplined armies bought their provisions from the local peasantry rather than looting them (even those peninsula war veterans who burned the White House in 1814). Blucher's Prussians exacted vengeance, but on Wellington's arrival, Paris was magnanimously spared.

Imagination Stoops

And so Wordsworth reaches, though briefly and glancingly, the 'sublime' yet 'hideous' event. Waterloo, the claims, satiates as no prior heroic feat can do, the poetic Imagination. Though 'ne'er before content / But aye ascending … / From all that martial feats could yield / To her desires', Imagination 'stoops' to this victory.[19] She need yearn no longer, as in the Simplon Pass, for 'something evermore about to be': this battle (as Scott and Southey had not yet understood) makes all battle poems redundant. In italic spasms, Wordsworth devotes one line to the field of Waterloo, and one line to its result:

> —The shock is given—the Adversaries bleed—
> Lo, Justice triumphs! Earth is freed! (177–8)

Line 177 is Wordsworth's answer to Southey's interminable guide to the battlefield, and how he got there, and who did what where and to whom, and to Scott's attempt to treat of 'The Field of Waterloo' in a style cognate with his best-selling chivalric romances. The seven terse words of line 177 are among the twenty-three Wordsworth devoted to the battle and its 'dreadful' particulars. He speaks of 'victory sublime' and 'hideous rout' (in one sonnet), 'horror' (in another'), of those who 'bled / With medicable wounds, or found their graves / Upon the battle field' (in the ode) and of 'tens of thousands rent from off the tree / Of hopeful life' (*Elegiac Verses, February 1816*—the closing poem of the 1816 volume). War poet? Not really.

Immediately, Wordsworth makes a fanciful attempt to convey the universality of the event and the spread of the joyful news:

> It pierced the caverns of the sluggish North—
> It found no barrier on the ridge
> Of Andes—frozen gulphs became its bridge—
> The vast Pacific gladdens with the freight—

[18] Isaiah 35: 38-39)

[19] Helen Maria Williams used the same trope of French victories in 1793–4: see Richard Gravil, *Wordsworth and Helen Maria Williams; or, the Perils of Sensibility* (Penrith, Humanities-Ebooks, 2010) 37, 119.

Upon the Lakes of Asia 'tis bestowed—
The Arabian desart shapes a willing road
Across her burning breast,
For this refreshing incense from the West! (180–7)

John Milner, more prosaically, details the global impact of the Napoleonic Wars upon all of Europe, the straights of Constantinople, the plains of Syria, the sands of Egypt, several African islands, the Cape, the whole extent of India, the frozen lakes of Canada (in the War of 1812), the parched soil of Guiana, and the extremity of Paraguay. 'Who can count up the millions of human victims whom this Moloch of revolutionary war has devoured in the different quarters of the globe?' (Milner, 7–8). Ceylon, ceded to Britain in the Treaty of Amiens, might be added to this list.

But Wordsworth's focus is not on territory but on 'thankfulness' and fit 'commemoration'. Balancing the one line devoted to battle are fifty four (205–259) considering what is due both to God and to the slain. Perhaps a new 'temple' might be built ('Upon the shore of silver Thames—to greet / The peaceful guest advancing from afar'); or, if Waterloo's veterans prefer, regular festivals of commemoration should be held in Westminster Abbey 'Where their serene progenitors are laid', with inspiring music to lift the soul. He seems to ne imagining an ideal version of Remembrance Sunday:

Be it not unordained that solemn rites,
Within the circuit of those gothic walls,
Shall be performed at pregnant intervals;
Commemoration holy that unites
The living generations with the dead; (236–40)

—that recurring Wordsworthian motif derived from the creed. More simply, homage is due,

For them who bravely stood unhurt—or bled
With medicable wounds, or found their graves
Upon the battle field— (253–5)

To spend so many lines weighing up monumental possibilities seems odd, but as Philip Shaw has shown, there were vigorous arguments about the most fitting memorial. Lord Liverpool wanted a statue of England's saviour (Wellington); others a cenotaph with the names of all those who died.[20] Only Wordsworth envisages a bright new *temple*, gleaming 'like a star' beside the Thames. The witty John Milner suggests an immense, gleaming, equestrian statue on the Field of Waterloo itself, depicting the commander in chief, 'whose glory', Milner said, 'exceeds that of Henry V and the Edwards'. And who is this commander in chief? Why, the portly Prince Regent—who 'through his immortal general lopped off and seared the last neck of the

[20] Philip Shaw, *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (Palgrave 2002), 148.

tremendous Hydra in the field of Waterloo' (Milner, 17). All such possibilities, however, are shadowed and rendered hypothetical by Wordsworth's first thought: the only adequate memorial is 'Not work of hands; but trophies that may reach / To highest Heaven—the labour of the soul' (215–6).

