

Edited by  
JOEL FAFLAK and  
JULIA M. WRIGHT



A Handbook of  
**Romanticism**  
Studies



# A Handbook of Romanticism Studies

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# A Handbook of Romanticism Studies

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# Introduction

*Joel Faflak and Julia M. Wright*

This *Handbook of Romanticism Studies* is organized around a set of key terms. Some of these terms have been central to Romanticism studies for some time, such as imagination, sublime, and poetics. Other terms reflect critical trends of the last thirty years, including philosophy, race, historiography, and visual culture. And yet other terms name a selection of genres and modes on the margins of canonical Romanticism but increasingly important to a wider Romanticism studies, including satire, gothic, drama, and sensibility. The list of terms addressed here is not exhaustive, but it does offer a wide range of entry points to the study of Romanticism, from debates over the formal properties of high art to the complex world of Romantic-era theater to the impact of philosophical and scientific debates on conceptions of culture and cultural works.

Romanticism studies, like other literary fields, has undergone a series of sea changes in the last thirty years. Until the 1980s, Romanticism scholarship and teaching were dominated by the so-called “Big Six”: William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Sometimes this was reduced still further, to the “Big Five” or “Big Four,” dropping the unlyrical Blake and/or the too-worldly Byron. Then the field was reshaped by canon reform, spurred largely by feminist theory, the general turn to theory in English departments, and critical studies that rethought and resituated received ideas about Romantic transcendence and lyricism, such as Tilotama Rajan’s *Dark Interpreter* (1980) and especially Jerome McGann’s *The Romantic Ideology* (1983). Canon reform led to new classroom anthologies, such as Jennifer Breen’s *Romantic Women Poets* (1992), McGann’s *Romantic Period Verse* (1993), Duncan Wu’s *Romanticism* (1994) and companionate *Romantic Women Poets* (1997), Andrew Ashfield’s *Romantic Women Poets* (1995), Anne Mellor and Richard

Matlak's *British Literature 1780–1830* (1996), and Paula R. Feldman's *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era* (1997), not to mention dozens of new single-author editions of long-out-of-print novels and verse, particularly through new publishers such as Broadview Press, founded in 1985, and the short-lived Pandora Press, active in the 1980s. In recent years, the Romantic canon has been significantly shaped by New Historicism not only in its interest in material culture and its contexts – the sciences, historical events, labor conditions, the cost and hence accessibility of cultural works – but also in its reframing of culture itself on broader terms, embracing materials pitched at “popular” as well as elite audiences and media beyond that of the printed volume, including the stage, the single-sheet print or ballad, magazines, public spectacles, and oral culture in general.

Romanticism studies never really focused exclusively on a small set of lyric poets, though. There was a well-established “sub-canon” of writers, many personally connected to the Big Four: William Godwin and Mary Shelley (P. B. Shelley's father-in-law and wife, respectively); Robert Southey, Thomas De Quincey, and William Hazlitt (friends of Wordsworth and Coleridge); Thomas Love Peacock (friend of P. B. Shelley); Leigh Hunt (friend and mentor of Keats). Some of these writers were sub-canonical because they wrote prose rather than verse; along with Godwin, Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein* only), and Thomas Love Peacock, Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott rounded out the canon of Romantic fiction. This ground began to shift with the canon reform of the 1980s, initially focused on women writers through the influence of such feminist texts as Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979): Mary Robinson, Felicia Hemans, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Amelia Opie, Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), Maria Edgeworth, Letitia Landon (L.E.L.), Charlotte Smith, and myriad other significant authors were incorporated into scholarship and thence into anthologies and modern editions. Moreover, as Julie Ellison suggests in her chapter here, such rethinkings of the canon opened the door to previously marginalized (feminized) modes, such as sensibility – and, we might add, sub-genres largely associated with women writers, such as the national tale and the silver fork novel.

The rise of postcolonial theory and “four nations” historiography followed feminism in reshaping our sense of Romantic literature, opening the door not only for Scottish, Irish, and Welsh writing as nationally distinctive (no longer to be collapsed into an ill-defined “English” or “British” category), as well as the literature of empire in general, but also for a rethinking of even canonical writers' positions. Scott, heralded by Georg Lukács as the originator of the historical novel, became important as a writer of the Celtic periphery, and Southey, known to the previous generation for dubbing P. B. Shelley and Byron “the Satanic school of poetry,” became known instead as a demagogue for empire. This was assisted by New Historicism, a Marxist revision of “old” historicism that attends to historical forces beyond the elite and major events to consider minority and oppressed groups, regional distinctiveness, and a range of cultural as well as documentary sources. With New Historicism came a concomitant turn to the details that round out the larger picture of culture – urban life, entertainment, learning, the thousands of printed works that never saw a second edition – and a



sense of Romantic literature not as a collection of authors' major works but as a cultural moment in which myriad texts were produced, many anonymous, pseudonymous, or bearing the names of authors about whom we know little or nothing. In other words, as Romanticism studies turned its gaze toward marginalized populations – women, the colonized, the Celtic periphery, the lower classes – the field's sense of the literature of the period broadened as well. And, as it broadened, it moved away from not only the centrality of the Big Six but also the centrality of the author. In the wider print culture, authorship is a much more tenuous category, from the composite authorship of periodicals to the collaborative authorship of the stage and the concealed authorship of the radical press. It has also moved away from the idea of a dominant "Romanticism" that unifies the literary period as a coherent cultural moment, largely because, as a number of chapters here note, that unification proceeded through exclusion – not only of kinds of writers, but also of kinds of writing and cultural production, including those addressed here in chapters on the gothic, drama, satire, narrative, and visual culture.

It is a commonplace to point out that "romantic," when it was used at all, was a somewhat pejorative term in the early 1800s, usually implying naïve idealism or troubling fantasy, and it is not a term with which any writer we now call "Romantic" identified. Subsequent Victorian writers such as Matthew Arnold and Robert Browning *did* reinforce notions of an incomplete, insecure, and thus ineffectual Romanticism, despite the fact that later movements such as the pre-Raphaelites, the Symbolists, and the Decadents were influenced by what had by then crystallized as a "Romantic" influence. What this designation meant, however, was the cause of some confusion, as Arthur O. Lovejoy complained in 1924; this lack of conceptual focus was to plague the period until the mid twentieth century when such influential works as Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953) helped to consolidate a sense of Romanticism in relation to the expression of genius – the lyric gush of individuality. But Romanticism was never fully consolidated in relation to literary history, partly because it was never a purely historical category. While many literary periods are named for objectively defined eras – the Early Modern era, the eighteenth century, the Victorian period – Romanticism names a transhistorical attitude that resists the imposition of temporal or even national boundaries. German Romanticism is roughly contemporary with English Romanticism, but they are variously dated. For English Romanticism, 1789 (French Revolution) and 1798 (Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*) were traditionally used starting dates, and the most common end-dates are still 1837 (Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne) and 1850 (the death of Wordsworth). In recent years, the starting date has been pushed back to 1785, to approach the publication dates of early volumes by William Blake, Robert Burns, and Charlotte Smith, and even back to 1750 (see Wolfson), an expansion followed by a number of contributors here.<sup>1</sup> French Romanticism postdates English Romanticism, as does American Romanticism, which overlaps with a broader "American Renaissance," partly because it was defined as an offshoot of English Romanticism. And contemporary poets such as Seamus Heaney are sometimes dubbed "Romantic" if they show debts to William Wordsworth or P. B. Shelley. Romanticism as a literary

period, moreover, supplanted earlier periods such as the Regency (1811–1820), which approximates the heyday of the so-called “second-generation” Romantics – P. B. Shelley, Keats, and Byron. To add to the complications, some scholars are uncomfortable with the implication that a unifying “ism” can describe a diverse period of literature, and many now eschew the term “Romanticism” in favor of formulations such as “literature of the Romantic period.”

This decentering has been reinforced through a series of sea changes at the theoretical level. As Jerrold E. Hogle notes in his contribution to this volume, the New Criticism that dominated literary study by the mid-1900s shared a number of values with contemporary understandings of Romanticism, particularly Coleridgean organicism.<sup>2</sup> James Benziger begins a 1951 essay on Coleridge, “Perhaps only one who has been long interested in the phrase *organic unity* is wholly aware of how commonplace it has become in twentieth-century criticism” (24). A fuller history of this trajectory might link Coleridge’s aesthetic theory to the “Romantic” poets of the American Renaissance, particularly Emerson (mentioned by Benziger 25), and thence to the US New Critics of the early twentieth century, a transatlantic theoretical genealogy founded upon the valorization of transcendence through the unifying forces of the individual, the imagination, and organicism. “The organic form, said Coleridge – translating Schlegel almost word for word, ‘is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form’” (Benziger 24), the parts working together synergetically so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In a reading of a latter-day Romantic, W. B. Yeats, foundational New Critic Cleanth Brooks thus writes of a “flowering of a few delightful images,” urging, “We must examine the bole and the roots, and most of all, their organic interrelations” (186). There is a seductive symmetry to this kind of organicism that follows Romantic ideas of the relationship between the human and the divine – the poet (from the Greek *poesis*, or “maker”) echoes, on a lower register, the creative force of the Christian God or, as Coleridge puts it, “primary imagination” is “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (I:263). The “well wrought urn,” in Brooks’s phrase, is both metaphor and proof of the capacity of the imaginative individual to create order out of chaos – to transcend the material world and all of its limits and contradictions, and to approach the divine or ideal. But along with this organicism comes a naturalizing that obscures the theorization that the organic, originally, merely tropes: organic verse and New Critical readings alike become “natural,” objective truths that transcend the messy politics, textual histories, and literary climates from which both literature and critical readings emerge. Brooks’s study, after all, his dedication suggests, came at least partly out of a class he taught in the summer of 1942, just a few months after the United States entered World War II, and its Preface is deeply concerned with what Brooks calls “The temper of our times” (x).

To borrow two terms from French thinkers Deleuze and Guattari, we might say the idea that Romantic writing forms an arborescent body of thought has gradually been replaced by a conception of a more diffuse or rhizomatic Romantic *culture*. This process began in the late 1970s and 1980s as “theory” writ large pushed

New Criticism out of its naturalized dominance: first feminism (bifurcated into French feminism and Anglo-American feminism), deconstruction, psychoanalysis (Freudian, then Lacanian as well), and Marxism and post-Marxism offered new ways of reading texts, then postcolonial theory, New Historicism, gender theory, cultural studies, and even a revised editorial theory. But crucial to this theoretical shift was an insistence on calling attention to the theorizing that the New Critics rendered nearly invisible. Thus, while “organic unity” is, as Benziger implies, a term that operates in New Criticism as a “commonplace” rather than the theoretical construct that he reveals it to be, the proliferation of theoretical schools went hand in hand with the proliferation of specialized terms that were never commonplace: *différance*, the Imaginary, intertextuality, Capital, the metropole, Ideological State Apparatus, and so on. Using the terms both made precise theoretical distinctions and flagged the theoretical frame being applied, so that Romanticists became not only Wordsworthians or Coleridgeans but also Derrideans, de Manians, Kristevans, Marxists, Foucauldians, or Habermassians. But this opacity was then read not only as a reaction against the self-effacing theory of New Criticism or an openness about the theoretical assumptions being applied, but also as obscurity – or, worse, an elitist obscurity that relies on a “jargon” that alienates readers. Such theories hence became known, collectively and somewhat wryly, as “High theory,” echoed in Romanticism studies through the naming of canonical, transcendent Romantic writing as “High Romanticism.” “High theory” then spawned its own counter-movement, particularly through the influence of a Marxist-inflected New Historicism that sought to recover lost voices, introduce forgotten texts, and draw a more finely detailed picture of the historical moment.

This turn may seem “anti-theory,” but, like New Criticism, this revived historicism has its own theoretical contours, beyond simple materialism, even if it tends not to foreground them – it is broadly Marxist and often feminist in its interest in non-elite culture and life, for instance, and often implicitly Foucauldian in its understanding of and interest in the operation of power or Habermassian in its attention to a public sphere of complex sociopolitical interactions. It also gestures toward a healthy suspicion of the schematizing impetus to emerge from many 1980s theoretical schools as specialized terms became treated as nearly universal concepts. Scholars thus disputed the merits of using Marxist ideas to analyze preindustrialized Britain, or the appropriateness of applying Pierre Bourdieu’s remarks about twentieth-century French culture to any other time or place. “High theory,” in other words, as it was sometimes used, was legible as Romantic transcendence by other means – a philosophizing turn that, like the lyric moment itself, took us out of history.<sup>3</sup> The historicist reaction against “High theory” is thus another corrective, an effort to counter abstraction with materialism, and systematization with a heterogeneous mass of detail that refuses generalization. No counter-movement, however, has erased its precursors, and we now operate in a complex theoretical field in which New Criticism, “High theory,” and (New and old) historicism are all in play, to one degree or another.

Romanticism studies has thus moved from naturalized organicism (New Criticism), to self-conscious conceptualization (“High theory”), to an almost sublime

avalanche of details about Romantic-era culture, one that has, most strikingly, radically changed our sense of the Romantic canon far beyond the inclusion of women writers and lower-class authors of both genders. There is some nostalgia in the field for the days in which Romanticists could quote Wordsworth's 1850 *Prelude* at each other – for a time in which the theoretical frame was monologic and the Romantic canon compact enough to be known intimately by all. But as much as our circumference (of theoretical approaches, of texts and authors, of historical conditions) has expanded almost exponentially, the center still holds: the first conference of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR) in 1993 had ten papers explicitly on William Wordsworth and five on P. B. Shelley; the eighteenth NASSR conference in 2010, about twice the size of the first conference, had nineteen papers on Wordsworth and seven on Shelley. Readers of this volume will find these poets' names again and again in its pages – but will find them alongside repeat appearances by such newly canonical writers as Barbauld. Romanticism studies has changed dramatically over the last thirty years, and it is now as crucial to recognize the names Hemans, Moore, and Barbauld as it is still expected that we will know that Wordsworth wrote *Michael* and Coleridge about the “infinite I AM,” and essential to be aware that Romanticism studies is now broadly concerned with scores of authors, popular culture, spectacle, visual culture, and other pieces of the complex puzzle that is Romantic-era culture. One might argue that this change sometimes reflects an “archive fever” to document Romanticism so exhaustively that it exhausts whatever conceptual power the terms “Romantic” or “Romanticism” might still hold. The opposite is also true, however, for now perhaps more than at any other time we are aware of the heterogeneous range of authors, texts, events, documents, and cultural artifacts that make the terms more vital to us than ever before.

