Announcement about Forthcoming Issues

Studies in Romanticism continues to solicit general submissions in the area of Romanticism as well as essays written with special topics in mind, and we hope to continue alternating miscellaneous issues with more specialized ones. Currently we are proposing three new topics for special issues: *Romanticism and the Eighteenth Century*, *Romanticism in Modern (and Contemporary) Poetry* and *John Keats*.

CALL FOR PAPERS: "A Wagner Retrospective." An Interdisciplinary Symposium marking the Centennial of Wagner's Death, 1st or 2nd week in November 1983. University of Illinois at Chicago. Those interested in reading a paper on any aspect of Wagner's art or thought should submit a proposal by December 15, 1982, to Professor Leroy R. Shaw, Chairman, Wagner Centennial Committee, Box 4348, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL 60680.

Browning Society Notes, under new editorship, is seeking articles for an issue on *Men and Women* (projected for publication during 1983). For more detailed information, please write to Paul Kenny, Exeter College, Oxford or Joseph Bristow, Dept. of English, The University, Southampton, SO9 5NH, England.

Bread, Politics, and Poetry: Morris Eaves Interviews David and Virginia Erdman

An all too common, if unintentional, feature of collections such as this is a silent honoree who haunts the proceedings like a voiceless ghost. But who would ask David Erdman to linger outside the door while the banquet is served in his honor? I do not want to deny that the following interview is offered partly as an improvement over the familiar narcotic tribute composed by an editor out on his first date with the Fulsome Muse. But the interview is also a way of bringing the dinner guest back to the table. To David Wagenknecht, editor of Studies in Romanticism, and I, no introduction to this volume seemed as appropriate or as promising as an interview: because David Erdman has ideas and a career worth talking about, and because dialogue characterizes his scholarship as nothing else does. The interview began as a taped conversation in New York in late December 1981 and continued on paper during the following months. The version printed here is an edited literary composite based on a transcript of our initial conversation. [M.E.]

Morris: David, let's talk about scholarship and life. No one could possibly read much of your work without realizing that it is motivated by some kind of strong politics. But you've always seemed a bit reluctant to introduce your politics directly into your work. Can you tell me something about the relation you see between your politics and your scholarship? To put it more bluntly: Do you think of your scholarship in political terms?

David: I see; you're asking not about my political studies of writers and their times but about my own life, what my own human commitment has been?

Morris: How do you see scholarship fitting into your life generally? Have you just done it without thinking much about how it fits into anything?

David: No; I've been very much aware of the dialectic of life and scholarship. But that awareness came rather late, after graduate school (at Princeton). The human interest that informed my dissertation (Byron's Prosodic Technique) was psychology, not politics.

The first real political involvement began when Virginia and I moved to Madison, Wisconsin, for my second teaching job, at the University of Wisconsin. The first job was at the A & M College of Monticello, Arkansas, 1936–37 at the peak of the Depression. By the spring there were openings; I wrote four or five letters to universities that sounded good to us; one of them was Wisconsin. It was a one-page letter saying “I’ve got this going about Byron, and I would like an instructorship,” and they wrote back saying, “You’re hired!” In those days interviews and search committees hadn’t been invented. So when Virginia and I—we’d just got married—went to Madison and settled in, we made friends rapidly in an English department that was seething with a kind of caste war between instructors and professors. There hadn’t been a promotion from the lower ranks in eleven years, and most of the junior faculty (with a few champions among the senior faculty) were active in the teachers’ union; so I joined and immediately had a host of friends, all pretty active for the rights of man—and woman.

Morris: Was the teachers’ union a union in the sense that SUNY has a union?

David: It was a very active local chapter of the AFT, American Federation of Teachers.

Morris: I didn’t know they were organizing teachers in those years.

David: Well, rather, the teachers were organizing themselves, and the union meetings and committees were filled with debates and votings about theory and about strategy and tactics: democracy in action, very self-consciously. The issues were momentous—and often unclear. This was a unique period, the Depression at home, the rise of Mussolini and Hitler abroad; unemployment (people with PhD’s were driving taxis in Madison); the New Deal, antifascism, communism, the Spanish Civil War (with volunteers from America returning to campuses to arouse support). That year in Arkansas I had got excited about radical politics and begun reading, as “everybody” did, Reed’s *Ten Days*, Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*, and I subscribed to *New Masses*. *Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck) made Arkansas conscious of Ozark “Okies” and they were distressed at the poverty implications of Caldwell and Burke-White’s *You Have Seen Their Faces*. For a Northerner, going from Minnesota (and Princeton) to the South was moving into a zone of class struggle left over from the Civil War and Reconstruction. The students, some of them, were very radical.

Morris: Really?

David: Yes. I could see that as they grew up they might go either way. The students would pull the legs of their professors—those from Yale, Princeton, etc.—by making racist comments and jokes, Southern

style, but their minds were divided. As a bachelor I lived in a dormitory with two students, one cynical but trying on the “Southern attitudes” for fit, the other the son of a mill owner in Pine Bluff who rebelled against his father’s generation by making friends with the black workers in his father’s factory and encouraging their resistance. The student who pretended to be a redneck may have grown up to be one, but he was intellectually open to both sides.

Virginia, just out of social work training at the University of Minnesota, came to Monticello when I was teaching summer school—Chaucer and Shakespeare—and for our honeymoon the radical student introduced us to a “movement” school called Commonwealth College, up in northern Arkansas near Fayetteville—

Morris: Never heard of it—

David: It was burned down by vigilantes later (in the ’40s or ’50s?). It had a Joe Hill (I.W.W.) mural; one of the teachers was Claude Williams; it was sort of like the Highlander Folk School, which still survives as a radicalizing/Christianizing center for union organizers among sharecroppers and miners.

Morris: A pacifist movement?

David: Well, radical pacifist. It wasn’t a question of war or peace in those times; these intellectual-moral centers (or schools) were part of the people’s side of the New Deal. The Workers’ Alliance, whose organizers studied at Commonwealth, was a union of the unemployed; and some of the CIO union people were there. Williams and his wife Joyce—Cedric Belfrage wrote a book still on our shelves about them, *A Faith to Free the People* (1944)—were field preachers and storefront preachers; some others we’d meet later in Detroit, following the working people who fled from sharecropping to assembling Fords. In both areas they were in effect organizers of a movement that later supported King.

Virginia and I, that summer, were of course primarily observers, but we began a lifetime habit of subscribing to radical publications and scouring bookstores for “proletarian” novels and “issue” pamphlets.

When we got to Madison and I joined the Teachers’ Union, we soon became no longer observers but active speakers-from-the-floor at many kinds of meetings. And I took on the job of editing the union newspaper, *The Madison Teacher*.

Morris: Was that your first editing job, then?

David: No, I’d worked on our highschool magazine, and at Carleton College I wrote a sort of op-ed column in the student newspaper—and had a lot of fun writing humor material for the college yearbook. I also edited a college poetry magazine, *The Sun Dial*. (I wrote some

poetry, but my Shakespeare professor told me very earnestly that I had a talent for writing picture captions.) But I grew up with a typewriter and a printing press, a tiny thing in the basement.