'Yea, Carnage is thy Daughter'

And so to the part of the poem that everyone remembers:

> Nor will the God of peace and love
> Such martial service disapprove.
> He guides the Pestilence—the cloud
> Of locusts travels on his breath;
> The region that in hope was ploughed
> His drought consumes, his mildew taints with death;
> He springs the hushed Volcano's mine,
> He puts the Earthquake on her still design,… (260–7)

The thought is trite enough, Henry Crabb Robinson said (other epithets might occur to readers less attuned to Judaic thinking), but that last line 'deserves to pass into proverb'.[21]

Line 265 recalls the plate in Blake's *Europe* known as 'Mildew blighting ears of corn' which title alludes either to Amos 4:9—'I have smitten you with blasting and mildew … yet have you not returned to me, said the LORD' (it is curious psychology)—or to Pharaoh's prophetic dream of famine in Genesis 41. Blake drew nothing more beautiful, but how can blight be beautiful? Since the work of a just God must be beautiful, it is a spiritual necessity to perceive the beauty of chastisement. Thus the rhythms of the famous passage of Jeremiah (27:8), concerning God's subjection of the Israelites to Nebuchadnezzar:

> And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, 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:

So far, so biblical, but Wordsworth takes one step further:

> But thy most dreaded instrument
> In working out a pure intent
> Is Man—arrayed for mutual slaughter,—
> Yea, carnage is thy daughter. (277–82)

[21] *Henry Crabb Robinson on Book and their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley, 3 vols., Dent 1938, 1, 182.

Or, as John Bethune put it in his sermon: '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.'

But Bethune had been in arms in 1812–14. The point is made more subtly by the Bishop of London, pursuing the analogy between biblical despots and Napoleon Bonaparte as instruments of divine providence. Ancient despots, Howley says, were 'blindly impelled to the execution of the Supreme Will by [their own] barbarous violence of temper, by the wild rage of ambition, and insatiable delight in blood and rapine. In the confidence of irresistible power, they … insulted the God*, whom they unknowingly served as the ministers of wrath and justice*'. Milner argues more subtly still, interpreting Jewish myth for a modern congregation. In the late war, God has saved us from 'defeat and subjugation' using 'the natural means of prudence and valour', just as, by *miraculous* means, 'he protected his former people from the fury of Pharaoh and Sennacherib'.

Despite these precedents in ecclesiastical argument, a chorus of wrath descended on Wordsworth, from Hazlitt, Shelley, Byron, and eventually from Ruskin, perhaps for the entire sentiment, or perhaps simply for what Byron called its 'genealogy'. Wordsworth might have got away with 'Carnage is thy granddaughter' allowing for a greater human share in such transactions. Shelley's shrill lampoon in *Peter Bell the Third* (it gets shriller still after this famous stanza) reads:

> 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!'

So in 1843 Wordsworth caved in, reducing four brave lines to two rather limp ones: 'But Man is thy most awful instrument, / In working out a pure intent'.

Quite why Shelley execrated Wordsworth for depicting the God of the Old Testament precisely as he, Shelley, conceived him, has always puzzled me. Presumably Shelley objects to Wordsworth revelling in carnage. If so, he grossly mistook Wordsworth's tone. That the lines were designed to shock seems certain: they bring the reader and indeed the poet face to face with something every church-goer was familiar with from infancy: the God who numbers the fall of the sparrow is also the God who slaughters Israel's enemies in their thousands. 'Yea, carnage is thy daughter' may exhibit enthusiastic

bloodlust; it can also be read as shocked realization—wondering, fearful, and appalled—of the implications of all those old testament records of Israelite Jihad. *Home at Grasmere* celebrates 'God / The Mourner, God the Sufferer, when the heart / Of his poor Creatures suffers wrongfully', but the one taking the salute on 18 January 1816 is the God of military chaplains, union jacks and prayers for the royal family. He is the God of the Book of Judges 1: 4—'And LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men'—Old Testament carnage is usually tallied in round numbers—and of the Book of Kings, and of Isaiah.