A key aim of this volume is to help the reader through this renovated and diverse field, both center and circumference. While our general focus throughout is British Isles Romanticism, the significance of continental writing and European Romanticism is a recurring concern, particularly in essays on the sublime, philosophy, gender and sexuality, science, and psychology. We need to remember that the British Romantics read, wrote, and often traveled widely across national boundaries. William Wordsworth and Helen Maria Williams were frontline witnesses to events unfolding on the continent, although a comparison of Wordsworth's sublime “crossing” from Switzerland to Italy in Book 6 of *The Prelude* and Williams's *Letters Written in France* (1790) indicates how diverse British reaction to affairs beyond the metropole could be. Disaffected with British conservatism, the Shelleys and Byron exiled themselves to Italy, from where they wrote British cultural identity and politics large in more continental terms, and Byron met his fate at the “margins” of the West. This transnational exploration unfolded at once with and against both the progressive and repressive aspects of British colonial and imperialist expansion. British Isles Romantic writing thus articulates and reflects the hopes, desire, and anxieties of the metropole, both from within and from without: Byron's and Southey's orientalist narratives, the xenophobic fantasia of De Quincey's various opium writings, Sydney Owenson's novel of cross-cultural confrontation, *The Missionary* (1811), and

Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789) all offer telling counterpoints here. More often than not, the engagement was more metaphoric or psychic than empirical. The jingoism of De Quincey's various writings on the Opium Wars in the later nineteenth century was buttressed by the fact that their author never actually visited China, and in Sweden, Norway, and Finland, Mary Wollstonecraft, though an actual visitor, used their topography to map the melancholy of her introspective nature. But, as Kari Lokke reminds us in her chapter here, British Romantic thought and writing were also generatively cosmopolitan affairs, a libidinous economy of knowledge and desire that reflected the enlightened and global *frisson* as well as anxieties of transnational human interaction.

This volume begins with a cluster of chapters on "Aesthetics and Media," partly to register the shift in Romantic studies from one to the other and partly to highlight the ways in which Romanticism remains fundamentally yoked to form – to the lyric, the sonnet, the dramatic poem, and the epic; to emergent print culture and thriving theatrical culture; to the capitalizing of the "p" in Poet. The first essay in this section, inevitably if not naturally, is on the Romantic imagination. Richard C. Sha traces its elevation on the one hand as near-mythic in its power to transform and transcend, and on the other its recent critical pathologization as the vehicle of concealed ideology and the corruptions of history. Sha instead argues that we need to move away from deterministic views of the relationship between interiority and the material world (either transcendence or historical embeddedness) to consider instead the complex interplay between self and world imagined in Romantic literature. In the period, that interplay, as Sha suggests, could be understood as pathological – bad stimuli could make diseased imaginations and so diseased minds; unhealthy imaginations could negatively affect the body – but also transform bodies through the proper stimuli and training. Julie Ellison, in the second chapter in this section, deals with another aesthetic theory concerned with the disciplining of the subject's response to exteriority – sensibility. Sensibility might seem to stress interiority through its interest in the subject's sympathetic identification with the feelings, and especially sufferings, of others. But, as Ellison makes clear, it was also entangled with the transformation of public culture through, for instance, the emergence of politeness and the public display of morality, including opposition to slavery and other forms of social injustice. Sensibility redefined the civic leader as the "man of feeling," and martial scenes of suffering to argue against myriad social ills. The third chapter in this section deals with efforts to theorize overwhelming exteriority – the sublime. Anne Janowitz traces the larger history of the sublime back to Longinus and Lucretius, and then forward through the emergence of translations of classical writings to the eighteenth century in which the sublime was a key concept in aesthetic thought across an array of disciplines, and not only through the familiar icons of Burke and Kant. As Janowitz's chapter makes clear, the idea of the philosophic poem – taken from Lucretius by early eighteenth-century writers and carried through to Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Barbauld – is entwined with efforts, through the sublime, to think through the nature of the cosmos.

In the final two chapters in this section, we turn from the traditional interest of Romantic studies in the individual's experience of and escape inward from external phenomena, particularly through aesthetics (sensibility, imagination, the experience of the sublime), to the divisions of aesthetics by medium, taking periodicals and visual culture as our examples. We do not trace here merely a shift from the Romantic interest in interiority to a New Historicist interest in the materials of culture but rather recognize overlapping regimes of organization for Romantic aesthetics, and the ways in which they are classed. As Sha notes in his chapter, the imagination of Coleridge's *Biographia* was not considered to be available to the lower classes or to women. Sensibility, the sublime, and the imagination were alike the province of the cultivated, the well read, the judicious – the upper class, the formally educated, and generally the male. Periodical and visual culture, dramatically pitched at more diverse audiences, both embraced and policed different reader- and viewerships. In their chapter, Kristin Flieger Samuelian and Mark Schoenfield make clear the ways in which periodicals engaged a much broader array of cultural interests than the dominant artistic modes and vehicles can represent. Celebrity culture, court fashions, dancing, boxing, folk song, as well as literature, politics, current events, travel, and science, dominated the periodicals – and the periodicals dominated print culture and the era's proliferation of reading publics and, along with those publics, standards of "taste" that sought to regulate, for instance, the Romantic novel on terms entwined with particular visions of social and domestic order. In the next chapter, Sophie Thomas addresses the significance and diversity of visual culture in the era, including such popular entertainments as the panorama and an 1816 exhibition of Napoleon's belongings, in order to trace the centrality of visuality to Romantic culture across a variety of media and viewerships. If the gothic, as Hogle discusses in his chapter in the next section, insists on calling attention to the ubiquity of the counterfeit, many Romantic spectacles depended on it – the panorama in particular offering to simulate the "wonder" or terror of being in the midst of battle, unfamiliar landscapes, and even "ghost shows" (we might think here of the visuality of the gothic, from its staged versions to its narratives' reliance on architectural forms, paintings, and displays of emotion that are otherwise beyond utterance). The limited populism of such spectacles – most requiring the disposable income to pay for admission, though not the substantial resources required for a private library or art collection – cut two ways, on the one hand distributing legitimated forms of knowledge (scientific, anthropological, aesthetic) to a wider audience and, on the other, eroding hegemonic control over culture, the priority of the "natural" (in the proliferation of "illusion"), and the common identification of elevating aesthetic response with solitude. The latter was reconnected to the visual, however, through book illustration and ekphrastic verse, returning the visual to the private. As the chapters in this section make clear, moreover, the visuality of the Romantic period cuts across media and mode: the interest in the relationship between self and world traced by Sha is first and foremost understood through *looking*, whether at the "scene of sensibility" (Ellison), the sublime vista (Janowitz), or the entertainments described in the pages of the periodicals (Samuelian and Schoenfield). All are, in some measure, "scenes of seeing" (Thomas).

But there is another relationship crucial to literary Romanticism, and that is the one between author and reader – what Wordsworth famously described as a contract or “a formal engagement” in his 1802 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (596), an agreement on conventions of genre and style through which the author meets the expectations of (or is even comprehensible to) the reader. Our section on “Theories of Literature” thus begins with essays on the author and the reader. As Elizabeth A. Fay and Stephen C. Behrendt demonstrate, these concepts are bound up with fundamental questions of authority, of the author’s power to represent (to organize, narrativize, and affirm), and of the reader’s increasing role as consumer and interpreter of authorial output. Central to Fay’s argument is the author as a locus of organization, from Edmund Burke’s “creat[ion] of a narrative whole” out of the nation’s history in his *Annual Register* to Foucault’s concept of the “author function,” as a process through which an author’s body of work is made “whole.” As Fay demonstrates, this is closely allied to the emergence of copyright (and concomitantly, the profitability of print), placing the question of authorship amidst concerns about intellectual property and public authority, as well as communities formed through reading, and interleaved with more aesthetically framed concerns, such as originality (“genius”), allusiveness, and representation – and the complicating fact of collaborative writing in the period. In his chapter, Behrendt attends to the growth of a reading public at the same time – the proliferation of kinds of readers, and of kinds of readings – and the related effort to organize them through a course of reading that would serve “to inform, and thus to *form*, an educated and sophisticated citizenry capable of exercising moral, economic, military, and scientific leadership.” Readers were caught in the countervailing pressure to both normalize readers through “standard English” and common bodies of knowledge, and to sustain social hierarchies through different levels of literacy and access to print, in a complicated organicist maneuver that naturalized both the coherence of Englishness and the divisions that separated the educated elite from the increasingly literate and educated populace, which was demanding greater political rights in the period. Suggestively, both Fay and Behrendt discuss Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan”: for Fay, the poem’s fragmentation and polyvocality put on display the poet’s “genius” and “trustworthiness,” making it possible for readers to “share” in the creative process; for Behrendt, this readerly role is part of “the Romantic-era empowerment of the reader.”

The remaining essays in this section deal with questions of form, as part of this author–reader contract – a guide to expectations, and a set of conventions to be transgressed. Because of the traditional stress on Romantic verse and the lyric in particular, we begin with Jacqueline Labbe’s chapter on “Poetics.” Labbe situates Romantic debates over poetical proprieties within a larger eighteenth-century concern not only with verse, but also with the questions of politeness, taste, and cultural authority that concern many of the earlier chapters in this volume. What Labbe finds distinctive in the Romantic period is a “poetics of place,” that is, an insistent return to “locality” for various purposes, often to situate the poetic speaker and memory, or to introduce the reader to unknown (colonial, peripheral) locales –

a concern of prose narrative as well, as the next chapter shows. This poetics undergirds the alliance between poetry and nation that Labbe traces in the traditional Romantic poetic canon, and can be more fully contextualized through the expansion of that canon in recent decades. In the next chapter, Jillian Heydt-Stevenson addresses what was once the province of the sub-canonical but now is central to the revised Romantic canon – narrative. While Labbe focuses on the poetics of place, Heydt-Stevenson attends to the motion of narrative. Narrative not only propels the action forward but also moves through time and across space, turns to contemporary debates, details the growth of character, and perhaps even spurs readers to act. Romantic narrative, she suggests, is marked by various techniques that resist the conventional impetus to support the narrative illusion of transparency, consistency, and plausibility. Framing narratives and paratextual materials (notes, glossaries, appendices), digressions, irony, free indirect discourse – all challenge the reader to puzzle over the text’s meaning without offering any conclusive answers. In the next chapter, David Worrall addresses another significant genre that has been marginalized by the dominance of lyric, the drama. As Worrall makes clear, theatrical culture extended far beyond the two licensed theaters at the center of the metropole – reaching out to London theaters that could stage “lighter” dramas (burlettas, for instance) without state permission (and censorship) and onward to provincial theaters and home entertainments, like that represented famously in Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. This larger picture of Romantic theater is much more diverse, including middle-class events, women theater-managers, and African-American actors, and it is traceable not in our canonical anthologies but rather in the wider documents of history, including letters, diaries, playbills, accounts registers, and the Larpent archive of manuscripts submitted for the Lord Chancellor’s approval. Worrall’s chapter thus not only explains but also offers a salutary rethinking of the Big Six’s interest in dramatic form – their plays, he suggests, are canonically trivial, from a historicist perspective in which there were hundreds of more successful plays, and yet their dramatic work also registers the ubiquity of interest in contemporary theater.

In the final chapters in this section, we turn to two key modes: the gothic and satire. As modes, they appear across genres – verse, prose fiction, drama – and can constitute isolated moments within texts dominated by other modes. A novel of manners can veer toward satire for a few pages, and a poem of exploration can have a gothic section. And, as Jerrold E. Hogle establishes in his chapter, the gothic mode is inextricable from the modalities of Romanticism; it is the reflection of Romanticism against which canonical Romanticism defined itself to secure its status and stability in a complicated tangle of fear and desire that Hogle frames through the Kristevan idea of the abject. Calling attention to the gothic preamble, almost premise, of Coleridge’s famous statement on the imagination in Chapter XIII of the *Biographia Literaria*, Hogle traces the pervasiveness and indeed the centrality of the (abjection of the) gothic to English Romanticism in particular, and reminds us that the marginalization of the gothic was largely pursued by New Criticism. In his chapter on satire, Steven E. Jones pursues the similar abjection of satiric writing in the



development of a mid-century Romanticism. But, as Jones notes, satire was always in Romanticism – in scholarship that attended to the importance of print satire, in passages in canonical poems, and in non-canonical works by canonical authors. The putative opposition between Romanticism and satire, Jones suggests, was a Victorian maneuver through which to empty out the radical politics of the Romantic period (and so construct the period as a starry-eyed “Romantic”) or to ally it with an atavistic Augustanism (as in comparisons of Byron’s satire to Alexander Pope’s). As Jones’s chapter demonstrates, satire was nearly ubiquitous in the era, in the works of long- and newly-canonical authors, in graphic satire by such notables as James Gillray, and in newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and songs. Together, these two chapters not only trace the oppositional moves by which Romanticism was entrenched by the New Critics as serious, organicist, and transcendental, but also the ways in which such moves excise influential or otherwise-significant materials as well as elide the very oppositionality of Romantic-era culture itself – not least the importance of radicalism, criticism of the imperial enterprise, challenges to dominant codes of politeness and gender propriety, and efforts to transform literature itself.

In his 1792 *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* William Godwin flirted with, and subsequently mourned, the idea of a society free of “Ideologies and Institutions,” the title of our third section, which takes up how Romantic bodies and bodies politic were formed and striated by the stresses of history. The historical (re)turn in Romanticism studies reminds us that the period was at once intensely utopian, skeptical about, and self-aware of its historical moment. Ted Underwood begins his chapter on “Historiography” by noting the shift from studying exemplary (male) individuals or events to systematizing historical processes. This shift reflected awareness of sexual, cultural, national, or racial difference, but also of the remoteness of antiquity, nature, the cosmos, even of the human mind and body themselves; of progress, evolution, and decline; and thus of the strangeness of time itself. Underwood focuses on sacred versus secular history in biblical hermeneutics, the politics of historical interpretation, and the science of language and museum culture, both of which emerged to compare, evaluate, and conserve historical process and progress. Increasingly, such developments elided history with historiographical practice and thus with the educational, political, and aesthetic utility of historical discourse. This ideological form of history is, of course, a central concern of the historical (re)turn in Romanticism studies. Or to paraphrase Orrin N. C. Wang in the next essay, in Romanticism “Ideology” realizes that it has a history, one that takes in our own attempts to read Romanticism. Via their concern to work through and past ideology (Burke’s exploitation of ideology to achieve a sense of “natural” Englishness, for instance), Romantics were at once mired in and critical of ideology, aware of the social, educational, and political influence of their writing. Reading between Romantic ideology and our critique of it, Wang thus traces a shift from ideology as habit, custom, or doctrine to a shifting structure of desire or aesthetic phenomenon at once protean and disciplinary, productive and repressive. For Julia M. Wright ideology gains purchase on “truth” to the profit of “Nation and Empire.” Although British histories post-1776 or post-1789 remarshaled national energies

toward building a Second Empire, nationalist debate often contested this (in)corporation, a productive comparison between nationalisms and nationalist literatures (English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish) that belied simplistic patriotism to signify an often resistant singularity. This contest of national differences comprises an incipient postcolonialism now central to political critiques of Romanticism. For Wright three genres in particular express both a British Isles nationalist cum imperial consciousness and its unconscious energies: epic, ballad or song, and national tale. Critical hegemonies both Romantic and contemporary have tended to obscure in each the historical and material traces of a Romantic ambivalence toward as well as celebration of nation and empire.