Morris: So you became a union editor. Did you run for any office?

David: No; I've served on committees but have never been much interested in officiating. I prefer to talk and watch and read and try to get it clear what people are doing or want to do—and why. And editing the *Teacher* was a fascinating chore, ranging from an interview with the President of the University (there was no point in his doing anything to help us, he said, because "action and reaction are equal and opposite") to attending meetings of the central labor body—where I met plumbers and newspaper reporters and school-teachers.

And we lived in a big cheap apartment in the center of Madison, between the campus and the square, an easy gathering place, for talk—and book auctions for a cause—and conferences. Virginia took a job as social worker in the County Pension Department, and this extended our personal contacts. Nationally and internationally these were eventful times, and university and union people were full of arguments for every shade of political action or inaction, from escapism and total pacifism to the extremes of right and left militancy, to cynical detachment. In my third year I was one of four instructors—another was Don Hayakawa—who used propaganda analysis as an alternative approach to Freshman English. But the whole department, I believe, used the *Autobiography* of Lincoln Steffens, the great "muck-raker," as an assigned text.

About this time I took a summer to get on with my literary scholarship, first shaping up an article on "Byron's Stage Fright" and then digging into the detailed evidence—the Wisconsin Historical Library was right in the next block—of Byron's career as a member of the House of Lords and a Regency Radical.

Morris: Didn't all your meeting and class work—I assume you had a heavy teaching load—interfere with your scholarship?

David: Well, yes, but it also inspired some of it. And my wife reminds me to explain that from the beginning of our life together, on the advice of older scholar-friends, we planned to allow time for my scholarly work. I always kept my summers free from teaching. And we deferred having children for four years.

Morris: What about Virginia's career, then?

David: Well, as a professional she calls herself a jack-of-all-trades. She has worked as a social worker, government social research worker, technical writer, college teacher, clinical psychologist, and, unpaid, as a social organizer. Her graduate training at Minnesota was in Social

Work and Psychology, but her earlier interest was in literature and writing. Her undergraduate advisor, Joseph Warren Beach, was her friend and confidant, and when we married she took counsel with him and his wife—and as a result, she tells me, assumed the life of a scholar's wife without illusions. Faculty life was uncertain and insecure in 1937, as it is becoming now, and she deliberately chose to fit her occupations to circumstances in the various stages of my working life.

Her early jobs related to child care and social investigation. While our children were small she limited her employment, but when my career was threatened in the Fifties, she went back to graduate school and then worked full time for several years. But she feels that she always chose work that interested her, that gratified her personally. Her career as a clinical psychologist was based on her fascination with the Rorschach Test and its relation to symbolic expression in fiction.

We have always worked independent of each other, but with mutual support. For example, through her I met Zygmunt Piotrowski, an eminent psychologist who has been for years a valuable consultant on symbolic interpretation of visual imagery—the implications of Blake's illuminations, for instance. And her interest in social structure and organizations, personality and group dynamics, has widened my interests. On the domestic scene we've shared responsibilities, and the closeness of our family, now into a third generation, has been a mutual joy.

Morris: Still, getting involved in so many things must at least have slowed down your research and writing.

David: True. Certain stages of creative scholarship do require isolation and concentrated attention. And I never did write the life of Byron which I remember an Oxford Press traveler was urging me to do, out of the thesis. But all the social and political thinking which the busy world stimulated was a constant inspiration to think penetratingly about the world the romantic poets lived in, between the French Revolution and the Reform Bill. In fact I began early to accumulate data for a book that was to be called "Bread, Poetry, and Politics: 1789 to 1832," and which Virginia and I called à la Coleridge I suppose, "The Opus." I had each semester a Federal Aid student to help, and Virginia, who was bedridden for some months during pregnancy, did some reading and note-making for this project. She was putting together a narrative of Tom Paine, as one of the strands. Blake was to be another.

Morris: What about tenure?

David: Well, our fourth year at Wisconsin was the last, though the first

Byron article had appeared and the next two were on their way. There had never seemed much chance for our generation of instructors. But we had the prospect of a job in South Carolina, at the Citadel—and suddenly a more attractive opening appeared, in a small progressive college in Western Michigan, Olivet, where I taught “general semantics” for a year (outgrowth of those sessions with Hayakawa, who had been shaping “Language in Action” out of the theories of Korzybski).

But that was the year of Pearl Harbor, and by spring we were expecting a second baby—and I was out of that job. From a distance the Citadel, in Charleston, looked interesting. And it was, but not in the ways we had hoped. The war was really on by then, the early casualties coming in, and we were close to it in Charleston, an embarkation point. After the second baby Virginia worked for a while as a social worker in the Navy Hospital, and I was a member of the State Militia: the Citadel is a military college and we taught in uniform, and I also volunteered for some radar work. It was good to feel one was taking part in the war against fascism. But there was little of that spirit among the retired army officers who ruled the college. The Commandant of Cadets (Dean of Men)—they called him “Jungle Jim”—would have preferred that the United States were fighting *with* rather than *against* the Germans. I remember being with him when the parents of a graduating cadet wanted him to assure them that their son would have a commission in the regular army. He said he couldn’t promise anything, because of Roosevelt (“that man in the White House”), who was forcing us to fight in the wrong war.

The student officers, actually, were often rebellious against the whole system, but there was very little intellectual communication with them, or other faculty “officers,” and by spring I thought I would rather be drafted into the regular army than stay at the Citadel.

Morris: If you were teaching in a situation like that, then, you weren’t automatically eligible for the draft? Being at the Citadel was a kind of umbrella?

David: Oh, sure. The General would say, “I need these people on my staff. They belong here.” And that would be that. In fact, when I told the four-star General who was President of the College that we wanted to leave at the end of the year, he flatly refused his permission. I only got away because they lost some Army money from Washington and had to cut back on staff, dropping four members of the English department who had a few days’ less seniority than I—and all I had to do was switch names with one of them.

Curiously enough, when I ended up in the Auto Workers’ union the next year I expected to be drafted but was not. I went down to

the Draft Board, and they found that my body was fit for fighting. But they never called me.

Morris: Why not?

David: I found out later that there was a union representative on the Detroit draft board who tagged me as an essential war worker.

Morris: You got a job with the Auto Workers?

David: Yes, with the United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of the Congress of Industrial Unions (UAW-CIO) in Detroit. When we left Charleston, in June 1943, I expected to be drafted but till that happened I wanted work that made sense in those times. In my own mind—and I think Wisconsin determined it—I felt settled as a teacher and scholar, a Marxist scholar with a major work begun. But this was not a quiet time for such work. Virginia thought she could manage with the two children but wanted to leave the South.

And eventually, through contacts in labor education, we were in Detroit. (I still attended MLA conventions, with a UAW badge, and Ernest Bernbaum or Clarence Thorpe would say, “How fascinating, that the workers are interested in Byron!”)