Those who on 18 January 1816 conducted services of thanksgiving for *deliverance* (that good Old Testament word) or as Wordsworth put it '*survival*', encouraged their flocks to see the twenty years of war (twenty-two with a brief interval) as God's just judgment on the English people for their equivalent of the worship of Baal—that is, for having allowed their country to become, as Wordsworth had put it in his 1802/06 sonnets, 'a fen / Of stagnant waters', governed by 'selfishness', 'Rapine, avarice, expence', its state policy influenced by 'money'd worldlings', led by a 'venal band', who are incompetent to 'judge of danger which they fear, / And honour which they do not understand'.[22]

Least of all (as shown by the *Convention of Cintra*) could her statesmen conceive that liberty is indivisible—that Britain's liberty must entail the liberty of other lands. As Thomas Jervis put the matter, in an especially eloquent passage: 'profligacy, injustice, rapacity, and oppression' are 'a disgrace to any people, and the ill-omened precursors of national ruin'. It would have been a worthy ambition, Jervis argues, as if he had been reading Wordsworth's sonnets, 'to become eminently distinguished among the nations of the earth, by a love of justice, freedom, humanity, and national honour;—by humility, integrity, and purity of manners'. Instead, the nation indulged not only 'levity and folly', 'luxury and dissipation' at home but 'unmeasured hatred and virulence' abroad, 'forgetting what we owe to humanity; forgetting what we owe to ourselves' (21).

That may be a characteristic expression of Unitarian high-mindedness, but in Montreal John Bethune agreed. In times of national decay, Bethune says:

> Patriotism becomes a name, and is only exercised from interest. The internal disorders which agitated our Mother Country shew but too plainly, that these rank weeds had been nourished to a considerable degree by the long train of prosperity which she enjoyed, and no doubt contributed to place her in that perilous situation, from which she has so lately and happily escaped.

[22] The last two lines quote, in 1806, Brooke's *Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, which Wordsworth employs again, less limpidly, in the ode.

To Milner, however, the 'rank weeds' included all those Jacobin sympathisers like Richard Price, John Thelwall, Horne Tooke, Thomas Hardy, and indeed William Wordsworth, fifth columnists all—intent upon undermining hierarchy and order until Burke smoked them out. But that's another story.

Six amplifying lines follow the 'carnage' couplet. First a second couplet compresses just about every Old Testament text referred to on that day.

> Thou cloth'st the wicked in their dazzling mail,
> And for Thy righteous purpose they prevail;

The first half of an *abba* quatrain observes that

> Thine arm from peril guards the coasts
> Of them who in thy laws delight:

The wonder is, as the Reverend Milner pointed out, that despite England's profligacy, God's arm did indeed guard her coasts from peril in October 1803. Napoleon's '150,000 strong Army of England' was waiting to set sail in three separate flotillas, emulating the successful strategy of Claudius in 43 A.D. Instead, Milner says, 'winds, calms, and tides', in the hands of the great 'Ruler of the Universe' saved England from invasion.

And the quatrain concludes with a third attribution to deity:

> Thy presence turns the scale of doubtful fight,
> Tremendous God of battles, Lord of Hosts!

It was, Wellington is believed to have said 'a damned nice thing—the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life', adding rather less modestly, 'I don't think it would have been done if *I* had not been there'. The clergy endorsed the first part of that remark. In Montreal, John Bethune, war veteran, thought that had Napoleon's final onslaught on the allies been less impetuous it might have succeeded. But 'The Tyrants' cup was overflowing with iniquity, and the judgments of God were upon him' (22). Or as Luke Booker put it:

> During the dreadful conflict,—over the field of Blood, the tremendous balance—awhile hung doubtful!—Nay for a time, fear dwelt in *his* mind [Wellington] who could feel no other fear,—the agonising fear that the scale would preponderate in the Tyrant's favour! If it had done so, what incalculable Evils would have ensued! Who prevented it? God.