The final three chapters in “Ideologies and Institutions” explore further this tension between hegemony and singularity, center and margin, in Romantic writing and criticism. Like Wright, Michael Scrivener, in his chapter on “Class,” takes up modes and genres that voice ideas silenced by “official” Romantic culture and politics, but also by more recent Romantic criticism. Middle and lower ranks wrote against the cultural hegemony of Wordsworth’s critique of Augustan rhetoric and its “anti-aristocratic cultural offensive.” But class further complicated this offensive: were the Shelleys or Byron any less justified than Clare when speaking for the polis? For Scrivener, class, language, and genre unavoidably intersect to necessitate the study of pamphlets, periodicals, or broadsides alongside “legitimate” objects of aesthetic contemplation. Accounting for laboring-class poetry, for instance, means displacing the author as icon and thus replacing a high/low dichotomy with a spectrum of political identities from individual to communitarian, in turn evoking a cultural politics overdetermined by the capitalism of the shifting critical marketplace then and now. Peter J. Kitson’s essay on “Race” explores this cultural politics through criticism’s account of Romantic attempts to exorcise the ghosts of racism. Caught between race as social construction and as a biological or essential marker of human difference, Romantic critiques of race (abolitionist debates, slave narratives, ballads, and so forth) were also complicit with the same racial categories they sought to overturn, especially as Romanticism continues the classification and distinction that characterizes eighteenth-century aesthetic, scientific, and philosophical practice. But whereas earlier racial distinctions were uncertain, the racialized sciences of Romantic comparative anatomy, ethnology, or physical anthropology, or the Romantic aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime, often turned shades of gray to black and white, a “neutral” but nonetheless insidious racialization that effaces difference. Kari Lokke takes up this “divisive” elision in this section’s final chapter on “Gender and Sexuality.” Assuming and further exploring the feminist critical revision of the Romantic canon in the 1970s and 1980s discussed by Ellison, Lokke begins with the “unprecedented, highly public, and cosmopolitan platform for the expression of women’s political opinions” offered by French Revolutionary debates, a political ferment that made Romantic concerns with gender and sexuality an especially cosmopolitan, pan-European affair. The innovation, expansion, and democratization of Romantic writing practices, publishing markets, and reading publics allowed women to write across class, race, gender, and national boundaries in

the public sphere. This investment accrued, however ambivalently, to the profit of both women and men writers, creating what Lokke calls a synergy of sexual relations that at once rewrote and entrenched marital, familiar, and sexual categories.

The final five chapters, in a section entitled “Disciplinary Intersections,” address ideas, ideologies, and institutions that shaped Romantic and post-Romantic disciplines and interdisciplines – bodies of knowledge formed by the conflagration of a number of cultural, philosophical, scientific, historical, and political drives. They also thus address the disciplinary desire of knowledge itself, both in the Romantic period and in the criticism and theory that shaped Romantic writing after the fact. In “Philosophy” Marc Redfield explores this shifting anatomy at the “porous” boundary between theology, politics, literature, and science, but also between and across nations. As Theresa M. Kelley and Joel Faflak later explore with regard to Romantic science and psychology, philosophy unfolds in specific national settings – empirical and materialist in England and Scotland; metaphysical and idealist in Germany. An earlier organicist Romantic criticism implicitly ventriloquized these divisions by privileging a transcendental view of the imagination shaped by the influence of German philosophy on Wordsworth, Coleridge, or De Quincey. Redfield’s chapter corrects the historical and critical reaction formation that condensed fears of a “Germanized” Romanticism with those about the later “undue” influence of continental philosophy or “theory” in order implicitly to protect the properly material and historical nature of English thought from the taint of French or German abstraction. That is to say, he reminds us how British Romanticism, like German thought, was itself profoundly polymathic. Michael Tomko addresses a similarly transdisciplinarity in the oldest discipline, religion. By desacralizing an earlier Romantic poetic faith, Romantic criticism has rehistoricized Romantic religion as a conflicted congregation of theological, sociopolitical, scientific, and philosophical forces, which at once collapse and reify the church/state divide. The French Revolution shifted sacred to secular concerns, but also unleashed the fanaticisms of theology, science, and politics that rushed to fill the void left by the death of sacred rites and systems. Post-revolutionary religious politics transmutes into what Hent de Vries calls political theologies: evangelicism, millenarianism, low versus high church, the zealotry of scientific and economic promise. For Tomko, however, perhaps Romantic religion exists beyond metaphysics, mysticism, or politics via its radical engagement with “the unknown,” the intellectual, affective, and spiritual dimensions of which Romanticism studies is only beginning to appreciate.

Philosophy and religion clashed with science in vitalism debates of the later eighteenth century, which raged far beyond the Romantic period. At stake was the soul and life itself. Who or what controlled life? One side aligned spiritual forces with a higher power (or powers) beyond human control; the other saw vitality in increasingly materialist, physiological, secular terms: the human as the product of its own biopolitics. For Theresa M. Kelley in “Science,” this latter group’s hegemony was by no means stable, however. The scientific disciplines we now know emerged from a rather more polymathic philosophical inquiry that crossed between the material and immaterial. Or as Kelley puts it, Romanticism’s scientific spirit floated

between empiricism and speculation, forensics and theory. Romantic thought experimented in the laboratory of scientific practice to “constitute the arresting core of Romantic science as a professional and public inquiry pitched to recognize the possibility of imaginary and imagined physical worlds.” Ideology and imagination thus vitally interplay both to observe and classify lived and hypothetical experience, from the biological unfolding of organic life, to the broader evolution of species and the natural world, to the unimaginable warp and woof of cosmic and geological time and space. Science’s often tenuous ability to imagine and systematize a shaped and shaping world becomes a rather more determinate scientific inquiry in James Robert Allard’s essay on “Medicine.” Formed out of the perfect storm of politics, science, philosophy, and literature, Romantic medicine sought to classify, diagnose, and thus cure the forces of historical decline in the human body. This war against biological destiny was armed by medicine’s ability to sell its knowledge to the public, embodied in the doctor, particularly the surgeon, as physical and social healer. In this triumph of biopolitics the literal and metaphorical “precision” of the medical gaze signified the power to administer and thus “author” life properly, an author-ity was indebted to the Scottish Enlightenment as the intellectual, scientific, and philosophical center of modern scientific debate. *Who* argued was as important as *what* they argued, Allard contends. Surgical personality and celebrity as well as knives cut to the source of disease to arrest the vital forces of decay, a Romantic scientific Prometheanism always poised, as Mary Shelley prophesies, on the abyss of its own Frankensteinian ambitions. One outcome of this Prometheanism, as Joel Faflak shows in this volume’s final chapter on “Psychology,” is the emergence of the human mind and consciousness as both engine and crucible of human knowledge, determination, and progress. Emerging between philosophy, religion, science, and medicine, psychology evokes the poetics of Romantic thought itself, the literary equivalent of a human endeavor that is also a central feature of Romantic personhood, society, and politics. If medicine materializes the physiology of motivation and desire in the brain, psychology analyzes the mind as both material substance and immaterial drive, a potentially knowable (because we are its vital witnesses) and ineluctably inaccessible origin (because we can never witness ourselves witnessing). So, when in “Ode to Psyche” Keats builds a shrine to the unsung Psyche in some “untrodden region” (51) of his mind, he locates the mind’s powers at the center of ideological, social, political, philosophical, religious, scientific, and cultural activity. At the same time, however, he bequeaths to us the impossibility of “thinking” our way beyond or outside of this human dimension, an impossibility that Romanticism studies is only now beginning to contemplate.

## Notes

- 1 See Blake’s *Poetical Sketches* (1783), Burns’s *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), and Smith’s *Elegaic Sonnets* (1784).
- 2 For more on organicism, see Sha’s contribution to this volume.

- 3 This was most striking in the Paul de Man controversy of the late 1980s, in which deconstruction was read as a rationalization for eliding the significance of de Man's contributions in the early 1940s to a newspaper with anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi leanings.

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Part 1

Aesthetics and Media





# Imagination

*Richard C. Sha*

## **On the Romantic Imaginations We Want and Imaginations We Don't<sup>1</sup>**

Perhaps no single entity was more important to Romantic writers than the imagination. Blake wanted “this world of imagination” to be “the world of eternity,” to the God dwelling within every human breast (555). Percy Bysshe Shelley wanted the imagination to be “the great instrument of moral good” and it could function as such by operating as an organ of sympathy (517). In her “Ode to Imagination Under the denomination of Fancy,” Scottish novelist and poet Elizabeth Hamilton addressed the imagination as “Offspring of celestial light, / Spirit of the subtlest kind, / Fancy! Source of genius bright – / Illuminator of the mind!” In one go, she desires the imagination to embody fecundity, Enlightenment, spirit, genius, and mind. That this linkage is accomplished by the figure of apostrophe, the fictive figure of address, perhaps hints at the inability of the imagination to be all these things, even as her insistence on “denomination,” based on the Latin meaning “calling by a name,” generates more naming by adding fancy to imagination.<sup>2</sup> The very powers of naming and addressing are thereby undermined. In her final stanza, Hamilton renders this initially ungendered “offspring” a “daughter,” and femininity enables her to close the gap between “thee,” “thy,” and “thou” (the imagination) – which appear fifteen times – and her “my” in the final line (used once). Hamilton thus demands thinking about how the imagination can heal the gap between wanting and being, and invites us to consider what we are to do with this gap.

The gap between wanting and being is well worth thinking about, especially with regard to the critical history of the imagination. This essay deliberately begins a few miles above Romantic accounts of the imagination because it charts the competing

ways in which Romantic critics have invoked the imagination to perform critical work. Why have critics wanted one version of the imagination over another? The fact that these positions so often mirror and/or reverse previous positions signals that our very definitions and theories of the Romantic imagination have something, perhaps everything, to do with critical desire. Indeed, this history shows that the Romantic imagination oscillates from being pure of ideology to the very embodiment of it, and now to being more wary of ideology than critics of the evasive or ideological imagination have recognized. At bottom, then, I will argue, this debate – this need to read ideology where others have read imagination – is conditioned by our increasing skepticism about the role of literature in the world, and the uses or uselessness of literary methods of reading to that world. The symptom of this skepticism is that contemporary critics have renamed the imagination “history,” the “social,” and “ideology.” And yet, as we shall see, what counts as “history” and “ideology” is a particularly literarily centered history or ideology whose core is figuration or language or reading. The irony here is that Romantic writers had no need to name the imagination as history or ideology because it was for them inextricable from history or ideology. Their notions of history, however, took different forms of material embodiment. The clear-cut distinctions between text and context, literature and history, verbal figures and action, are ours, not theirs, and they are ours because of our faith that to make literature historical or ideological is to do meaningful intellectual work. I will then propose some future directions of study that attempt to return to what the Romantics wanted to do with the imagination, what they found wanting in it, and why.

### **Romantic Histories of the Imagination**

Originally published in 1953, M. H. Abrams’s *The Mirror and the Lamp* is still read and cited today. Few critical books have an off-the-shelf life of almost sixty years. Abrams distinguished Romanticism from the Enlightenment because it offered a revolutionary expressive theory of art instead of a mimetic one: against Locke’s metaphor of the mind as a mirror, the Romantics conceptualized the mind in terms of a lamp that is “bathed in an emotional light he himself [*sic*] projected” (52). This theory enabled Abrams to show that whereas previous writers had made the world central to the work of art, Romantic writers made themselves central to the work of art.

In terms of his concept of the imagination, Abrams emphasized a gap between mechanical fancy and the organic imagination (ch. 7). He defines “organicism” as “the philosophy whose major categories are derived metaphorically from the attributes of living and growing things” (168). Underlying both is an associationalist psychology that moves from understanding the mind in terms of a mechanical combination of ideas to a more “organic” synthesis and fusing: in the same way that a plant unfolds “spontaneously from within” and assimilates “to its own nature the materials needed for its nourishment and growth” (167), the imagination works

organically. Where the imagination before organicism was doomed to combine and recombine previous “unit images of sense,” the Romantic imagination could assimilate and digest such images (172). Abrams concludes this chapter with speculation that this idea of the imagination “incorporates our need to make the universe emotionally as well as intellectually manageable” (183). This of course raises the issue of what he has done to make his version of the imagination as valuable, including setting up clear binary oppositions between mechanism and organicism, mirrors and lamps – oppositions that will not hold up to rigorous scrutiny.

Like *The Mirror and the Lamp*, James Engells’s *The Creative Imagination* is a major milestone in the critical scholarship on the imagination. Situating the Romantic imagination within multiple Enlightenment contexts ranging from Humean empiricism to Kantian transcendentalism, Engells highlights the key developments in aesthetics, psychology, philosophy, and art that contributed to the growing influence of the imagination. Where Hume believed that it was possible to know the things of this world – hence his empiricist leanings – Kant argued, by contrast, that since things could only be apprehended through our modes of apprehension of them, we could only know about how we know, and the things themselves could never become objects of knowledge. As the name for the relationship between sensory information and mind, the imagination thus became central to knowing.

If Engells admirably charts the manifold ways in which the imagination was defined and used by male English and German writers, psychologists, philosophers, and artists, he stresses synthesis over difference. Like Abrams, Engells’s creative imagination harmonizes difference under the rubric of growth (ix), when in fact the clashes he so ably documents threaten the imagination’s coherence. For instance, although Engells insists that the Germans provide the foundation for the rise of the imagination in Britain, insofar as they systematically think about it, Gavin Budge has recently argued that German idealism was an outgrowth and reaction to British Common Sense Philosophy, embodied in the school of Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart (12). “The Common Sense school’s emphasis on the semiotic nature of perception situates human reason within a theological and providentialist framework” (30), a framework that not only belies neat distinctions between British empiricism and Romanticism, but also undermines the general alignment of British Romanticism and German idealism. The foundations of anything, thus, change according to what is counted in the historical sample. In order to measure growth, growth must be charted against some baseline, and the narrative of growth is contingent upon what counts as the baseline. This growth narrative further obscures interpretative choice: the selection of beginning and endpoint undermines the claims to organic growth.