Morris: Well, what were they interested in?

David: It was the Education Department of the UAW, producing updated versions of “How to Read the Contract” or “How to Process a Grievance” and starting a new magazine for shop stewards—and what they needed was an editor. So I accepted a contractual handshake. And those Detroit years proved, for all four of us, wonderful years—1943 to 1947. Our office was at first in the same block as Wayne University (now Wayne State) and later near the General Motors building. (After we’d been there a while I taught one course, in the English Department, and Virginia taught returning G.I.’s after the war; we lived about four blocks away. And the Detroit Public Library was right there, too, where I dug out the mirthful details behind Blake’s “Island in the Moon.”)

Morris: What was the new magazine?

David: *Ammunition*: Official Publication of the Education Department. So, in truth, it was work for the war effort—and the peace effort when that came. Circulation about 40,000. Format roughly like *The Nation*; political cartoons by Ben Yomen. And lots of advice from Carl Haessler, a wise, wonderful man, Director of the Federated Press, serving labor papers with news wire service; knew everybody, had views and a fine-honed sense of true and false.

Our news and editorials—and book reviews, for instance of Bel-
frage on Williams—were written primarily for the shop stewards, the structural component of democracy in the union. And we compiled

a Handbook for the editors and committees that issued shop papers in the various locals. For me all this was a tremendous learning process—about workers and their working and organizing lives. There was much give and take between our staff and the editorial groups and education committees in the greater Detroit area, and in Canada, where there was a Workers' Education Association, the WEA. With that group the UAW conducted a stewards' summer school in Port Hope, Ontario—where I taught public speaking, Roberts' Rules of Order, and so on. People you met there were the salt of the earth, full of zeal and purpose. They were good romantic poets, humanly speaking.

Morris: Politically, how committed did you feel at that time?

David: Oh, quite committed. I mean, I was drawn into all sorts of discussions, about current postwar social and political "options" (we would say today). And I did a lot of reading, Veblen, Beveridge, Lenin's *Imperialism*, Communist pamphlets and the *Daily Worker*, and pamphlets of the Proletarian Party, and talking and listening in discussion groups including a book club of wealthy women in Detroit's Gold Coast, Grosse Pointe.

In that large environment you couldn't help getting serious about life and history; you got a feeling that the class struggle was taking a powerfully hopeful shape for the democratic future. In my place in the Union I didn't have any political weight, but I felt refreshingly helpful to the people who were, in effect, democratic leaders for the people, for the workers.

There was another side, of course. Not all the people in the union, or the surrounding "movement," were genuine. The union leadership had a left wing and a right wing, with opportunists in both. During the war a general harmony or balance prevailed, but soon afterward a bureaucratic development grew, led by Walter Reuther, a cynical, ruthless man. He gained a radical reputation by visiting Russia in the early years of the Revolution, but the Reutherites in the union were building an apparatus of loyal followers to replace the steward movement. It was, when Reuther was elected President of the UAW, a simple matter of union politics (as he politely explained) that he put his own people into the Education Department, with his brother Victor as head and with no place for an independent like me. And in policy, class struggle was replaced by collaboration, wage demands by emphasis on community relations, cooperatives, women's auxiliaries. There were careers for career-minded people in that apparatus, not for people who believed, as I did, that labor democracy could be a brake on imperialism, the developing thrust of postwar American policy.

Morris: You decided to try an academic job again?

David: Not exactly at that time. I had a choice—move to another industrial city and continue as a labor editor (there was a possible job with *The Rubber Worker* in Cleveland) or stay in Detroit and pick up my scholarship where I had pretty well left off—the project of a political-social history of the romantic poets. Virginia was teaching at Wayne University; she had organized a city-wide movement to support public nursery schools, our two children were in the schools, and we had a good central place to live and a big circle of friends, many of whom I had already drawn into long discussions of Byron and Wordsworth and the politics of the unformed "English Revolution" that was in their visions.

Among these Detroit friends was Carl Haessler, the Federated Press man. He had been a professor of philosophy, once a Rhodes Scholar, and during the first World War a conscientious objector who spent three years in Leavenworth Prison—a man of admirable integrity. He and his sturdy and resourceful wife Lucy were friends to many in that city during the years of the second War.

In this intellectual climate—with Joe McCarthy and similar characters performing the post-Waterloo roles of Sidmouth and Castle-reagh with their anti-radical campaigns and suppression of popular leaders—it was easy to identify with Shelley and other "unacknowledged" heralds and followers of a great struggle for civil and intellectual liberty, to paraphrase his *Defence of Poetry*. I could easily feel that my pen was my strongest instrument. While I worked for the UAW, I was sometimes invited to go to a union-organized talk about literature and history. I would try to correct mistaken ideas about what machine-breaking (Luddism) was in Byron's day, making the point that it wasn't simply a matter of physical strength against machinery but a mode of resistance to wage reductions. (The Luddites were "machine weavers"—but the machines were little hand looms that were owned by a man called a capitalist who came around each month with a supply of yarn to weave stockings. When the workers wanted to increase their piece rate they would refuse to make stockings, and when the capitalist got angry or refused to bargain they would "break" the loom—which would magically be in working order as soon as a wage agreement was reached. All "machine-breaking" was not such a tame affair—though consider, too, the similar "plug riots" of Emily Brontë's time—but historians have often exaggerated or invented worker violence.)

Anyway, encouraged in my own inclination by some sober radicals who were of the industrial working class, and with Virginia's help, I returned to my scholarly work. Recommendations from CIO leaders

and Harold Laski and Teachers' Union scholars and Joseph Warren Beach brought my first Guggenheim fellowship, and I went back for a couple of years to the "Opus"—which rapidly turned into the "chapter on Blake," ultimately *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*. In 1948 when we went home to Minnesota for a visit, I talked so enthusiastically about the Blake book that Beach, English Department chairman at the University, invited me to join the staff in the fall—still as an untenured assistant professor, of course.

Morris: You kept up your interest in contemporary politics after you left the Auto Workers?

David: Well, of course. We still, today, subscribe to dozens of journals, liberal and radical, literary and historical. There were many during the New Deal and Postwar period, including the Communist Party's *Daily Worker*, which got pretty newsless after a while, and *Science and Society*, in which I published at least one Byron article—but it has become dull in recent years. Much better at present is the *Monthly Review*, a Marxist magazine. And there is a new crop of radical journals, including a newspaper, *In These Times*, that has excellent foreign and labor coverage.

Morris: What kind of politics do you identify yourself with now?

David: With those of *The Nation*—and, well, Russell Baker in the daily *New York Times*.