Mr Wordsworth's Thursday Morning Service

And so, the ode continues its devotions, in welcome simplicity:

> To Thee—to Thee—
> On this appointed Day shall thanks ascend,
> That Thou hast brought our warfare to an end,
> And that we need no further victory! (289–92)

A prayerful thought. In fact the ode is repeatedly on the cusp of prayer. It was prayerful some eighty five lines back when discussing memorials:

> Preserve, O Lord! within our hearts
> The memory of thy favour,
> That else insensibly departs,
> And loses its sweet savour!
> Lodge it within us!— (205–9)

The rhythm is fluent, the catelectics surprising, the sentiment surely heart-felt, as again in lines 302–3:

> Let all who do this land inherit
> Be conscious of Thy moving spirit!

Now perhaps, even those who, like Wordsworth in 1793–96, once sat silent in village churches like 'an uninvited guest' feeding on 'vengeance yet to come', while the '*simple* worshippers' bent all to '*their* great Father' and offered praise for English victories (*1805*, 10.268–74), may be reconciled in communion. The 'great Father' 'has brought our warfare to an end' so 'let all who do this land inherit'—all factions and all tribes—'Be conscious of the moving spirit'.

> Oh, 'tis a goodly Ordinance,—the sight,
> Though sprung from bleeding war, is one of pure delight;
> Bless Thou the hour, or ere the hour arrive,
> When a whole people shall kneel down in prayer,
> And at one moment, in one spirit,[23] strive
> With lip and heart to tell their gratitude.
> For thy protecting care,
> Their solemn joy—praising the Eternal Lord
> For tyranny subdued,
> And for the sway of equity renewed,
> For liberty confirmed, and peace restored! (304–14)

'A whole people … at one moment, in one spirit'; Wordsworth is looking back to his vision in the Cintra pamphlet of 1809 of a people united in 'one zeal and one life'[24] and further still to his first political sonnet in 1802, 'Fair Star of Evening', imagining an England of 'one hope, one lot / One life, one glory' (*CWRT*, 1. 639). Even the Unitarian Thomas Jervis agreed with that appeal to national at-one-ment, and that the Royal Proclamation was a goodly ordinance:

> While we contemplate a great people, high and low, rich and poor, prostrate in the presence of the supreme Lord of heaven and earth, we are

[23] Revising the poem, Wordsworth changed 'one spirit' to 'one rapture'. He also used the word 'rapture' in a sonnet of the raising of the siege of Vienna by Jan Sobieski, ending a threat to Christendom, but it is a favourite word, early and late, probably without the theological sense, but suggesting raised to another dimension.

[24] *Concerning the Convention of Cintra: A critical Edition*, ed. Richard Gravil and W. J. B. Owen (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2009), 210.

> struck with the grandeur and solemnity of the spectacle. … there is something peculiarly affecting in the idea, that the inhabitants of our country are, at this moment, *as by one consent, and as in one grand assembly*, repairing to the temple of God.

* * *

How long would it take a fit 46-year-old to make it along the coffin path from Rydal Mount to St Oswald's Church in Grasmere? Forty minutes? I ask, because the church bells are ringing. Yet Wordsworth, instead of setting off to St Oswald's, takes refuge in four lines of minute nature description, returning to his opening sunshine motif, but in a minor key:

> But hark—the summons!—down the placid Lake
> Floats the soft cadence of the Church-tower bells;
> Bright shines the Sun, as if his beams might wake
> The tender insects sleeping in their cells;
> Bright shines the Sun—and not a breeze to shake
> The drops that point the melting icicles:—
> *O, enter now his temple gate!*
> Inviting words—… (315–22, Wordsworth's italics)

Inviting indeed, but they are imagined spoken at some remote Minster, where a Miltonic 'tubed engine' (321–329) raises its chords to the skies. Wordsworth is summoned by St Oswald's village bells, yet the pronouns in the closing section vacillate, as Wordsworth's pronouns often do.

> *Us*, humbler ceremonies now await;
> But in the bosom with devout respect,
> The banner of our joy *we* will erect,
> And strength of love *our* souls shall elevate:
> For to a few collected in his name,
> *Their* heavenly Father will incline his ear,
> Hallowing himself the service which they frame;—
> Awake! the majesty of God revere! (330–37)

To whom is the imperative' awake' addressed? 'Go', he continues (not 'come'):

> *Go*—and with foreheads meekly bowed
> Present *your* prayers—go—and rejoice aloud—
> The Holy One will hear! (338–40)

This sudden and unexpected self-exclusion at the close of a poem devoted to unity and atonement is, to say the least, bewildering.