Responding to what he saw as a tendency of Romantic critics such as Abrams and Engells to recapitulate a Romantic ideology of seeing poetry as non-ideological, Jerome McGann made in his 1983 *The Romantic Ideology* one of the signal interventions in Romantic criticism. “Today the scholarship and interpretation of Romantic works is dominated by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism’s own self-representations” (137), he announced. Symptomatic of this uncritical

absorption was the tendency to frame the imagination as having “transcend[ed] the age’s doctrinal conflicts and ideological shifts” (68). In stressing the organic imagination, and in refusing to think about the ideology of organicism – how could the imagination be doctrinal if it were like a plant? – both Abrams and Engells were guilty of such “uncritical absorption.” McGann elaborates, “When Romantic poems deal with Nature and the Imagination, then, they are invoking a specific network of doctrinal material” (69). What he meant by doctrine and ideology was a kind of false consciousness, a “particular socio-historical vantage [that] hence embodies certain ideological presuppositions” (28).

With a few clicks of a keyboard, the very thing that escaped ideology became the very thing that embodied it. The imagination thus became the doctrine that enabled an illusory escape from doctrine. This maneuver had two consequences: one, the value of a critical position became measurable to the extent to which it was at critical distance from Romanticism’s idealisms; two, Romanticism itself became the object of critical suspicion, despite the fact that McGann repeatedly recognized how the Romantics understood the precariousness of the ideal (72), and the critic’s work became valuable to the extent that it manifested such suspicion.

It is the absolutist framing of this position that leads me to ask if the imagination’s relation to ideology can be captured by so blunt an instrument as suspicion. More recently, defenders of the imagination such as John Whale and Deborah White have argued that the imagination was used far more self-consciously than has been credited. If, for McGann, literature as ideology locates the capacity for critical distance in historical distance, then lost in such a position is the possibility of critical sympathy with the Romantics’ belief in the imagination and its capacity to change the world. For McGann, it seems, critical sympathy is not possible. More importantly, Romantic writers had their own suspicions about the imagination. Alexander Schlutz has shown the ways in which Kant worried about how the imagination’s connection to the “realm of receptivity” might disable it from producing an “actual cognition worthy of the name” (85). Yet McGann’s book has had such impact that the twelve-step recovery program for Romanticists has yet to be fully written.

If Abrams and Engells stress growth – the imagination constantly grew in relation to Enlightenment developments – Denise Gigante has recently argued that critics such as McGann have oversimplified organicism by forgetting that “the very concept of organic development, indicated by the German word *Bildung*, merges the diverse fields of biology and aesthetics” (46). Against a narrow version of poetic form as ideology, Gigante argues that “the concept of vital power upon which they [the Romantics] relied made possible a world in which material structures were plastic and subject to ongoing change” (48). And against the synthesizing organicism of Abrams and Engells, Gigante insists that one logical outgrowth of organicism was monstrosity. Here, she aligns monstrosity with Kant’s definition of it: “an object is monstrous . . . if by its magnitude it nullifies the purpose that constitutes its concept” (47). Read in a Kantian light, organicism has the power to frustrate itself and thus cannot be reduced to ideology. Perhaps McGann would respond by insisting that this is yet another form of uncritical absorption into Romantic ideas.

Like McGann, Alan Liu counts himself among historicist critics of Romanticism who see “not so much historical reference in the text as the historical groundedness or determinateness of the lack of reference itself” (579n). In other words, and in a typical deconstructive move, the absence of historical reference speaks to the presence of history. To help with the idea of a lack as presence, imagine a smoker who is trying to quit, for whom absence conditions awareness. For Alan Liu, “there is no imagination” (39) because the imagination names the denial of history that is, in effect, the only possible engagement with it. Let me untangle this paradox. As Liu explains, one can never experience history as history because “the stuff of history is manifestly not ‘here,’ available for such ordinary means of verification as sight or touch,” and consequently “the reason poetic denial is ipso facto a realization of history . . . is that history is the very category of denial” (39). Because engagement with history is only possible through its denial, Liu returns to the famous Simplon Pass episode of Book 6 of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* (1850), and where Geoffrey Hartman named the self as filling the gap between nature and nature’s source in order to reformulate the self so that it is about the connections between “history, nature, self” (4), Liu adds, “The theory of denial is Imagination” (5). Because the sourcehood of the self is elsewhere and because the “self” needs an “ad hoc definition of history at its contact point with experience: a sense not yet formulated into idea” (5), this denial must be doubly imagined and such imagining is the very condition of a selfhood partly constituted by history. He then goes on to show how Wordsworth’s crossing of the Alps is mapped onto Napoleon’s crossing, and these crossings – through the figure of chiasmus, the Greek word for crossing – figure the crossing of literature and history. Wordsworth adds his paean to the imagination to the earlier draft because imagination serves as a “canny double for an uncanny ‘Napoleon’” (24). “Imagination at once mimics and effaces Napoleon . . . to purge tyranny by *containing* tyranny within itself as the empire of the Imagination” (24).

One must pause and admire the deftness and formalist elegance of this reading.<sup>3</sup> Rarely has chiasmus had such force. Notice how crossing enables Liu to capture the doubleness of every act: denial is engagement, mimicry is effacement, purging is containment, postcolonialism is empire of the imagination, literature is history. If New Historicists such as Liu turn to chiasmus to get away from totalizing histories, they often return to such histories when they employ chiasmus as a form of synecdoche for history as Liu does (Thomas 12). Liu’s theory of the imagination, moreover, in part attempts to grapple with “a blurred confusion between notions of passive and of active engagement in cultural process” (579n). He submits, “in terms of my operative concept in this book: ‘denial’ connotes a more active form of passive representation than ‘displacement’” (580n). His deconstruction of the terms “denial” and “engagement” grants history an undeniable shaping force even when that force is itself a form of denial. And yet it is the imagination’s undeniable relation to history, undeniable because denial counts as an engagement with history, that I wish to interrogate. If Liu makes history a part of self-making and a part of literature, he also thereby runs the danger of flattening distinctions between active and passive engagement, and thus makes literature’s engagement with history

potentially valueless because it is inevitable. If Wordsworth has since Hartman rarely been read with such power, perhaps the signal failure of Liu's theory is that it cannot adjudicate between radical and conservative engagements with history.

Instead of seeing the imagination as an evasion or denial of the real, Forest Pyle in *The Ideology of Imagination* insists not only that the imagination is a figure, but also that as a figure it represents the very workings of ideology. Because the imagination is charged with "making a linkage, an articulation" (2), it marks "a disjunction" within subject and society and spirit and matter "that cannot be healed" (3). As such, Pyle's subtle revision marks a critical advance: by making the imagination inseparable from ideology, its figuration and representation become sites for probing how ideology works. Such a position enables him to return to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous difference between the primary and secondary imagination at the end of Chapter 13 of the *Biographia Literaria* (1817) – the former creates while the latter reconciles – and consider what Coleridge calls upon the imagination to do. "The imagination institutes the process by which divisions inherent in subjectivity – divisions reproduced in the formal doubleness inherent in autobiographical discourse – are 'reconciled' or 'harmonized' as the subject is, by virtue of its 'training' in the systems of education, 'sutured' or written into th[e] national narrative" (57). Here, the difference between the primary and secondary imagination allegorizes the difference within subjectivity which in turn allegorizes the difference between subject and nation. This difference is valuable insofar as it "leaves an image of the 'nontotalizability' of the social" (175).

This interpretation not only helps to undemonize ideology because ideology is now about "the inscriptions of the social in all forms of representation" (3), but also renders reading as being about the critical exploration of their "co-implication" (4). As Pyle himself notes, the notion of ideology as "false consciousness" is a particularly limited one for two reasons: it assumes that there is such a thing as true consciousness, and it oversimplifies how ideology works. While McGann thinks that ideology can be combatted by situating texts within their sociohistorical moments, Pyle argues that this does not begin to address the fact that "the ideological gap is active in the real itself" (14). Pyle himself thus is attentive to how the real itself is implicated in the process of ideology.

Of course, one may take issue with Pyle's simultaneous reduction of the imagination to a figure and elevation of figuration to the groundwork of ideology. Seeing it as a figure, of course, puts the imagination in the camp of non-totalizability because it is just a figure. Romantic psychologists, by contrast, worried about the totalizing force of an unregulated imagination. My reference to psychology further suggests that whatever the imagination was to the Romantics, it was much more than a figure. One might also question the extent to which one gap stands for all other gaps. The fact that words defer as opposed to refer to things does not prevent deferrals from referring to each other. Here reference – the idea that words refer to things – creeps back in through the back door. For Pyle, the Romantic imagination allegorizes the salience of a Marxist deconstructive method, and if some have charged deconstruction with being unhistorical, Pyle shows the extent to which figuration is

central to understanding the social, since the social demands representation in language. While the social may rely upon figuration insofar as the social requires representation in language, figuration is not tantamount to the social. It is the rendering of verbal figures as metonyms for the social that somehow erase their metonymic status that troubles me and leads me to suspect that this elegant and incisive interpretation speaks more about critical desire than it does about Romanticism. When figuration stands for the social, the standards for the social have been so relaxed that one wonders who is appeased by the label of the social?

In *Romantic Returns*, Deborah White positions herself against modes of critique of the imagination because this vantage falsely implies that, in exposing the ideology of the imagination, the Romantic imagination has itself been surpassed (2). Instead, White argues that the very aesthetics of the imagination demands “the rethinking and rewriting of its supposed errors” (4). If, unlike Pyle, she is skeptical of the claims of critique, she joins him in her insistence that “these texts pose and expose [the perils of finding oneself in thrall to new impostures] through the very workings of their own (ex)positions, and this uneasy reflexivity, far from closing itself off from the material conditions that make it possible, opens up the space of those conditions, recalling the axiom of their and its joint possibility” (5). Situating the arguments and practices of the Romantic imagination between “the mystifications of superstition and the (de)mystifications of Enlightenment historicism” (11), White insists that the Romantic imagination never does away with the possibility that it itself is merely another superstition even as it participates in the Enlightenment project of demystification. She adds, “Imagination is not, therefore, the ideological resolution of the contradictions of historical being. It is the setting into motion of those contradictions” (17).

Insofar as she recognizes the need for critics to have surpassed what they critique and yet undermines such hubris, White offers a welcome warning to Romantic critics that the imagination has been far from exhausted. White shrewdly examines Shelley’s “problem of reference” (103) in “Mont Blanc” (1817), and shows how the poet’s linguistic self-consciousness is tensed against his decisive political engagements. Despite the poem’s initial suggestion of a reciprocity between mind and mountain, “the whole burden of the poem is that referential status or the status of the referent remains to be decided,” with the end result of making Shelley’s “there” only refer to the need to refer beyond itself without actually referring to such a beyond because it cannot (111). Here and elsewhere, White effectively demonstrates that the neat oppositions between discourse/text and context/action, writ large in the opposition between literature and history, does not hold up because many Romantic texts “(re)install quotation marks around the very terms of the opposition between discourse and action” (17).

White is absolutely right that Romantic texts on the imagination do have kinds of self-reflexivity that have been undervalued. I worry, nonetheless, about her model of reading, which puts anything like ideology, or history, or self within literature, under erasure. To wit, she insists that Hazlitt’s “Essay on the Principles of Human Action” (1805) “effectively produces an ideology that its critical analysis puts into

question” (100). Although she recognizes the potential of the text to be ideological, analysis “puts into question” this ideology. In similar maneuvers, she replaces history and selfhood with futurity. In linking ideology, history, and self with resolution, then, White suggests that aesthetics is about irresolution/futurity and therefore evidence of the one precludes the other. I do not see why either ideology or aesthetics should side with one over the other. After all, organicism, despite its dynamism, has been taken as an ideology. Perhaps ideology gains effectiveness under the sign of irresolution; certainly texts do insofar as they thereby become never-ending reflexive events (Levinson 9).

White once again marshals irresolution against ideology when she insists that the “disinterested imagination . . . bespeaks neither its determination by history . . . nor its transcendence of history. . . . It much rather bespeaks the becoming *of* history” (89). Virtually by definition, Romantic poems cannot be vehicles of ideology because they are histories of becoming. That this method ultimately defangs ideology within literature returns us for all intents and purposes to the notion of the imagination as ultimately free of ideology because whatever ideology is there is erased by a futurity that has yet to determine how poems are ultimately read. I am also reminded here of Liu’s sense of the self’s “ad hoc” need to “defin[e] history at its contact point with experience” (5). Yes, poems speak to futurity. But they also speak to readers situated in historical time who may not have the luxury of turning to figurative returns to counter ideology.

### Where to Go from Here

Whether transcending, displacing, or denying history and ideology or victim of them, the Romantic imagination must be considered in some relation to history or ideology even if that relation is based on denial. Indeed, the imagination has become the critical name for this interplay between mind and world, self and society (Schlutz). How else might one explain the imagination’s stark reversal of fortunes – from its being considered the locus of the transcendence of the real to the very embodiment of the real – and from being understood as an evasion of materiality to the embodiment of the very conditions of materiality? This about-face, along with a persistent insistence that either the imagination is ideology or it is not, suggest that critics are dealing with the Romantic imagination not so much as an historical entity, but as a mode of apprehending the imagination. Why then have we needed to protest too much the imagination’s relation to history/ideology in these ways?

For those who link the imagination with ideology, Romanticism thereby has power and (social) influence in the world. True, this influence is deeply suspect, but bad influence is better than no influence. For those who defend the imagination from its historicist critics, many of whom do so on the grounds of a theory of figuration or a theory of reading, the “history” they offer seems particularly provincial: a literary critic’s version of history that centers on tropes. It is especially telling that both the major historical treatments of the Romantic imagination – and indeed its defenders



and detractors alike – and even those critics such as Paul Fry who argue that Romantic lyrics have nothing to do with history – feel the gravity of deconstruction. Walter Benn Michaels has argued that the deconstructive “formalism of the signifier makes every instance of reading and writing into the emergence of linguistic difference and thus transforms people who believe different things into people who speak different languages” (61). For Michaels, this maneuver makes “disagreement impossible” because it produces “conflicts without disagreements” (62). If Michaels worries that this drains the signifier of anything meaningful because it is now ironically located in identity – that is, because the signifier constitutes the identity of the text, “what it means to you may well be different from what it means to me” (61–62) – I worry that if it makes Romantic poetry historical, it simultaneously drains “materiality” and “history” of historical meaning.

All of this suggests that our current insistence upon the imagination’s relation to the outward world perhaps screens our attention from our own inward worlds: the relevance and centrality of the imagination to history are inversely proportional to literary criticism’s value to history. In this light, materiality itself serves as a screen, hiding our preoccupations with reading and figuration under an objective materiality located in language. Indeed, Brook Thomas locates the origin of the New Historicist fascination with displays of power in the political theatricality of the Reagan era (Thomas 19). Such a screen is further complicated by the fact that Romantic-period psychologists and scientists framed the imagination as a turning inward to the self, a susceptibility to being influenced by the external world (Kirmayer 586). And yet such susceptibility is not a denial of the external world, but rather a pathologizing of a certain kind of relationship to that world, one that locates indiscrimination within social class and gender. The cure is to learn, despite one’s identity and habits, to better attend to other things.