I used to call myself a Marxist, but there is hardly such a definable position any more. Marxism and its original manifestoes are rather a source than a living set of principles in today's intellectual movements. I haven't exactly gone through a Wordsworthian revision, since he came to fear movement of the people after the long grim Napoleonic empire, as Shelley and Byron did not. But as time goes on, it isn't just that you get older but that you learn more and more about the times you study and the times you live in and see many criss-crossing patterns, the complexity of human social life. Take today, for instance, Poland. When I was in my twenties—or thirties—I would have had a very clear sense of the crisis there. I would think, this is right, that's wrong. Now, I hear more voices. Recognizing complexity doesn't mean that you lose your sense of justice, political justice, but that you are more aware of the binds, the impasses and shifts of direction that occur in human activity. I observe the political movements in the world today, in the news and documentations and analyses, thinking of what people expected, in the twenties and thirties, from the revolution and, now, what they're getting. And I have a similar experience exploring the complexities of the age of revolution and war in which the romantic poets lived and saw patterns of change and conflict. And

I believe that each of these strands of thought both complicates and clarifies the others.

Morris: When did you begin to lead this double life?

David: Well, it was a slow thing. I was always interested in the romantic poets, but as an undergraduate and even as a graduate student my attention was on the rhythm and meter, the prosody, of the work and on the personal existence of the poet, his philosophy/psychology.

Wordsworth was an early fascination; his "panentheism" was said to be neoplatonic: so I studied the *Enneads* of Plotinus and read *The Prelude*—and wrote an honors thesis on that. In graduate school, I thought I might do a thesis on the colloquial diction of Chaucer. I had a kind of psychological feeling about his sense of humor and thought this might define it. Ultimately it was Byronic nuances of humor and personality that I settled on. And I was very much my own boss in these matters; I encouraged my professors' encouragement of but detachment from my special interests as they developed. Nobody looked at my Doctor's Dissertation, on Byron's Prosodic Technique, until I had typed and bound it. Today I have to remind myself of that independence to keep myself from interfering too much in my own graduate students' working out of thesis projects.

Morris: Well, what about—

David: Let me get back to what I've been slowly driving at, the relation of living to scholarship. It was only when, at Madison in Teachers' Union days, I felt actively involved in understanding some social thing that had to be done, a definition of passive resistance or the issues in a school-board election, that I developed a dynamic interest in the historical involvements of, say, Blake or Byron. For me, political action or involvement has always paid off in historical insights. In the classroom I could analyze Shelley's interest in human struggle and change, or the potential of change, because I felt this in the world I lived in.

Even today, after over forty years of scholarly writing and editing, I find the classroom work, conferences and conversations with others, getting into arguments about economics, about politics, about war—all these activities sharpen my interest in the literary historical scholarship I am doing and in turn are illuminated by it.

Morris: So your interest in history came rather late?

David: Yes, and rather rapidly, at Wisconsin. There at the Historical Library, with my student assistant to copy out passages, how I combed through the parliamentary history, the newspapers, the private and political and artists' and poets' diaries and letters! In about four years I accumulated a file of three-by-five slips, arranged mostly

by date but some by subject, covering the years 1788 to 1825, about eight feet deep.

This file was what I had to turn to when my job with the UAW ended. "Bread, Politics, and Poetry"; I was ready to pursue the bakers and statesmen and artists and poets through crisis periods and lulls of "Dejection" on simultaneous levels, private and public. On the other hand, my direct experience with workers and organizers, crowds in action, purposeful and random debate, my own share in the movement, in Madison and in Detroit, gave me insights that were clear gain to me as a scholar. When I got going on the toughest chapter, I read Mark Schorer's *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*, and read Blake against my card file, and I had a chapter of a hundred pages within a month but saw that it would have to be a book by itself. People have an exaggerated sense of how much historical learning there is behind *Blake: Prophet*. It had just accumulated in those files.

Coleridge and Wordsworth chapters—especially the daily context of Coleridge's newspaper editorials—were going to take a different kind of gathering. So the next time I got a Guggenheim, which was when we left Minnesota, we just moved back to Princeton because I knew that the Firestone Library had the historical material I wanted and that nobody there was busy working with it. Though it would have been less lonely if there had been somebody. There were many helpful people; there were friends. But perhaps I needed mainly lots of private time to study and mull.

Morris: But wait. Why did you leave Minnesota—and what were you doing there?

David: I went there as an assistant professor in 1948—and wrote *Blake: Prophet*, even had a publisher (who backed out), and got a contract letter from the University of Minnesota Press to do an edition of Coleridge's journalism—but did not get tenure.

Morris: Why not?

David: Officially stated, the reason was that my scholarly production was inadequate. Joseph Warren Beach, who was chairman of the department and invited me there on the sound of the Blake project, retired the year I arrived, and I never had another really sympathetic sponsor. Blake was an esoteric topic, too obscure for the interests of a state university, the assistant chairman said. The tenure committee went through my typescript and made exclamation marks in the margins, but that was not what was bothering them. Later we learned that my politics were a main issue, my identification with organized labor (in those days the CIO was a radical organization), my acquaintance with open leftists, my quoting the *Daily Worker*.

DVE: Lake District, 1978

DVE: early on

with his father, Carl, 1934

with Heidi and Wendy, Christmas 1950, St. Paul

What had impressed Beach when we first met in the thirties and what led him to invite me to Minnesota in 1948, worked against me in the repressive atmosphere of the fifties. I know that I was indiscreet. I didn't deny my past; in fact, I did the opposite. I urged one of my theoretically progressive colleagues to go to a Peace Convention in Chicago, and the thought scared him to death. In fact, those were scary times. When the Korean War broke out and we heard the news on the radio, with some colleagues, I responded to it, having been reading the background news, with an anti-administration, an anti-U.S.-imperialism remark. This colleague of mine suddenly—god almighty, I mean he was immediately patriotic about it. It was that sort of thing; they were scared of what might happen to them by association if I remained as their colleague. If the FBI went after me, they might get tainted.

Morris: Right.

David: It could be that the FBI had got at them already on my account. They had begun calling at our home when we first subscribed to the *Daily Worker*, in Madison. They came to our flat in the Old Citadel in Charleston, pretending to inquire about the evil fascist ideas of some colleagues; one asking leading questions while the other scrutinized the books on our shelves. Aha, a set of the works of Karl Marx here. At every move we and (we sometimes learned) our neighbors were given this kind of "red scare" investigation. Some people thought this was contemptible and told us about it, but most were intimidated enough to keep it to themselves until years afterward.

In Detroit Virginia was questioned about the previous tenants of our apartment; it had been a stopping-off place for the Almanac Singers (Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie et al.). We hadn't known them and felt this was another ruse to get a look at us and our books. But the questioning would take different turns in different periods. At one time the peace movement would be conservative, at another radical. And when Russia was our ally, it was patriotic to be pro-Russia. Even at that time, though, one colleague who was questioned about us, though he scarcely knew me, was shocked with the FBI's explanation that they were drawing up a list of Russian sympathizers to be prepared for a time when we would no longer be allies with Russia. The man felt this to be sheer duplicity and came in indignation to warn us of the investigation. He was the first to do so; his wife was the second, and the incident led to a long friendship between our two families.