All that we know Wordsworth actually *did* on the morning of the 18th January is write a famous letter to Francis Wrangham (dated 'Thanksgiving Day') explaining the spiritual allegory of his beautiful pacifist poem *The White*

Doe of Rystone. Sacred objects, such as Emily's banner, 'derive their influence not from properties inherent in them … but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects'. As with Banners, so with Acts of Thanksgiving perhaps? Points have we all of us within our souls where all stand single. Others may celebrate united worship in words ordained by the all-conquering Prince Regent. What matters to this poet is the authentic self-examination of a contrite soul.

Had he made it to church—any church—Wordsworth might have cringed inwardly at aspects of the sermon. John Bethune cannot resist a three-page assault on our American cousins for their perfidious declaration of war in 1812 when Britain stood almost alone: 'such black ingratitude goaded by the most wicked ambition, and such a total want of principle, as, had we not felt its effects, we never could have believed'. William Howley welcomed Waterloo for its restoration of the Bourbon monarchy and the *status quo ante*, and as 'the triumph of religion, of order, over lawless force'. Thomas Jervis indulged at some length the Whig complaint that the war could have been ended sooner, and like Byron still held to the heresy that Napoleon was a great liberator, one who but for his all-too-human vanity 'might have given peace and freedom to the distant regions of the earth!'. Charles Crane (Rector of Stoketon) exhorted his congregation to remember 'the great things God has done for you'—which included, apparently, the most perfect constitution in the world, a state of liberty unknown elsewhere on earth, equal laws impartially administered, a dutiful clergy never absent from their parishes, and a system of poor relief 'for which our labouring poor should be at all times most gratefully thankful'.[25] From what we know of the general state of the clergy at this date, Wordsworth may have had no great expectations of a St Oswald's sermon.

And so, with a confirmation in the pronoun 'ye' that the poet remains on his mound at Rydal Mount, perhaps unsure whether to join in worship of the Father of carnage, we move into the last, strenuous, sentence of the ode. These lines deal precisely with this question of the adequacy of reflection to the occasion. What matters is not the ritual, but the properties with which our own reflections imbue the ritual. To paraphrase a challenging and barely speakable closing sentence: 'the business of this Day of Thanksgiving is to 'purely *meditate* and simply *feel*' the 'warnings' embodied in twenty years of war—a weight of warnings to do with an *unprecedented might of impiety*, the arduousness of right-doing in a 'moral cause'; the acceptance of revealed mysteries and God's 'final retribution'. If that meditation is both *felt* and *pure*, this spiritual 'offering' (one thinks of what makes 'offerings' in the Old Testament acceptable) will be found 'not unworthy' of the throne of Grace.'

[25] Charles Crane, *"God's Mercies to our Country;" A Motive to fear Him and serve him in Truth. A sermon preached in the Church of New Brentford, Middlesex, on Thursday, Jan. 18, 1816 being the Day Appointed by Royal Proclamation for a General Thanksgiving to Almighty God, for His great Goodness in putting an End to the War in which we were engaged against France*. London : F. C. & J. Rivington, 1816.

It is a conspicuously self-reflexive utterance. Compared with, say, Hunt's doggerel 'National Song' (1815)[26] or Scott's *Boy's Own Paper* account of the battle, the fastidiousness of Wordsworth's poem guaranteed its commercial failure. According to Philip Shaw it sold 163 copies in 8 years.[27] But its quality of meditation, its careful discrimination between thoughts that hit and thoughts that miss 'the sole true glory / That can belong to human story!' may qualify it where it matters, in the sight of God, as

> An offering not unworthy to find place,
> On this high DAY OF THANKS, before the Throne of Grace!

To call it 'worthy' would be hubristic. 'Not *un*worthy' will have to do. Or so says the poet who began his poem on this costly, hard-won peace, 'not *un*rejoiced'.

[26] 'Hail England, dear England, true Queen of the West / With thy fair swelling bosom and ever-green vest' (*sic*). *Examiner*, 25 June 1815.

[27] Within two months as Philip Shaw points out, Southey's *Pilgrimage* sold 2000 copies (*Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination*, 237, n. 43). In the same period Scott's *The Field of Waterloo* went into a third edition.