I urge a return to the reasons why the Romantics thought the imagination needed defending, and to their awareness that the inward bears a necessary relationship to the outward. Because the standard map of the human mental apparatus was divided into the three faculties of memory, reason, and imagination (Goldstein 30), the existence of the imagination was assumed and taken for granted. Shelley thus understood the imagination as one of “two classes of mental action” (510). Whereas contemporary critics are obsessed about the larger salience of figuration or reading to society, Romantic writers instead had to defend the imagination from charges of madness, disease, and delusion. If a pathological or delusive imagination was undesirable, it is instructive to look at how they sought to combat such possibilities.<sup>4</sup> In returning to a history of what they did not want, I seek to restore to our view the reasons why they believed in the imagination, and the reasons why they thought the imagination could change the world. Put simply, the imagination had powers of healing that had been scientifically demonstrated.

Such an approach would look at the historical reasons behind the Romantic distrust of the imagination and use those reasons to question our own. Jan Goldstein has written a history of the French imagination, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750–1850*, one that might serve as a model. Goldstein shows

the extent to which the imagination was elided with the lower classes and with women, and these contexts show no necessary incompatibility between literature and history. Because the imagination was “the most vulnerable component of the person” (22), much thought went into how to discipline it effectively. Goldstein’s study importantly frames psychology as both a turn inward and outward. The imagination becomes a problem only when it has not been sufficiently disciplined, and her focus on discipline shows the ways in which the psychological reshapes one’s relation to the outside world.

Elizabeth Hamilton, with whose poem I began this essay, shows the extent to which the imagination was, as Goldstein suggests, a call to discipline and proper education. The internal only goes wrong when it has been exposed to the wrong externals. My point here is to underscore the incessant traffic between the two. For the Scottish novelist and essayist, the imagination was “not a simple faculty, but a complex power, in which all the faculties of mind occasionally operate” (*Popular Essays* 1: 157). The stakes of disciplining it then were large indeed. Hamilton emphasizes this discipline by focusing on the problem of attention: “the operation of these faculties upon the power of imagination, bears an exact proportion to the degree in which the objects of these faculties have been objects of attention; or, in other words, to the degree in which these several faculties have been previously cultivated” (1: 158). The key to proper development of the imagination was in choosing the right objects of attention. Cultivation of it, therefore, trumps any innate capacity. Given notions about women’s inferior innate abilities, her turn to attention shrewdly moves the discussion away from the innate and toward education. Hamilton elaborates: “the imagination may be equally active as in the minds of a superior order; but, when the attention has never been directed towards subjects of an intellectual nature, we may easily conceive how little its utmost activity can produce” (1: 159–160). If the health of the imagination is based on disciplined attention, then the imagination is about the workings of history or culture.

Hamilton further undermines the very neat division between the self and the world that frames our critical discussions of Romanticism. This division, however, was nearly impossible to police in the Romantic period because of growing awareness of how the imagination was shaped by the environment. Anti-masturbation tracts urged the disciplining of the imagination and many psychologists offered moral management as the cure of the madness of the imagination. Dr. Bienville localized lasciviousness in the imagination, and thus it was the root cause of nymphomania. He reasoned thusly: lewd images that are stored in the brain eventually change the very fibers of the brain: “the fibres of the brain are so fatigued by contests with the imagination that they begin to change their tone” (78). Once again outside changes inside, and the recourse is to change what one attends to on the outside. The physician William Buchan repeatedly warned, in his immensely popular *Domestic Medicine*, that patients must be soothed because “everything which disturbs the imagination, increases disease” (133).

Although Romantic critics tend to see the material as a curse to the spiritual and ideal life of the spirit or mind, there was no necessary opposition of the material

and spiritual. Even when the imagination is associated with disease, this is not in itself materially determining, because diseases can be cured, if only one knows how. To wit, despite the fact that the entry under “Imagination” for *Rees’s Cyclopaedia* (1819) begins with “Imagination, as it has been often defined, is a power or faculty of the soul, whereby it conceives and forms the ideas of things,” it elaborates that “the depth and cleanness of the tracks of the imagination depend on the force of the animal spirits, and the constitution of the fibres of the brain.”<sup>5</sup> The author continues, “Now the agitation of these fibres (sensory and brain) cannot be communicated to the brain, but the soul will be affected, and perceive something.” If materiality then could stretch to accommodate both the soul and the fibers of the brain, then spirit and matter were not necessarily antagonists. This flexibility suggests that the tendency to link the material with determinism is perhaps our legacy, not theirs. Like Blake, Joseph Priestley thought the separation of matter and spirit was contrary to Christianity, and if matter had powers of attraction and repulsion, then it was not clear why matter could not think (Knight 10). Far from determining, the vitalist view – “that everything corporeal was evolving: Nerves, spirits, fibres, brain, mind, consciousness, thought, imagination” (Rousseau 179) – further underscored how Romantic corporeal materiality could be about conditions of possibility.

Current criticism has shackled materialism to determinism. However, such mind-forged manacles have been obscured by the relocation of “materiality” from the world to language. Usually taken to signify the physical quality of something, materiality has in recent criticism shifted so that instead of referring to the physical world – “the substance and substantiality of the world” (Oerlemans 34) – it refers to the ways in which language works. Such a collapse between materiality and language only becomes possible with a postmodern understanding of the world, one that takes for granted the role of language in making it possible to think about the world. Here is Pyle tracing Paul de Man’s usage of the “the prosaic materiality of the signifier” (20): “the redemptive gestures or recuperative structures inevitably fail to account for the ‘prosaic’ materiality of language, which is both productive of and incommensurate with those structures and gestures” (21). And here is White: “in de Man’s work, the materiality of the letter is the unmediated remainder that disrupts the dialectical and interpretative allegories of literary criticism – including those of historicism” (21). My point here is that in order for de Man to conceptualize the materiality of language, the very term materiality has changed meanings so that language acquires a kind of material bite, a kind of constitutive force on reality.<sup>6</sup> As long, then, as language is the embodiment of materiality, materiality can retain flexibility. But this is to deny the other kind of materiality, the materiality of thingness and bodies, which might provide some resistance to the constitutive powers of linguistic materiality. Hence this version of materiality screens the other from view.

Although some Romantic critics have resisted this localizing of materiality to language, outside of language, the material is still a manacle.<sup>7</sup> Among others, Onno Oerlemans and Noah Heringman have attended to the materiality of physical nature. While Oerlemans studies the ways in which Romantic poets use the

materiality of nature as a springboard for consciousness while refusing to reduce consciousness to nature (52–53), Heringman reads the irreducible materiality of rocks in Romantic poetry as a counter to the social that nonetheless seem to derive a sublime power from materiality itself (67). My call for attention to a physiological imagination, moreover, comes with the reminder that for Romantic writers even scientific materiality had social consequences, and that such scientific materiality did not preclude the soul and its accompanying theological discourse.<sup>8</sup> Even more crucially: if Romantic materiality even in its scientific forms did not deny the spiritual; if it were active, dynamic, changing, and energetic, then, language could not do anything that materiality could not. Hence the need to locate materiality in language is ours, not theirs.

Because Romantic writers recognized that the imagination was steps away from disease, the issue becomes one of controlling one's behavior or environment so that pathology might become physiology – disease can return to the condition of health. Perhaps no one put it more succinctly than Coleridge: “pathology is the crucible of physiology” (*Omniana* 182). However, the very framing of the imagination in terms of disease/cure meant that the imagination had undeniable material effects on the body. To the extent that the imagination had material bite, there was no need to trumpet its historical impact. Hence, after a general overview of the imagination, and an entry on its pleasures, *Rees's Cyclopaedia* devotes most of its space on the imagination to “Imagination, Influence of, on the corporeal Frame.” I want to think about imagination and this kind of materiality, not a linguistic materiality but instead a physiological and psychological one.

I do so because writers then did not connect materiality primarily with language in the ways we now do. Here again is the author of the *Rees's Cyclopaedia* entry: “The phenomena actually occasioned by the operation of the imagination on the corporeal functions, are so numerous, and yet at times appear so extraordinary, that they merit particular investigation.” William Wollaston's 1809 Croonian Lecture, published in the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*, underscores a flexible materialism, despite his warning that, with nervous diseases, “the mind becomes incapable of any deliberate consideration, and is impressed with horrors that have no foundation, but in a distempered imagination” (13). “With a steadier tone of mind,” however, Wollaston argues, the mind “returns its full power of cool reflection; and if the imagination becomes more alive than usual, its activity is now employed in conceiving scenes that are amusing” (13). Wollaston insists the distempered imagination can be cured.

Read in such a light, we can return to Blake who not only equates imagination with “spiritual sensation” (703), but then also proceeds to ground this imagination in Lord Bacon's comment that “sense sends over to Imagination before Reason has judged & Reason sends over to imagination before the Decree can be acted” (703). Notwithstanding Blake's alleged hostility to science, he invokes Baconian science in his understanding of the imagination as literally mediating between reason and sense and reason and action. The imagination is thus necessary to thought and to history, and as such must be cured if diseased. Bacon has described the imagination as having

ontological priority over reason, and thus the poet's famous dictum in *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* – “what is now proved was once, only imagin'd” (plate 8; p. 36) – ironically would six years later acquire Baconian proof for its faith in imagination.<sup>9</sup> Blake's repeated understanding of the imagination as a divine body (see *Jerusalem*, plate 24; p. 169), moreover, once again signals a more flexible corporeality and materiality than the vegetative ones he denounces.

The imagination, the writer of the article on the imagination in *Rees's Cyclopaedia* submits, had almost miraculous powers of healing. The author demonstrates the key role imagination had to play in two scientific controversies, the Mesmerism controversy in France and the British debate about the efficacy of metallic tractors. In the former, Antoine Mesmer claimed to have the ability to manipulate the magnetic powers of the body and thereby cure it of disease. King Louis XVI created a commission to discover whether or not Mesmer's cure was legitimate. Benjamin Franklin and Antoine Lavoisier determined that the imagination was behind any cure: when blindfolded, previously susceptible subjects did not know when and where they were magnetized, and therefore did not react. “Our experiments allowed us to discover only the power of the imagination” (Bailly 51). This context enables us to return to the books of Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1850) that speak to how the imagination was impaired and then restored, and examine his references to wizards and their wands. Wordsworth writes,

And as, by simple waving of a wand,  
The wizard instantaneously dissolves  
Palace or grove, even so could I unsoul  
As readily by syllogistic words  
Those mysteries of being which have made,  
And shall continue evermore to make,  
Of the whole human race one brotherhood. (12: 320)

Clad in opulent robes like a Wizard, Mesmer would enter the room and magnetize his patients into health by inducing a “crisis.” Imagining himself as a wizard, Wordsworth hopes to restore his imagination, damaged by the crisis of the “brotherhood” of the French Revolution. If, for Mesmer, the power was not so much in his magnetic wand as in the imaginations of his patients, for Wordsworth, the power lies not in “syllogistic words” but in his imagination's ability to heal itself by converting history into the more renovating “spots of time.”<sup>10</sup> The poet's failure to name Mesmer here, then, is a refusal to engage in syllogism. Just as Mesmer cannot explain the “mysteries of being,” neither can Wordsworth, and yet this refusal is part of the healing process, part of how the French Revolution's slogan of brotherhood does not unsoul the kind of universal brotherhood the poet desires.

In the latter, physician John Haygarth painted wooden tractors to look like Perkins's metallic tractors, and he used these to “cure” his patients. Perkins had touted the magnetic healing powers of his metals, and patented his “tractors” in 1798. The Quakers built a “Perkinean Institution” specifically for the curing of the diseases of the

poor. The fact that Haygarth's tractors were wood, not metal, meant that it was the hope of a cure, the imagined cure that effected any cure. One report noted that "the wooden tractors were drawn over the skin so as to touch it in the slightest manner. Such is the wonderful force of the imagination!" (*Rees's Cyclopaedia*, s.v. Imagination). The poet Robert Southey pronounced that "the tractors are no new mode of quackery" (*Omniana* 111). Both of these events helped to facilitate the development of controlled experiments, and thus the imagination played an underappreciated role in the development of science. Because the imagination's openness to the world was read in terms of suggestibility – the fact that weak, lower-class, and female minds had allowed themselves to be indiscriminately influenced by the world – the imagination was internalized and pathologized (Kirmayer 586). From the stance of criticism today, what could have been celebrated as an openness to the world, to history, was diminished in terms of disease, class, and gender. And yet this diminishment was also an historical stance: the need to try to anchor diseased imaginations in certain bodies was in part an attempt to defend the imagination. When John Keats framed the poet's role in "The Fall of Hyperion" (wr. 1819) between the "fanatics who have their dreams" (1) and the physician who pours his balm upon the world (190, 201), he is thinking of the imagination's tendency to delusion, its activeness in an unconscious state, and, surprisingly, its powers of healing.

Before leaving the issue of disease, I would like to return to the issue of the physical materiality of the imagination by revisiting another debate, popular in the period, about the ability of the mother's disordered imagination to imprint itself on the fetus (Huet). In the Romantic period, this theory actually lost scientific credibility. But as the debate moved from ontological questions about whether a mother's disordered imagination had this power and how it could be proved, to epistemological questions of how to explain why people believed in the pathologizing power of the maternal imagination, the theory moves out of the orbit of empiricism and into the realm of psychology. Because empiricism and psychology are two sides of the same coin – the external and the internal – and because scientific empiricism must ignore psychology because psychology threatens to make the external subjective – this shift has dramatic consequences for the imagination. The shift to psychology runs the danger of turning the imagination inward, and this shift perhaps partly helps explain why we today are so concerned with its outward relations.

Without a theory of heredity or genetics, the imagination could be called upon to explain birth defects. How did the imagination have material effects? While blaming the maternal imagination for causing the defect became suspect, one could still blame the mother for believing in the powers of her imagination to have such effects, and then the beliefs might have those effects. Although some dismissed the theory of the disordered imagination as the basis for birth defects on the grounds that "there is no communication of nerves whatever between the mother and the child," they did concede that there was real evidence of the powers of the imagination over the "nervous and vascular system" (*Rees's Cyclopaedia*, s.v. Imagination). The imagination's material effects were also imagined in terms of metaphors of galvanism and electricity, metaphors that provided especially flexible kinds of

materiality. William Belcher, MD, in *Intellectual Electricity* for example, not only equated the nervous and electrical fluids, but also named “Oxygen, or Electricity” “the vehicle of the soul” (20). In recognizing the “peculiarity” of electricity, the chemist Humphry Davy sought to remind his readers of an experiment that might “assist the imagination in the conception of this singular and mysterious mode of action” (417). By tethering imagination to experiment, Davy makes it work on behalf of science instead of against it.