Morris: You left Minnesota in 1954, and then where?

David: Well, before the last year at Minnesota I had a one-year visiting professorship at Duke and did summer teaching at East Lansing. Then

I had my second Guggenheim and we moved to Princeton—for Coleridge and Wordsworth. And I didn't publish the Coleridge *Morning Post* things, because I met Kathleen Coburn, who drew me into the Collected Coleridge project, the Susquehanna Edition, she was calling it. And that added a new team of corresponding scholars—besides the developing Blake team, not to mention the team collaborating on the annual Romantic Movement Bibliography.

Morris: You moved to Princeton, but what would you do after that second Guggenheim ran out?

David: Well, we had a safety net that time. The University of Illinois in Chicago (then at Navy Pier, later Chicago Circle) had offered me an associate professorship with tenure, and I had taken a year's leave for the Guggenheim. Then Virginia was licensed as a clinical psychologist and began working for the State of New Jersey, and we took another year's leave. The Chicago people were glad, since their enrollment hadn't been growing as fast as was planned and they just wanted people nominally on their staff. So that was fine, and we kept it up formally for a couple of years. It made a lot of difference. But if we could continue our busy existence in Princeton and New York, it didn't make sense to move to Chicago. So let's try to find something else. At a New York cocktail party Kenneth Cameron, ensconced as scholar-librarian for Carl Pforzheimer, suggested that the New York Public Library ought to have room for a couple of scholars on its staff. So I went there the next morning and introduced myself to the Director's Assistant. What did I want, he asked. To see about a job. What kind of a job? Editing, I said, and that was that. It took a couple of months to sort it out, but they had been looking for an editor. I hadn't even known that they had a publication department; I meant editing texts in the manuscript rooms.

So that was how we came to rest, continuing to live at Princeton until I got the Stony Brook job, at the invitation of Herbert Weisinger, who had met me during the summer of 1953 in East Lansing, but moving to the Stony Brook neighborhood in 1968. That's the life history.

Morris: Let's get back to the French Revolution.

David: Yes. Well, I keep getting back to it, in my mind whenever it's vacant and in books and journals whenever I can dart into the Public Library stacks for half an hour, or do some searching in the quite good historical collection at Stony Brook. Coffeebreak research I call it.

And I read everything that comes out on French and British history of that period—narrowly now, 1789–93. So I keep revising my sense

of the structure of the Revolution, getting further and further away from feeling that anybody can define it in class terms, in economic terms, anything else. Pressures can be seen building up; groups can be seen sometimes with common purposes, but altogether it's a very rough-and-tumble kind of thing, history is, and it depends upon whose history book you're reading what shape it appears to take. Once you get past a simple formula—once you've read three history books—you can't fit what you know into a firm pattern. And so that curious experience keeps repeating—and leads up to why I'm doing the Oswald book now: *The Life and Works of John Oswald (1760–1793), The Man Who Was Not Napoleon*.

I'd known for years that there was a real Oswald, in the Paris Jacobin Club, that somewhat matched the Oswald in Wordsworth's play *The Borderers*. Then recently Burton Pollin dug up a vivid biographical notice of John Oswald by Sampson Perry, and I ran through the streets of London and Paris looking for him—finding him to be a very interesting and central and, at the time, well known figure, publicly accused by Edmund Burke of spreading the sinister doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, in Paris; actually conspiring with Tom Paine—and just possibly Wordsworth—to start a British Revolution; even, in an impressive Paris journal which Oswald helped edit, seeming to be counted as one of the "Fourteen" active spirits who got the French Revolution itself started.

Part of the fun is detective work—finding out that so much is to be known of a secretary of the British Club in Paris who has dropped out of history books altogether. Part is the light reflected upon Wordsworth's also almost unknown career as a British sympathizer in Paris. This voice of Wordsworth we *do* know, and we know what he was saying at what dates—with increasing accuracy as the Cornell Wordsworth volumes get published. It is thus increasingly possible to recover something of the national-political context of each utterance, each revision, rewriting of a political passage in *The Prelude*. Or we can work the other way around: When did Wordsworth "grieve" for Buonaparte? And why and when did he stop grieving for him? I suppose that old card file of mine might help here—I haven't tried it recently—but my point about the complexity and unknowns of history (and of poets' lives) is that these contexts are not at all simple to recover. Last night's Wordsworth session [at the 1981 MLA meeting in New York] had five or six panelists all focusing on the drowned-man passages in *The Prelude*.

Morris: Right.

David: After a while someone argued that we do need to know the

context, political and social. So I jumped into the discussion, to make the point that context needs to be narrowed down and located: is Wordsworth thinking this in Grasmere? in London? Before the Peace of Amiens? Just after it ended? We can't just say, for instance, that this was a period of the rise of industry, or this was the time of the Napoleonic Wars. We have to ask, a propos of *The Prelude* books entitled "Residence in France" for instance, what the immediate context was: Why is he dealing with this aspect of the French Revolution at this point (in time and place)? What does he want to tell people in 1805? Or in each of those dated sonnets of 1802-3?

To take a close look at the sonnets wishing Milton were "with us" in London and that the "good old cause" were still alive, we realize that Wordsworth is thinking of the struggle for a Commonwealth in the 17th century, that he wants to revive the good cause of republican revolution right there in England, now. He can see a possibility for the good cause to emerge out of the "fen of stagnant waters" if the fighting Men of Kent don't simply take arms to repel a French invasion but recover the commonwealth unity of spirit. In 1805 (and differently at different times) he can't simply advocate an English Revolution like the French one, which failed; nor can he really point to present ingredients of an English one. But if he tells about the French Revolution in its hopeful dawn, and in a certain way—he can keep alive certain thoughts, certain principles of humanity and human rights.

Let me bring in here another recent debate which was fun. This fall there was a conference in Boulder, at the University of Colorado—
Morris: With Christopher Hill.

David: Right. He lectured about Milton the first day; I lectured about Wordsworth and we debated and everybody joined in, the second. As I listened to Hill talking about Milton's political life and theological life, his changing beliefs, and language, I was struck by certain similarities between the post-Restoration Milton and the post-Revolution Wordsworth. Both had associated deeply with revolutionary thinking in a time when it was vitally stimulating to be alive. Afterward both were writing epics, and they were writing in a kind of symbolic and allusive language which doesn't reveal specific doctrinal views—

Morris: Okay, writing after the fact—

David:—doesn't even reveal a commitment to definite goals, but is tremendously allusive to the lost era of ideological debate. And I began to realize—Hill illustrated the point—that after the great change constituted by the Restoration, Milton had to go underground, so to speak, in his case both literally, to keep from getting hanged, and intellectually, writing biblical epics rather than tracts for the times.

And what corresponded in Wordsworth's life to the Restoration? I suddenly realized that the throning of Buonaparte in 1802, putting "Consul" on a par with "Pope" or "King" (later confirmed by a Pope's crowning him Emperor), had constituted a monarchical Restoration for Wordsworth. Up to that time he was going through a different kind of struggle that isn't very comparable to Milton's, but the sequel is. *The Prelude* is his *Paradise Lost* and *Found*.

I've tended to think of the 1802-3 sonnets as just his becoming reactionary, a super-patriot. But rereading them I now see my mistake. The sonnet "composed near Calais" recalls the "too-credulous day" when France seemed a land "pledged to new-born Liberty"; yet the poet, in his first version, felt "happy as a bird" (birds don't *think*) and hopeful of "Fair seasons" yet to come, for France. The sonnet "Composed near Dover, on the day of Landing" back in England, asks "Oh, let me for one hour just feel how wonderful England is with no criticism" (I paraphrase). By definition the "one hour's perfect bliss" cannot last. Both France and England fail to live up to his expectations. And he goes on, letting his real disappointment in both nations come out fiercely—and calling on Milton, and other Republicans, to lend him inspiration. Blake registered the same wish, as a road-to-Damascus conversion. Not to British patriotism but to annihilation of the Selfhood.

Wordsworth: "We are selfish men . . . return to us again."

Both invoke the radical spirit of the past.

Morris: But do you ever stop? I mean, when you start working out these problems it's obvious that you get very engaged with a sort of minute-to-minute account of what's actually going on.

David: Then you have to take an overview, and you have to move dialectically between the particulars and the larger picture.

Morris: But if you do that, don't you ever stop and wonder at some point what is all this worth? I mean, why am I doing this?

David: That's the other side of it. The other side is that I'm being alive in the twentieth century, maybe even the twenty-first, and the world I live in isn't that different. While I'm studying the failed French and the unattained English Revolution, I'm studying the contemporary revolutions too, getting insight both ways. I'm reading about South Africa, reading about Nicaragua, I'm reading all kinds of analyses and interpretations of what's been going on in this century, what's going on today, the ideas of people trying to figure out what can be done for positive change in the world. Is the world going to destroy itself; where do we go from here? And so these feed back into each other.

Morris: All right.

David: That's what I meant when I said, when people asked me how I

had time to work in the Teachers' Union, my response was that it was stimulating to do both things.

Morris: All right, that's for your own work.

David: But it also kept my own intellectual interest in those things going.

Morris: Okay. But what about the further implications of your intellectual interest? I think that the public at large believes that scholars are mainly wasting their time, especially scholars who don't do useful work in science or something where the implications are pretty clear of what you discover and what you write. Even syndicated columnists may have a sense of immediate power when they write something: Reagan reads it; he reacts to it, or at least he tells his PR man to quash it or something, but when *you* write something, Reagan doesn't read it. Carl Woodring reads it, or, you know, Kenneth Cameron reads it, or I read it, and then, don't you have a sense sometimes of like why the hell am I doing this, and is there any real point, beyond just the point of discussing things with other people who also have similar concerns and say they care?

David: Well, yes and no. I mean, one entertains these thoughts from time to time. These days we wonder about almost any need for change in terms of whether there's even going to be a future history. Or, on a more simple and non-military train of thought, consider the current movement to stop publishing journals and books in print but have all reading done at computer terminals. This denial of access could destroy scholarship as we know it. The congressman who spoke to us about it at the meeting of editors [at the 1981 MLA meeting] says the idea is gaining ground, even though (perhaps because) economically it will require investment of billions of dollars. When I face a thing like that I feel desperate; my conscience hurts because I'm not sitting down and writing letters. I didn't even take notes about the details. It can make me wonder what's the point of writing books if there won't be any shelves to put them on, years from now. Yet one simply mustn't let such prospects sink one's hope. Then I think of Byron, or I read about the suicides of people at the failures of the 1830 revolution and those of 1848, pathetic to look back upon.

One doesn't cherish the thought of being looked back on as a pathetic fool, you know. If anybody is going to survive to look back, you see, then it would be wrong to give up.

My main point, to answer your question, is simply that—you and I probably share this feeling—that we are educating people and that it's worth doing. You don't educate people in doctrine, you don't educate people even in clear-cut principles, but you do bring to their

mental equipment a lot of things—I use a general word, things, rather than facts or thoughts or ideas—a lot of things that make personal difference—as you can see in former students you happen to run into at conferences or in the business world or on the street. You have an influence, and so do your writings. And the best we can do is keep increasing the intellectual world, keeping it fed with more accurate and honest visions of human possibility.

Morris: Do you have a sense that there's been any change, say, between World War II and now in the way professional scholarship works?

David: Yes, it's very very different, and in some respects much much better, in some respects worse. But the days of the loner who establishes the thinking about Wordsworth for decades is just gone.

Morris: That's a loss, you're saying.

David: There's much more teamwork now. No, it isn't a loss. No, no. If George Harper had been surrounded by students who were able to take up his insights and refine upon them, we might have arrived where we are today in Harper's day. My point is that his work, if you look back at Wordsworth scholarship, kind of disappeared into a void. Today you can hardly come up with an idea before somebody else is using it too, and you don't even try to keep it to yourself. We do a great lot of teamwork; the papers and discussions in conferences are much more complex and informed—and various. That may be confusing to some people, but minds are much more open these days. And students have more richly equipped minds than they used to have. Though they don't know Latin and Greek as well as they used to.

Morris: Doesn't that go counter to the usual view that we've definitely lost lots of skill?

David: Well, of course I'm talking about good students and good schools, but still I've taught in many different qualities of school, of university. There have been great differences, but I've always felt that I had some students in the class who were definitely worth teaching in this very narrow sense we're talking about.

Morris: But don't you have the feeling that, at a convention like this, when you see vast numbers of people gathered at any one of these sessions, that there's a kind of pressured rhetoric and a lot of questioning that sounds fairly earnest and significant—don't you have the sense that there's a certain emptiness in it all because a lot of these people are actually just being pushed to publish? Hasn't a kind of mechanization gone along with the professionalization that makes things more intense at a certain level but empty just below that?

David: There have always been people whose mental development was

full of falsehood, and the causes differ in different eras. But the quality of published research these days is very good, very high. Some of the intellectual activity is faddishness; there are also reactionary political implications in some kinds of criticism, and these are hard things to sort out. Some of the people using fashionable structuralist or post-structuralist concepts seem to be intent on turning away from human concerns, social concerns, from the concept of human truth. But on the other hand some are using the same language with a strong humane intent.

Morris: I tried to talk about that at the Blake session the other night, using Leopold Damrosch's *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* as a kind of case study of one of the conservative uses of post-structuralist premises to support a certain view of reality to measure Blake against. My paper and some others at the session led to some questioning at the end that divided the room into two sides. On one side were a couple of people who cheered for the idea that Blake was really the first deconstructionist. On the other side, after a while, a woman holding back tears as she was talking said, "Deconstruction represents a kind of skepticism and ultimately cynicism that Blake spent much time trying to combat; and if you just fit him into the latest trend, then he's being eaten up by scholars who need a new piece of meat." She seemed to be very moved by the idea that Blake could just be transformed. Tom Mitchell, one of those who seemed to have aligned himself with deconstruction at this session, said he was touched by her feeling but that he did not view deconstruction as a cynical anything-goes movement.