The imaginations Romantic critics want are historical and ideological. The ideological imaginations we want must be trumped by present reflexivity, unless we want Romantic aesthetic imaginations to have the capacity to resist forms of ideology. My point has been that all these wants obscure what the Romantics wanted. They wanted a physiological imagination, a spiritual imagination, a psychological imagination, and even a scientific imagination. More surprisingly, none of these imaginations had to cancel out another. In place of what they wanted, we have localized a materiality in language that neglects the physical world of materiality because it shapes it. And yet in quest of such linguistic materiality, we have lost sight of many of the key Romantic-era concerns about the imagination, especially with the deluded or diseased imagination. Of course, diseases could be cured, and with careful discipline, the imagination could shift from being the source of disease and delusion to its cure. Because no one could deny the imagination’s power over the body, a fact scientifically documented during the period, the imagination had real influence in the world, and a kind of material physiological power that we are only just beginning to grapple with.

See IDEOLOGY; PHILOSOPHY; PSYCHOLOGY.

## Notes

- 1 I adopt this framing from Eaves.
- 2 For a trenchant critique of the deconstructive reading of the figure of apostrophe, see Alan Richardson’s *The Neural Sublime*, ch. 4.
- 3 In his *ELH* essay, Alan Liu demonstrates the ways in which the New Historicism was in effect a New Formalism that performed its close readings on context.
- 4 On the relevance of the tradition of poetic madness, see Burwick.
- 5 *Rees’s Cyclopaedia* was well known by the Romantics. Blake did illustrations for it. We know that Percy Bysshe Shelley read it.
- 6 De Man links the “materiality of the letter” with the “errancy of language” (89–90). He defines the materiality of the letter as that which “disrupts the ostensibly stable meaning of a sentence” (89).
- 7 Exceptions include Knight, Wilson, and Lussier.
- 8 For some leads to this approach, see Gordon, Kirmayer, and Rousseau.
- 9 Although the letter is dated 1799, and the *Marriage* was written circa 1790, the fact that he would later ground his idea of the imagination in Bacon provides an ironic commentary on this earlier quotation.
- 10 On Wordsworth and mesmerism as providing a language for the sublime, see Rzepka.

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# Sensibility

*Julie Ellison*

## Introduction

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sensibility figured prominently in British cultural life. Sensibility materialized in literary works as extravagant emotion delivered through rhetorically intense and narratively complex textual episodes. And sensibility was not just an affair of the arts. It was something that philosophers, scientists, historians, and political commentators investigated as an element of mind, matter, and society. In its day, “sensibility” was part of a cluster of closely related terms. “Sensibility,” “sensitivity,” “sympathy,” and “sentiment” were often interchangeable. These words could be used as synonyms *and* they could mark real distinctions. In all of its diverse manifestations, the value of sensibility was not only dramatized but also debated: “The celebratory and the stigmatizing views of sentiment arise together” (Howard 71).

The preoccupation with sensibility started to emerge long before what we now call the Romantic period. Its roots lie in the religious and political conflicts of seventeenth-century England – the Civil War, the Interregnum, the Restoration, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The advent of parliamentary politics and the new prestige of sensibility were connected; as Claudia L. Johnson explains, “Because the subjects of the state [were] sensitive to each other’s approval and disapproval,” by this time they were working harder to “observe and sustain shared customs without requiring the intervention of authoritarian rule” (13). In a post-absolutist public culture, political competition was carried out through party politics, government patronage, and the press, rather than through violent regime change. Parliamentary culture brought with it a growing literature of masculine bonding and alliance.

In this increasingly “polite culture,” women writers and female characters came to signify the perceived rewards of sensibility while appropriating it for their own expressive and critical ends (Johnson 13).

Sensibility preceded, then coincided with, and quite possibly outlasted Romanticism. By the time Samuel Richardson published his epistolary novel *Pamela* in 1740 – a minute-to-minute rendering of the heroine’s emotional and sexual predicaments – sympathy was already highly valued. By 1771, with Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling*, sensibility was booming. In the 1790s, conservative intellectuals both attacked sensibility as a loathed symptom of liberal tendencies and defended the specific kinds of sympathetic feelings that sustained traditional values. Throughout the first third of the nineteenth century, sensibility continued to flourish. The “*affectional poets*” of the period between 1800 and 1835, as Marlon Ross shows, composed ambitious, popular historical works in verse, relying on a concept of “suffering action”; sensibility was “newly expressed in a public form” that engages with and influences the canonical Romantic poets (13, 287).

Sensibility is both easy to find and hard to pin down – easy to find, because the pros and cons of sensibility were a matter of obsessive interest in the nations, colonies, and former colonies of Britain and Europe. As a particularly acute kind of emotional intelligence, sensibility was experienced in many cultural and social arenas. It was pertinent to norms of politeness and mourning. It bolstered the impulses of gentrification, social distinction, and political reform. Sensibility energized “the literary innovations, and protofeminist and potentially radical social criticism” of laboring-class women poets such as Ann Yearsley, who treated sensibility with strategic ambivalence when she was not satirizing it ruthlessly (Landry 10). And sensibility was an industry, involving the production of objects for sale and display. So what is sensibility? It is an affective complex defined by feelings of difference and identification. It is located in moments that fuse pain and virtue, when suffering is witnessed and the sufferer is sighed at, wept over, concretely supported, and/or actively defended.

### Why We Study Sensibility Now

By the early twentieth century, the literature of sensibility was being dropped from the literary canon and college curricula: “World War I and the modernists brought about a profound change in literary taste that left unread most poetry of the romantic era” (Feldman xxxii). The critical reputation of sensibility succumbed to successful anti-Victorian and Modernist devaluations of the popular literature of social sympathy. The institutional effects of downgrading sensibility – and especially sensibility’s female authors – remained firmly in place for half a century or more. The literature of sensibility has now been freshly legitimated, however, recovered as a body of intellectually and aesthetically serious writing. Between 1980 and 2010, we have witnessed a surprising revival of critical interest in sensibility and its associated tendencies: sympathy, sentiment, sentimentality, sensation, and the gothic.

The restored reputation of the texts of sensibility came about through the concerted efforts of feminist literary scholars. Their thorough-going rereading of constructions of gender in works by male and female authors of the long eighteenth century led to one of the most dramatic turnarounds in critical opinion in the post-World War II period. In both British and US contexts, the relationship between the public and the domestic was thoroughly reanalyzed and the traditional denigration of sentimentality as intellectually sloppy, aesthetically lazy, and historically insignificant was upended. The study of British sensibility followed quickly on the initial surge of path-breaking work on sensibility, sympathy, and sentimentality in the literature of the United States, with somewhat different, but complementary, emphases. As Catherine Hall remarks, the connection between the two has always been “a crisscrossing business” (“Commentary” 454).

The boom in sensibility studies made its most powerful impact as a feminist intervention that connected gender, genre, and class. Literary scholars, including those who were exploding received notions of Romanticism, were at the forefront of these critical developments. Researchers in other fields are now making impressive contributions to our understanding of the history of sympathy. The dynamics of sensibility thus remain central to investigations of sensibility in places other than Great Britain and in domains other than the literary.

### Early Sensibility and Emotional Contagion

In the eighteenth century, the term “sensibility” referred to heightened emotional receptivity. This receptivity was both inner- and outer-directed: it ranged from the ability to tune into the surges of one’s own heart to the capacity for “passing into points of view not one’s own” (Chandler 26). Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) provided “the most energetic and influential account of imaginative sympathy” of the period (Chandler 26). Less than a decade after Smith’s book appeared, Lawrence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768) epitomized imaginative sympathy for many contemporary readers. It proved to be a wildly contagious text, in two different ways. *A Sentimental Journey* is a story of interpersonal encounters on the roads of Europe, each episode connected to the next by flights of associative thinking energized by emotion. This is why critic James Chandler uses this text as the defining example of a “vehicular” theory linking matter and feeling in the eighteenth century (31–38). Second, scenes from the book were themselves contagious, reproduced in paintings and prints, imitated and quoted and parodied in other writings.

The main character and narrator of *A Sentimental Journey* is Yorick, a minister. One of the most admired and ridiculed on-the-road encounters in this popular book by the author of *Tristram Shandy* is Yorick’s meeting with “Maria of Moulines,” which winks at an encounter with the same character in *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767). The reference to the earlier novel is an “impulse” (Sterne 113) – one of dozens of sudden-onset intuitions that propel Yorick from place to place, and

from person to person. The narrator explains the craving for “melancholy” (Sterne 113) that so often drives sensibility. At the heart of the melancholy adventure is an encounter with someone unhappy to sympathize with. It is usually a woman, a child, or an animal, marked by poverty, madness, or abuse. Yorick’s consciousness of his own sympathy is experienced as the workings of the “soul” itself:

The story he [Tristram] had told of that disorder’d maid affect’d me not a little in the reading; but when I got within the neighbourhood where she lived, it returned so strong into my mind, that I could not resist an impulse . . . to go . . . to the village where her parents dwelt to enquire after her.

’Tis going, I own, like the Knight of the Woeful Countenance, in quest of melancholy adventures – but I know not how it is, but I am never so perfectly conscious of the existence of a soul within me, as when I am entangled in them. (113)

The encounter with Maria takes place through the bodily communication so often attributed to sentimental cognition. The transition from looking into Maria’s eyes, where Yorick “saw” what she was “thinking” (Sterne 114), to wiping away the tears of memory (Maria’s) and the tears of sympathy (Yorick’s) is almost instantaneous. Maria’s “little goat” (114) is one of a large cast of animal characters in *A Sentimental Journey* (including an ass and a caged starling). The handkerchief is more important than the goat as a vehicle for shared emotion, however; it is “steep’d” in the tears that Yorick takes pains to collect and to mingle together:

I look’d in Maria’s eyes, and saw she was thinking more of her father than of her lover or her little goat; for as she utter’d [these words] the tears trickled down her cheeks.

I sat down close by her; and Maria let me wipe them away as they fell with my handkerchief. – I then steep’d it in my own – and then in hers – and then in mine – and then I wip’d hers again – and as I did it, I felt such indescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion. (Sterne 114)

The story of this brief encounter ends with a flourish in a passionate apostrophe to sensibility. This passage would reverberate through British writing for the rest of the century. With the word “sentimental” in the title of Sterne’s book and the rhapsodic paean to “sensibility” in this climactic passage, Yorick “employs . . . recent (or at least recently modified) term[s]” – sentiment and sensibility – “to name the affective centre-piece of his . . . world” (Chandler 22–23). Yorick likens the “creation” to a vibrating “Sensorium” that allows “Heaven” itself to sympathize even with infinitesimal losses throughout the cosmos: “Dear sensibility! . . . I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself – all comes from thee, great – great Sensorium of the world! which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground, in the remotest desert of thy creation” (Sterne 117). This example shows some of the ways in which sensibility represented the capacity to channel emotion. Along with its popular siblings, sentiment and sympathy, sensibility was the

power to feel along with or to intuit the moods and predicaments of other people. The phenomenon of sensibility was understood as connecting people, things, and texts through the emotions of tender, often painful, relatedness. The feeling of identifying or sympathizing with someone else, as a number of scholars have pointed out, depends not so much on similarity but on difference. Sensibility is not just a “feeling toward” others but also, as a rule, a “feeling down” by those in positions of relative privilege toward those of lower social standing who are in need or in pain. There is a lot of sensitive condescension by the privileged classes in the poetry and prose of sensibility – educated, refined, cultivated, tasteful, and unostentatious upper-class individuals, male and female. Nonetheless, these texts are not naïve. They are aware of the embarrassments and sometimes even of the degradations of cross-class encounters. Circulating through them is the flickering knowledge that Britain’s prosperity – sustained by trade, colonialism, and empire – was responsible for the figures around which such strong feelings swirled: slaves, servants, “poor Indians,” war widows, rural families displaced by enclosure, and victims of the Poor Laws (Stevens 18–21). Some forms of sensibility involve affectionate bonds among social peers, especially friendships among elite men in early eighteenth-century texts. But for the most part, sensibility mattered because it provided a way to feel toward others across distances of place, time, race, and social class.

### A Strategy for Readers: The Scene of Sensibility

As readers, where do we look for sensibility? We could look at characters or authors. We could look at the economy of print culture, the changing markets for books, periodicals, reformist or religious pamphlets, and works for children, along with the changing roles of printers, booksellers, and journalists. We could look at settings, such as the drawing room, the theater, or the rural landscape. We could look at things, such as the snuffboxes that were all the rage after the publication of Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*. Sensibility is located in all of these, but, for students of literature, it is best located in “the scene.” In “the scene,” story, setting, characters, mood, and ideas all come together. “The scene” of sensibility belongs to no single genre. It can be found in works of philosophy, travel, fiction, oratory, and visual storytelling in prints or illustrations. Scenes in which we can observe the transmission of emotion “allow us to study this culture’s interest in the mobility of feelings” (Pinch 168). As Adela Pinch observes, sensibility represents “the tendency of affective life to get located among rather than within people” (166).

I recommend a “scenic” approach to studying the texts of sensibility. I will introduce the “scene of sensibility” by looking at an important early example from the 1770s. Scenes like this underscore the centrality of differences in social class and social roles in writing of this period. The sentimental narrative in verse or prose deals with seemingly fascinating inequalities of class, gender, nationality,

and race, questing for the emotional conditions that make possible brief but powerful moments of moral connection.

A Scot, Henry Mackenzie, authored a classic of masculine sensibility, *The Man of Feeling*. The realities of British imperialism in Bengal trouble the book. In a crucial scene in the novel, Harley, the genteel Man of Feeling, meets Edwards, a worn but stoical tenant farmer whom Harley had known as a youth. A lot is going on here during an encounter between two long-separated acquaintances as they ruminate on what feelings are called, how they work, and what they are good for. Edwards, who has served with the British forces in India, is a veteran – a familiar pathos-laden figure in many late eighteenth-century novels and poems. First seen asleep by the side of the road, the old man shows “that steady look of sorrow, which indicates that its owner has gazed upon his griefs till he has forgotten to lament them” (86).

Family impoverishment in the British countryside brings about, through a concrete chain of events, the sufferings of both British and Indian characters caught up in the British colonial system in South Asia. Once Harley and Edwards have recognized one another, Edwards tells his story. The first part explains how Edwards got to India. The tale begins with a familiar scene of rural dispossession. A newly rich landlord hires a “London-attorney” as his steward (87). The important steward turns the tenant out of his farm onto a lesser holding, signifying the long process by which formerly common lands were privatized through parliamentary acts of enclosure. As in Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*, pathos is intensified by a suffering animal, “old Trusty, my shag house-dog,” who died of grief as the Edwards family was evicted (88). Hearing this, “Harley’s face . . . was bathed in tears” (88), as Edwards has predicted it would be: “Had you seen us, Mr. Harley, when we were turned out of South-hill, I am sure you would have wept at the sight” (89). Next, Edwards’s grown son falls prey to a press-gang, legally authorized to seize young men to staff the ranks of the British army and navy. The father bribes the sergeant of the press-gang to let him go in his son’s place and ends up with British troops in India. This provides the setting for yet another tale within a tale centering on yet another stoical sufferer, an “old Indian” (93).