That disagreement suggests that the new criticisms may be rich enough to support either reactionary ideologies or some true sort of radicalism, even radicalism with its feet on the ground, but I'm not sure. As far as politics are concerned, can you compare yourself to someone like E. P. Thompson, who seems to be moving actively on the European stage these days. Do you have any sense that that's what you ought to be doing, or do you feel perfectly comfortable doing what you are doing?

David: That's not an easy question to answer. I admire his kind of action, but I'm not likely to enter into it myself. But to compare the kinds of scholarship we do, I see great positive value in his work, the humane values we have been talking about. When he rewrites history he goes counter to the pragmatists who assume that lost causes were futile causes, or pointless, or wrong—that there's something bad and stupid about causes that didn't succeed. Thompson gives the benefit of the doubt to lost causes, and lost fighters; he stipulates that they

must have had real human interests, a genuine desire for something, that we would have liked them if we had known them. That's a very valuable counter-image to the history written as though whatever wins is right, what we might call Darwinian history. People are quick to deny that's their assumption.

The trouble with this very impulse of Ed's, however, is that it leads him to jump too quickly to optimum interpretations of his data; some of his own pupils have perceived this. One, examining his class-angled interpretation of the British Charity School Movement, as a mind-control movement by upper-class elements, finds that the working classes were there, many genuinely involved in this education movement even though, in effect, it was educating them away from class struggle. Perhaps Thompson over-simplified the picture in terms of class interest.

In seeking the connection between seventeenth-century radicalism and Blake, his attempts to make out Blake as a Muggletonian were attractive but not solidly based. He has come to see however, that he made too quick a leap. His carefulness as a scholar rights the error; I gather he has given up on the Muggletonians. Also, when he went into the disputes among London Swedenborgians in Blake's day, his hypothesis was that Blake would be one of the Swedenborgian radicals when they split. It turns out, he says with a sad face, that Blake would have been on the side of the conservatives in that battle.

I'm saying two things at once here: one is that you can't take his enthusiasms uncritically—but fortunately he doesn't either. There are pitfalls in that kind of approach as well as in the opposite, and he makes mistakes, but he has admirable qualities in both respects. His history of *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) is a real classic; essential for study of the romantic period.

Morris: Well, I gather from what Thompson himself does that he must think that's good reason, at certain times, for giving up writing and scholarship in favor of direct political action, and that that's worth, say, sacrificing five years of your life, to be right there on the front stage trying to disarm Europe. If you were in his place, I gather that you wouldn't be likely to feel that way.

David: I think if that were my opportunity, if I saw that as the next thing for me to do, I would do it. Or let me put it this way: I have no vision of myself involved in some active public cause, but I can't rule it out. I don't have Ed's kind of dynamic stage presence, but the world might call on me in some way.

About Thompson's work, the distinction could be made this way. He starts with a model of some people's movement, like the Mug-

gletonians, as a good, fine, admirable cause engaged in by good, fine human beings, doing what in their eyes is a good, worthy thing. My own approach to history is more disintegrating. That is, I want to find exactly what the Jacobins, or the British in Paris, were like and what they were up to; and as I get into the evidence, I find it never quite brings clear answers, or gets everything into focus, and I find that, oh my god, at this particular point these people turned a wrong corner, met an unexpected obstacle, fell into conflict. Even with a decent leader, they would have done this, or this. Ed is reluctant to do that; he wants, for instance, to find in his sources ideal radical figures.

I'm afraid I'm overstating this; if we were arguing about it, he would say No No. I'm right on the trend of my own thoughts, though. My intellectual curiosity and hypotheses have changed over the years, maybe you might say in a Wordsworthian way. I don't know. I wouldn't like to be compared to Wordsworth in the trend of my political thinking. But I see history as a tangled thicket. Every document or critique that seems to have it all figured out I question and test—and yet make my own attempt. About the French Revolution, I used to think that Lefebvre and Soboul were getting it all straight and that Cobban and Cobb were being perverse. But the newer revisions and re-revisions fascinate me, help me get a firmer grasp of that tiger, I think.

Morris: Two final questions. You keep coming back to Wordsworth.

David: Yes, I started with Wordsworth, wrote my undergraduate honors paper on him and recently gave out the word that I'm writing a book to be called "The Passionate Wordsworth." Currently it's more apt to emerge as "The Military Wordsworth."

Morris: But I don't ever hear you talking about your childhood, your parents. Is there no Wordsworthian component in your life?

David: Well, I've talked sometimes about Wordsworth's inventing his childhood, to replace the gulf left in his life by the failure of the French Revolution. I have no comparable need in my own life. Yet when I think back into my own childhood I do find some Wordsworthian aspects.

Morris: When did you first read *The Prelude*?

David: As an undergraduate.

Morris: Did you actually see any common ground?

David: I was fascinated by the mystical experience he claimed to have had (as I first understood the "spots of time") and began looking for such spots in my own recollections. One very distinct moment flashed on my inward eye.

I was a busy climber of trees, as a young boy. We lived on a hillside, so that if I got up in even a small tree, in the crab-apple orchard, I could see down the hill. The tallest tree was an oak, and I remember being at the top just at the moment when the noon whistles went on. (This was in the city of Des Moines, Iowa, and you had about the same view from that tree of the city area as you get from Hampstead Heath of the London area, I noticed later.) At that noon moment when the sirens pierced the air, I had a numinous experience just like Wordsworth's suddenly feeling himself one with God, one with all. So in a sense I was identifying with him, seeking in my own life recollections that fitted his—but I never felt compelled to write a Prelude of justification. Also, I've never been thrown into a depression such as his before he wrote *The Borderers*.

Actually, I must have read enough Wordsworth in high school to absorb on a simple level his natural pantheism. At least I remember writing a poem which shocked our neighborhood Congregational minister. It ended "God is Nature, of course"—and he insisted it should be "God is *in* Nature," panentheism.

Morris: Do you see any motivations in your upbringing or in your parents for your own turn to radical politics, or do you think that was completely separate? What are your parents responsible for in you?

David: I could try to tell you, but I think my wife learned more about my childhood, from my mother during the many years she lived with us, than I am able to recall. Let's let her answer this one.

Virginia Erdman: Mainly, I think they permitted him to be an individual, to do things his own way, to develop a kind of independence and authority from an early age, through his early childhood training. His mother had studied kindergarten teaching at Drake University and with Maria Montessori in Italy, and she applied her learning systematically in rearing her first child. His parents were in their thirties when he was born, and for the first four years he was an only child surrounded by adult relatives. So he had plenty of approval and attention, but I don't think he was over-indulged. His mother felt his most outstanding trait was his ability to concentrate and persevere in activities that interested him, and she encouraged this. He was a jolly child and a quick learner, and a good student when he went to school.