At the heart of this narrative is Edwards’s story of the merciful man who saved and was saved by him in India. This story honors the reciprocal charity that defines the moral (if not social) parity that defines the relationship between Edwards and the “old Indian” tortured by British soldiers: “Oh! Mr. Harley, had you seen him, as I did, with his hands bound behind him, suffering in silence, while the big drops trickled down his shrivelled cheeks, and wet his grey beard. . . . I could not bear it” (93). Edwards helped the Indian man to escape, and was punished with court-martial and lashes. The man “whom [he] had delivered” (94) nursed him back to health and gave him two hundred gold pieces to pay for his voyage home to England. Edwards and the “old Indian” wept together as they embraced in farewell. There are two real points of this tale of emoting across empire: first, to make Edwards and Harley weep together, in a reprise of the story of Edwards’s cross-cultural sharing of manly tears in India, and second, to provoke Harley’s critique of British foreign policy:



what title have the subjects of another kingdom to establish an empire in India? . . . You describe the victories they have gained; they are sullied by the cause in which they fought: you enumerate the spoils of those victories; they are covered with the blood of the vanquished! (Mackenzie 102–103)

Mackenzie's novel celebrates the capacity to feel and deplore the negative effects of empire on location, as it were. The scene of sensibility could just as well materialize in literary space as in landscape. In the scene, discussed above, sensibility is manifest as tearful affection between normally stoical men of different social classes who share ties of place and memory as they gaze around them at contemporary Britain. The young William Wordsworth was influenced by Helen Maria Williams's "To Sensibility" (1786), a firm defense of sympathy. Wordsworth's first published poem was "Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams weep at a Scene of Distress" (1797). The word "scene" in the title is hardly accidental, although no interior or outdoors locale is described or named. The scene, in this instance, is the poet herself (Pinch 76–82).

The textual travels of another, earlier classic of British sensibility, Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751), show that the scene of sensibility was transgeneric – portable between different genres. Mackenzie's Harley dies at the end of *The Man of Feeling* and is buried in the landscape of Gray's "Elegy," "shaded by an old tree" and "near the grave of his mother" (Mackenzie 132). The "Elegy" mourns the loss of an earlier England, criticizing the greed-driven social divisions that now destroy rural life while dignifying "The short and simple annals of the poor" (Gray l. 32). In 1759, General James Wolfe, crossing the St. Lawrence River before the decisive battle with the French for Montreal, recited Gray's "Elegy" to the officers seated with him in the boat (or so it was later reported). Almost a century later, the American historian Francis Parkman "makes a scene" in the atmospheric prose of his study, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (1851). "[Wolfe's] ruined health, the gloomy prospects of the siege, and the disaster at Montmorency; had oppressed him with the deepest melancholy," Parkman wrote; the general, "pale and weak," uttered the poem in a "low voice," including the famous phrase that foreshadowed his death in the English victory the next day (qtd. Ellison 87–88). The death of Wolfe was reproduced as a scene of sensibility on stage, in verse, and on canvas, echoing the moral of Gray's poem, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave" (Parkman; qtd. Ellison 88). Sensibility's scenes and moods repeat themselves in different sorts of writing. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, if one was an author, one normally published in several different genres, because authorship was not yet bound by the fixed identities of "novelist" or "poet." This made it easier for writers to translate sensibility's notable scenes from poem to painting, painting to history, newspaper to novel. The historian Parkman said that he got the story about Wolfe from a Scottish midshipman who became a professor of natural philosophy at Edinburgh. Writing in 1851 about a North American conflict between Great Lakes tribes and British forces that had occurred in 1763, Parkman's restaging of the scene of Wolfe's death shows how

durable and, indeed, how glamorous the Man of Feeling still was in North America, almost a century after the battle for Montreal and the publication of Gray's poem (Ellison 87–88, 209n).

### **Sensibility, Poetry, and Politics**

Sensibility was a resource for a colonial and imperial culture, as has been amply demonstrated by such scholars as Peter Hulme, Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh, Catherine Hall, Saree Makdisi, Nanora Sweet, and Kathleen Wilson. In the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature of sensibility, the distribution of “moral capital” is always at stake, and the subject of slavery always provoked contests around moral capital (Brown 457–458). The subject of slavery enters poetry and fiction through the figures of slaves and black servants, references to the abolitionist movement, and privileged characters that move between their family seats in England and their Jamaican plantations. The political use of sensibility in mobilizing public opinion appears in the well-organized abolitionist parliamentary campaign of 1787 that recruited many poets – including many prominent women poets – to an ambitious engagement with print media (Ferguson 146–150; see also 151–164). But this campaign, while impressive, had important precedents.

The works of the Boston poet Phyllis Wheatley challenge British policies on slavery more than a decade before the 1787 campaign. Wheatley was brought from Africa as a girl and sold to an evangelical Boston family. Her poetry locates itself in a transatlantic framework. Indeed, her creative and intellectual life operated within and was largely made possible by Anglo-American religious and cultural networks. In June 1772, a British judge handed down the *Somerset* decision, which made slavery illegal in the United Kingdom, though not in British colonies. The following year, Wheatley traveled with a member of her liberal owner's family to England – and came back, reentering a colony where slavery was legal. Wheatley had been publishing her poems since 1767, including a well-known elegy on the Reverend George Whitefield, addressed to the Countess of Huntingdon, whom he had served as chaplain. Wheatley met the countess while in England, and, with her patronage, Wheatley's book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, was published there in 1773. The poet did not obtain her freedom until the death of John Wheatley in 1778.

This is the background for Wheatley's subsequent poems, written during the preliminary skirmishes of the American Revolution when the principle of national freedom and the principles of what we now call human rights converged. Wheatley published “To the Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North America, &c.” in 1774. In this poem, as in others, Wheatley becomes an artist of long-distance sympathy who imagines the pain that others feel. Indeed, she values imagination precisely because it gives her the mental power to speculate on her far-away family's feelings when she was stolen from them as a child. It gives her the capacity to reflect back on her own suffering, as well.

The speaker of “To the . . . Earl of Dartmouth,” an anti-slavery and pro-American poem addressed to one of the major players in British North American governmental affairs, launches her critique of tyranny by thinking about feeling. The poet wonders about her father’s feelings at the moment of her capture, asking “What pangs . . . What sorrows labour in my parent’s breast?” in the face of slavers who were “by no misery mov’d” (26–28). Sensibility – the emotional thinking that reaches out across the Atlantic world – here signifies “the imagination as a social practice,” in Arjun Appadurai’s apt phrase (31):

I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate  
Was snatch d from *Afric*’s fancy’d happy seat:  
What pangs excruciating must molest,  
What sorrows labour in my parent’s breast?  
Steel’d was that soul and by no misery mov’d  
That from a father seiz’d his babe below’d. (24–29)

Building on her question about her father’s “pangs excruciating” – a question that quickly becomes a conviction – Wheatley, having started with herself (“I, young in life”) affirms the evidentiary value of her experience: “Such, such my case” (30). And this “case” is the basis for her call for general justice: “And can I then but pray;/ Others may never feel tyrannic sway?” (30–31). She treats her own capture as part of a larger narrative by which the victim protests but also recuperates her suffering, not least by authoring the poetry of the transatlantic Anglo-American public world. A decade later, Hannah More, in her 1788 contribution to the anti-slavery campaign “Slavery, A Poem,” depicted the slave as a “dire victim torn from social life” (More; qtd. Ferguson 150). Wheatley, the earlier analyst of slavery, understood full well the trauma of being “torn from social life,” but for her, sensibility could also make possible a recuperative public agency.

Like Wheatley’s verse, the poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld harnessed sympathy to political vision by calling for a reformation of national values. Barbauld came at sensibility from every angle. She reflected on sensibility in a 1773 essay, “An Enquiry into those kinds of Distress which excite Agreeable Sensations.” Also a critic and editor, Barbauld published the six volumes of novelist Samuel Richardson’s correspondence, providing a substantive biographical essay on the author of the classic epistolary novels that fused female virtue with female emotionality. In 1791, Barbauld published her poem, “Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for abolishing the Slave Trade,” a critique of sentimental portrayals of slaves as victims. Chiding the anti-slavery campaign of the late 1780s, she argues that the rhetoric of victimization has failed. She declares that the conventions of abolitionist sensibility are obsolete. She characterizes the rhetoric of sensibility as itself a scourge that, like the whip, “laid bare” (9) the suffering body of the slave: “The Preacher, Poet, Senator in vain / Has rattled in [Britain’s] sight the Negro’s chain” (3–4). While praising literary attempts to make the guilty suffer, Barbauld zeroes in on the shortcomings of rhetorical flagellation. Poetry designed to make the

nation bear witness to slavery proved that knowledge, however visceral in the moment of “Pity’s tear” or “flash’d conviction” (9, 10), is not enough: Britain “knows and she persists – Still Afric bleeds, / Uncheck’d, the human traffic still proceeds” (15–16).

The poetry of prophecy reaches imaginatively across spatial and temporal distances, correlatives of its large civic claims. Barbauld turns to prophecy in her masterpiece, “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, a Poem” (1812): “Britain, know, / Thou who hast shared the guilt must share the woe. / . . . Europe [may] sit in dust, as Asia now” (45–46, 126). She thus revises the conventions of sensibility, which had relied on vicarious emotion to induce pity in the witness. She introduces a more threatening kind of contagiousness, in which oppression eats away at the nation that perpetrates it. She imagines a future world in which African slaves and colonized Indians, now free, become spectators of Britain’s decline. British citizens, ages hence, will sink to the condition of slaves, corrupted by dependence on tainted wealth. This kind of poetic justice relies on the slow impersonal reflexes of economic time. Barbauld spoke to her fellow citizens in ringing tones of prophetic exasperation and paid a price for it, targeted for violating gender norms. The reviewer for the *Quarterly Review* deplored the fact that under the “irresistible impulse of public duty,” a “lady-author” had been inspired “to dash down her . . . knitting needles, and to sally forth . . . in the . . . resolution of saving a sinking state” (qtd. Ellison 113).

Long after the anti-slavery campaign of the late 1780s, Romantic-period poets retained an interest in the public power of sensibility. Reflections on power were not always explored in tones of pathos or prophecy. Carefully inflected shades of sorrow, respect, and sharp-edged paradox complicate the poetry of national life. Byron’s 1812 poem, “Lines to a Lady Weeping,” points to the continued usefulness of gendered emotionality in writing about the state. “Lines” was inspired by a report that England’s Princess Charlotte had burst into tears at her own birthday dinner when her father, the Prince Regent, complained about Whig political leaders, some of whom happened to be in the room. As Wordsworth had imagined a weeping Helen Maria Williams, so Byron sympathized with the tears of fury and mortification shed by Princess Charlotte, a figure central to the British national imaginary. Byron does not think it illogical to weep for one’s suffering country, though the speaker does not claim to weep himself. Only after Princess Charlotte’s death in childbirth in 1817 did Byron finally publish “Lines to a Lady Weeping” under his own name. Barbauld’s poem, “On the Death of Princess Charlotte” (1819), similarly took advantage of this moment of national grief to observe pointedly who did weep (the British public) and who did not (the Regent). Felicia Hemans’s “Stanzas on the Late National Calamity, the Death of the Princess Charlotte” (1818) depicts the British public in the town square, ready to celebrate the birth of an heir to the throne, about to receive news of the death of both mother and child. As Adela Pinch suggests in an extended reflection on these and other writings composed in response to the death of Princess Charlotte, the outpouring of letters, poems, sermons, and newspaper accounts shows that “a perception of emotion as fascinating, transsubjective, and

difficult to know was as crucial to national as to poetic identity” (Pinch 178; for further discussion of such responses to Charlotte’s death, see 182–187).

### Testing Sensibility in Novels

If sensibility freely traveled within existing literary genres, it also is part of the story of how new ones emerged. In this period, the novel emerged as a self-conscious, commercially viable, and aesthetically credible genre. Sensibility was central to its success, though in different ways at different times. And when revisionist critics recovered the broad spectrum of fiction of the Romantic period, including scores of novels by women writers, they made major contributions to scholarship on the history and theory of the novel, including pioneering works on gender and genre, novels and nationalisms, metropolitan and “transcolonial” print culture (see Mellor 4–11; Lynch and Warner 1–10). By the mid-eighteenth century, novels of sensibility had attracted significant reading publics through works such as Sarah Fielding’s *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa, Or the History of a Young Lady* (1748), Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), and, as already noted, Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling*. Sensibility is already a complex transaction in these earlier books. In the 1790s, the orchestration of sympathy changes into something that is complex in a different way. The resources of novels are brought to bear on sensibility as something about which people are ambivalent. Novels featured emotional and narrative disruptions provoked by the competitive politics of caring and the impulses of control, sympathy, evasion, and rebellion that now trouble unequal social relationships more overtly. We encounter perturbed treatments of sensibility in novels as diverse as Fanny Burney’s *Camilla* (1786) and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (1798), a posthumously published work that broke through to a new frankness about female sexuality and explored nurturing alliances between educated and laboring-class women (see Johnson 14, 69). There was revolution in France, war in Europe, and state policies of surveillance and repression at home in Britain, events that fueled the culture wars between conservative and reformist intellectuals, including contests over sensibility. The difficulty of negotiating masculine and feminine modes of sensibility “in a world riven with crisis” (Johnson 2) unsettles the novel at the level of form, plot, and affect (see also Butler 7–28).

If asked “what is sensibility?” most twenty-first-century readers would point immediately to Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). Despite its nineteenth-century publication date, however, Austen wrote the first draft of *Sense and Sensibility* in 1795, in the form of an epistolary novel entitled “Elinor and Marianne.” While later rewriting effected major changes in the work, its original context puts *Sense and Sensibility* in the company of socially conservative novels of the nineties (see Butler 161–165, 181, 188, 194–196). Many works of that decade incorporated an openly emotional character (Marianne) as foil to a more affectively disciplined one (Elinor). Elinor’s desire is represented as internal or psychological experience that

can be hidden from the social spaces where mannerly courtship rituals governed by class, rank, and education unfold. *Sense and Sensibility*, in which Elinor's sense wins out over Marianne's sensibility, appears to reject the possibility that the moody intuitions of feeling are, in their own way, sensible: morally serious, productive of insight, and a pathway to happiness. Marianne still has many fans, however, and for good reason. In the 1790s and for a long time thereafter, female novelists were testing women's options in a culture that valued sentiment but also constrained it.