His parents were basically conventional people, the kind of non-intellectual college-educated middleclass Americans—

David: No; Mother was my intellectual mentor for many of the early years of school and high school. She subscribed to the Literary Guild, drew me into long critical discussions of books we had both read.

And she brought me up on the great paintings and cathedrals of Europe with a diary of her two years there, packed with picture postcards.

Virginia: But in social attitudes they were both rather like the middleclass Americans that Sinclair Lewis satirized in *Dodsworth*, civic-minded, good Protestant church members who supported youth programs and would never have been associated with radicalism, or even political liberalism, in idea or action. Yet both of them felt that they had once been rebels, each having come from a much *more* rigid and conservative background. There were generations of Presbyterian ministers and missionaries in the Erdman family, pillars of the Republican party, and when David's father "went west," became a business man and a Congregationalist, and voted for FDR and the New Deal, they saw it as a considerable departure from family tradition. So there was a slight tinge of non-conformity in the atmosphere of the home. David's mother was a rational-minded, inquiring but timid, woman who sang in the church choir.

David left home for college at sixteen, and the literally radicalizing influence only came when he was on his own.

But paradoxically, in his post-graduate college years, at Princeton, David looked up his father's eastern relatives—his aunts, uncles, and cousins—and some of these people *did* have a radical influence on him, introducing him to new ideas and values at a time when he was open to them. In particular there was an elderly aunt, Alice Erdman Vernon, who had studied psychology under Adolf Meyer, had taken part in the effort to save Sacco and Vanzetti, was a pioneer in the campaign for Birth Control, and joined a women's movement against war and fascism. She instructed him in modern psychological theory and self-study and stimulated his thinking.

Morris: I see you nodding agreement with Virginia's account.

David: Well, yes: all those Sundays. My parents had met in the church choir in Des Moines—they both had excellent voices. And I was always with them—paying more attention to the music and the symmetries of the stained windows than to the sermon. I too, in high school and college days, sang in choirs. And I taught Sunday School lessons, too, when I was in college. My Christian upbringing gave me a dedicated feeling of being a good person and an example in doing good, the Boy Scout creed.

Morris: I think of Congregationalists as being not so ideological and much more moralistic, is that right?

David: Yes, and with a strong feeling of social purpose. I became an active member of the Ramsey County Sunday School Association in

St. Paul. We would have Easter Dawn services, and weekend "Retreats," and the basic thing to get across in Sunday School was that God is Love: a strong feeling of loving your neighbor. And my own personality fitted into that. I mean, I'm a warm and affectionate guy—unless I'm clobbered.

Then there was "leadership training" which sounds bad (I always say it with a wince, all too well acquainted with loving leaders who are really tyrants). I was one of a group who went to the American Youth Foundation Camps in Michigan, founded by the owner of Purina Mills, Danforth.

Morris: Yes, I've heard.

David: And the fourfold life—shades of the Four Zoas! It was a two-week training session, with courses in the four Gospels, their harmony and disharmony. Danforth gave an afternoon talk about why he wore four-square patterns on his neckties, shoes, shirts. The men who started the Boy Scout movement in this country were the organizers; they had the same ideals for the 4-H clubs, too.

Morris: Is that right?

David: And they all used Indian names, some American Indian and some India Indian: Wadjepi, Kodaya, etc. What I got most involved in was nature study, always bringing forward ideas of love and kindness toward beasts, toward other people—the gospel of brotherly love. So my later politically radical views were a sort of transfer of this. And I suppose that my lack of awareness of what was going on in the political world, until after college, was partly due to concentration on community.

When we are reading "Tintern Abbey" and come to Wordsworth's little "unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love," I have a sudden flash of my Sunday-School spirit. I say, for instance, choosing an example visible outside the window: acts like picking up that beer bottle as you come across the campus and putting it in the next trash bin. And to see who really gets Wordsworth's point, I'll walk to the window and say, who's going to go down after class and pick up that piece of trash? This is not just to teach the text of Wordsworth; I'm still (with self-congratulation, of course) encouraging good community behavior, in the simplest forms.

Another vaguely Wordsworthian identification was my determination, early in life, to be a poet. When I kneeled by my bed at night, I would pray to God to make me a poet.

Morris: That is pretty Wordsworthian, you know.

David: Well, it was a way of saying, I don't like the careers I know about. I never wanted to compete with my unknown uncles as a

preacher. And I saw my father get so cheated and beaten at business that I knew it was a ruthless world. For half a year, between high school and college, I worked in his insurance office, and I saw the insides of that. He was too kind a gentleman, too decent and honest, to succeed more than marginally.

So I was like Wordsworth in not wanting to assume one of those careers, but I did not have his experience of losing parents and having guardians that maintained a heavy disapproval.

Morris: Last question. Do you have any thoughts about the future? I know you're not quitting. Maybe I should say, I know you can't quit.

David: Thanks, I just want to live as long as I've got strength and health. What am I doing now? You know, there are always other things to be done, and I'm doing some of them. Maybe I'll actually write that book some day.

Morris: *The Military Wordsworth?*

David: No, no, no, the *Bread, Politics, and Poetry*. The original project.

March 21, 1982

NORTHROP FRYE

The Meeting of Past and Future in William Morris

THERE IS NO ONE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE who raises more fascinating and complex questions connected with the relation of art to society than William Morris. Part of the complexity, of course, comes from his bewildering versatility. In the intervals of running a business, designing furniture and wallpaper patterns, studying medieval recipes for dyeing textiles, setting up a press for printing fine editions, and agitating both for socialism and for stopping the "restoring" of medieval buildings, he produced a great mass of poetry and fiction, enough in its sheer range and bulk to have made half a dozen quite respectable reputations. Many people would not consider him a major poet or story-teller or translator, but even they would have to admit that he was a major figure, in literature as in many other areas.

The difficulties in understanding Morris are not in his writing as such but in his motives for writing what and as he did. His total work may be divided into five main divisions, which overlap a good deal but are still in a roughly chronological order. First, the early poetry, including "The Defence of Guinevere," and the early stories, appearing mainly in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, where he attained an intensity and vividness of emotion not often equalled in his later work. Second, the period of verse romance, including *Jason*, the collection of tales in *The Earthly Paradise*, and the remarkable masque *Love is Enough*. Third, his epic and romance translations, which include the *Volsunga Saga*, the *Aeneid*, the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf* and various Northern and Old French romances, an activity that spread over all his later life. Fourth, essays and lectures on socialism, more particularly on its relation to the place of the so-called "lesser arts" in society. Fifth, a period of long prose romance and fantasy: *The Wood Beyond the World*, *The Well at the World's End*, *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, *The Sundering Flood*, and others. There is also a genre in this period which combines romance with his political vision: *News from Nowhere*, probably his best known book, *The Dream of John Ball*, *The King's Lesson*, and the narrative poem *Pilgrims of Hope*.