What Lynch and Warner term the "cultural institutions of the novel" in this period include the endless depiction of the micro-protocols of bourgeois social life in an imperial nation (3–5). In Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), characters who disagree about how to treat a black servant exhibit different kinds of sensibility (Ellison 71–72). One kind is clearly good, the other is clearly bad. Belinda has acted sympathetically on behalf of Juba. Juba is a black man – a servant who is probably a former slave – who has been terrified by a fake phantasm crafted by the "freakishly" radical Mrs. Freke. The character of Juba is shaped by stereotypes: he is superstitious, loves song and dance, and shows "joyful gratitude" toward his master, Mr. Vincent, a Jamaican planter who is courting Belinda (Edgeworth 243). Belinda's charitable condescension toward Juba is also highly conventional, common to many intelligent, sympathetic young heroines. Juba is an index of the sensibility of the people around him. The characters of Juba (the victim) and Mrs. Freke (the tormentor) allow Edgeworth to showcase Belinda's sensitive liberal rationality. As in so many poems and novels of sensibility, white women's encounters with slavery are the occasion for examining feeling as something that happens (as Pinch says) between people rather than within them.

The most interesting feature of this novel, in which the effects of slavery on British society are an ongoing preoccupation, is the way in which sensibility is both a character trait and an intellectual performance enacted before an audience of friends and acquaintances. Performances of this sort involve references to the canonical texts for and against sensibility from Adam Smith to Mary Wollstonecraft, who here represents the extreme of republican opinion. Mrs. Freke expresses her dislike of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a text of which Belinda approves. She then summons Wollstonecraft: "'Vive la liberté!' cried Mrs. Freke – 'I'm a champion for the Rights of Women'" (216). Later, Lady Delacour, an aristocratic friend, reinforces Belinda's standing as a woman of temperate sensibility:

her ladyship . . . talked of Harriet Freke's phosphoric obeah-woman, of whom, she said, she had heard an account. . . . She spoke of Juba's marriage, and of his master's generosity to him. From thence she went on to the African slave trade, by way of contrast, and she finished precisely where she had intended . . . by praising a poem called "The dying Negro," which he had, the preceding evening, brought to read to Belinda. (329)

Lady Delacour positions Mr. Vincent and Juba as signifiers of the slave economy of the British Caribbean. Vincent's friends think of the slave trade when they think of him.

Thinking of the slave trade is more allusive than analytical, however. Lady Delacour refers to “The Dying Negro” – a poem about a slave’s suicide published in 1773 by Maria Edgeworth’s friend, Thomas Day – in order to celebrate the emotional power of pity and reinforce the human cost of slavery (Langford 58–59, 61).

### Conclusion: Trends in Sensibility Studies

There is robust evidence that scholars remain convinced of the intellectual potential of sensibility studies. Sensibility is inspiring fewer major studies of British Romantic literature than was the case a few years ago. But current work on sensibility still engages with and illuminates the Romantic period. Two strands of work – on British and American sensibility – met some time ago in the field of Atlantic Studies, which encourages comparative and interdisciplinary studies. The growing body of work on colonialism and empire helps us to locate the intimate choreographies of sensibility on a larger scale within transnational systems. Catherine Hall’s afterword to the essays collected in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* focuses on “the global circuits through which gendered and racialized selves are constituted” (“Commentary” 454). Hall affirms the importance of a research agenda committed to understanding “how a focus on discourses of affect and the livedness of emotional life might have an impact on the upholding, mediating, or transgressing of colonial relations. . . . What might an emphasis on affect and feeling open up?” (455). If feminism was an early driver of sensibility studies, postcolonial studies yields fresh understandings. Finally there is strong evidence that sensibility in the Romantic period continues to interest us. We ourselves see feelings everywhere in contemporary culture. This preoccupation is manifest in works of cultural theory, such as Clough and Halley’s *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007), Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003), Sara Ahmed’s *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), and Kathleen Woodward’s *Statistical Panic: Cultural Politics and the Poetics of the Emotions* (2009).

The public sphere is an important concept in recent work on sensibility then and now. Mary Kelley’s discussion of how sensibility, sociability, and the affections motivated schooling for young women in the female of the Early Republic comes in a chapter subtitled “The Grounds for Women’s Entry into Public Life” (Kelley 17–21, 25–33). Turning sensibility into a powerful resource for cultural theory, Lauren Berlant proposes the notion of “intimate publics” made up of strangers who identify with one another. Such publics, culturally associated with “non-dominant classes,” “provide the feeling of immediacy and solidarity by establishing in the public sphere an affective register of belonging” and provide the sense of “feeling political together” (“Affect”); intimate publics, Berlant argues, issue an invitation to a “scene of affective and emotional experience, expertise, and ethics” that is central to the long history of sensibility (*Female Complaint* 170–171). Berlant, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Michael Warner – prominent theorists of sentiment,

sexuality, and “counterpublics” – have woven the study of sensibility into the emergent fields of queer theory and performance studies.

The cultural legacies of the Romantic period thus enter into studies of many different technologies of sensibility. We still rely on sensibility when we “calculat[e] compassion,” in Woodward’s titular phrase. Financial transactions brokered over the Internet offer “sentiment for a small world,” as Shameem Black shows in “Microloans and Micronarratives” (269). Black examines a person-to-person micro-lending web site, Kiva, founded in 2005. Her essay begins with a discussion of the narrative strategies of the sentimental novel, which persist in the rhetoric of twenty-first-century web-mediated charitable fundraising. Showing that scholars, too, still reenact the dilemmas of sensibility, she asks the question that was posed throughout the Romantic period, one that is still with us today: “How can we come to care about the fate of others far away?” (269). We would not still be writing about sensibility if we were not still in its grip.

See NATION AND EMPIRE; RACE.

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# Sublime

*Anne Janowitz*

In the Romantic period, between about 1760 and 1830, the sublime was an aesthetic, philosophical, and psychological term vigorously debated in intellectual and artistic circles, where it was used to describe the grandeur of religious, literary, and visual experiences. These heightened experiences included the monumentality of geographical space and architectural construction, the thunder and lightning above an icy silent glacier, and the elevations and abysses of subjective states. It is worth keeping in mind that contemporary expressions such as “I can’t get my head around that,” “awesome,” and the violent military phrase, “shock and awe,” derive from what we can call the idiom of sublimity – a way of talking and writing about what happens when we are faced with things or concepts that are too large, too deep, too big, too tiny, too vague – in short, overwhelming. That is, accompanying the aesthetic idea that the sublime was and still is an adjective describing a natural view or a painting is the philosophical analysis of the sublime experience as the relationship between a person’s subjective emotions and an incomprehensible external object or object of thought. One might say a huge mountain or a deep ravine is “sublime” because it is just too immense, physically or conceptually, to be mentally grasped in its entirety. While many discussions of the sublime are closely tied to questions of aesthetics and psychology, the sublime as a category has also had a long history in the discourses of religion and the theoretical and practical discourses of cosmology.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) argued in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) that we experience the sublime when we try to conceptualize (his term is “totalize”), for example, the immensity of outer space. The difficulty we have trying to construct a comprehensible whole out of infinite height or depth ends up showing us our own minds at work rather than any external object. The dizzying

feeling of the sublime, then, can come from our acute self-awareness in the face of the incomprehensible. In the poem “Mont Blanc” (1817), Percy Bysshe Shelley describes an Alpine chasm as a “Dizzy ravine” (34), thus allowing us to attribute a feeling of giddiness both to the ravine itself and to our perception of it, blurring the distinction between objective and subjective sublimity.

In eighteenth-century Britain, when theoretical and literary discussion of the sublime was at its height, much writing about the sublime described it as a benign and productive human experience. According to writers such as Joseph Addison and the poet James Thomson, the sublime may provoke extreme emotional or intellectual reactions, but it was predicated on the guarantee of an assured religious or ethical or aesthetic wholeness, underpinning what humans experience as incomprehensible. Addison writes, “The more extended our Reason is, and the more about to grapple with immense Objects, the greater still are those Discoveries which it makes of Wisdom and Providence in the Work of Creation” (*Spectator*, No. 543, 1712). Others, however, considered the sublime to be as frightening as it was elevating; it was invoked to explore both what happens when grounding certainty drops away and the sensations that come from that loss: both ignorance of, and malevolence from, the unknown. These included the terrors found in gothic literature and in many paintings of dizzying danger.

Scholars of the period consider the sublime to be a particularly Romantic aesthetic or poetic commonplace, as so much poetry of the Romantic period asks its readers to believe that poetry is at the same time immortal yet insufficient to express the very things it means to say. This theme of inexpressibility is also common in Romantic poetry, and is grounded in the sublime. We are used to thinking of the sublime entirely within the framework of the aesthetic because Edmund Burke’s treatise on the subject, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), makes the aesthetic the central context within which the sublime sensation can be elicited, as the sublime itself is constituted of both terror and pleasure. In that sense, Burke’s theory of the sublime is very English, part of the tradition of John Locke’s and David Hartley’s materialist theories of association, whereby our ideas are the result of the mind’s registering of sense impressions which then combine to produce ideas and emotions. Burke’s treatise suggests that sublimity takes place only when faced with “safe” representations of terror and pleasure. In his *Enquiry*, Burke offers a taxonomy of those experiences that produce this sublimity. The reader of Burke’s text is meant to identify with the examples Burke offers – all within the range of recognizable psychological categories. But while Kant also considers the sublime aesthetically, and also allows for its elements of terror and pleasure, his argument is rationalist and idealist, in that he considers our capacity for judgment to be the central and *a priori* cognitive capacity of the human mind. Not a registering machine of sensations, the faculty of the mind contains distinct powers of imagining, understanding, and reasoning, the most important of which is self-conscious rationality, our capacity to make judgments through mental reflection. What each of these men means by “aesthetic” is quite different. In Kant’s idea, aesthetic judgment is made solely by operations of the mind, for there is no external

standard to which one can refer. Burke's is an element within the psychological mechanisms produced by biophysical patterns. In other words, for Kant the aesthetic is part of the life of the mind, while for Burke it is function of the senses, although it can be analyzed by reason.

But interest in the sublime is not only a feature of modernity. In fact, the sublime is one of the longest-lived categories of thought. It has been a persistent theme in cultural life, operating well before the Enlightenment disciplines came into being, and it now occupies what we might call our post-disciplinary discourses – drawing on the resources and methodologies of a range of distinct disciplines that show us that physics shares much with Zen Buddhism, aesthetics with mathematics.

The book first connected to the sublime is *Peri Hypsous* (*On the Sublime*), a first-century CE treatise, written by a Greek called Longinus, though hardly anything is known about him. This has been the classical text that writers over the centuries discuss and claim for their authority. Longinus' treatise regards the sublime as both a rhetoric of grandeur and an activity of the mind. The two can be linked, in that to write in the elevated style of the sublime one must have elevated thoughts and mental concepts. What readers of sublime rhetoric experience is a loss of balance, a sense of being cut off, and also of being dominated by the grandeur of the writing at hand. It is both overwhelming and glorious. One of the terms Longinus uses to describe this effect is "extasis"; that is, to be displaced, moved, transported. There is a European poetic tradition from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries of poems called "The Exstasie" that attempt to produce by narrating these "transports," including those by the Polish poet "Casimire," John Donne, John Hughes, and Benjamin Cowley. This focus on the sublime as rhetorical grandeur is echoed by Addison in the early eighteenth century: "The sublime rises from the nobleness of thoughts, the magnificence of words, or the harmonious and lively turn of the phrase" (*Guardian*, No. 117, 1713).

More recently, with a revival of interest in the philosophical poem on the nature of things, *De Rerum Natura*, by the earlier Latin Epicurean poet Lucretius (95–55 BCE), scholars and critics have turned to Lucretius to make sense of the sublime as a feature of the cosmos; or rather, to interpret the work as a poem that *is* sublime, uses the idiom of the sublime, and addresses a theme that is most often used in natural philosophical poetry of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – namely, the sublimity of the universe. What draws the modern scholar to view Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* as a sublime text may, in the first instance, be a result of Burke's own indebtedness to Lucretius, for his theme is the making and unmaking of worlds which, Lucretius argues, occur out of the random coalescence and subsequent disintegration of minute particles in the infinite emptiness of the universe – the void. The vastness of the void and the infinitesimal tininess of what Lucretius calls the "seeds" of the world together produce all that is the ceaselessly moving "measureless universe" (*omne immensum*) (1: 74). Here is the echo in Burke's *Enquiry*:

GREATNESS of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime. This is too evident, and the observation too common, to need any illustration. . . . However, it may not be amiss

to add to these remarks upon magnitude, that, as the great extreme of dimension is sublime, so the last extreme of littleness is in some measure sublime likewise: when we attend to the infinite divisibility of matter, when we pursue animal life into these excessively small, and yet organized beings, that escape the nicest inquisition of the sense; when we push our discoveries yet downward, and consider those creatures so many degrees yet smaller, and the still diminishing scale of existence, in tracing which the imagination is lost as well as the sense; we become amazed and confounded at the wonders of minuteness; nor can we distinguish in its effects this extreme of littleness from the vast itself. (72)

The classical scholar James E. Porter has recently made an exciting case for considering both Lucretius and Longinus as writers in a tradition of sublimity that actually predates both of their works. Porter gives examples of images used by both of these sources and makes an elegant case that, given the images of torrents and floods and massiveness and terror that accumulate throughout classical literature, it would be surprising indeed if there had been no prior critical consciousness of the rhetoric of “greatness” as both an elevated style and a collection of commonplaces of natural elevation.

Even more recently, Philip Hardie has shown beyond doubt that Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* had a profound influence on the sublime images used in poetry by Ovid, Vergil, and Horace. So it seems that the birth of sublime rhetoric in classical literature was earlier than previously considered and the importance of Lucretius to this tradition was greater than previously understood. In addition, we can see that the idiom of the sublime was being used in both rhetorical discussion and in what we might call the natural-philosophical tradition of the cosmos. So it is that our own contemporary interest in the connections between science and literature has encouraged scholars to look at aspects of the unmanageable mental experiences of awe, immensity, and mathematical infinity as presented by Lucretius.

Longinus’ *Peri Hypsous* was reintroduced to Western culture in the later sixteenth century, and was translated into French by Boileau in 1674. After it was translated into English in 1739, it became a popular point of departure for discussion of rhetorical and conceptual grandeur. The story is quite different with Lucretius: though his poem became known in the West and was published in Latin a number of times, and in connection with the revival of theories of atoms as the fundamental units of the physical world, *De Rerum Natura* was translated later, though Book 1 had been translated by John Evelyn in 1656. The most important translation was by Thomas Creech, who rendered the text into English verse and published it in 1682. It went through many editions and its points of convergence with Newton’s theories made it a remarkably successful book. Creech’s edition of 1714 incorporated a vast interpretative apparatus, defending its poetics and its insights, while downplaying Lucretius’ apparent atheism.

The context within which Lucretius’ sublimity came to influence eighteenth-century ideas about the shape of the cosmos was certainly through Joseph Addison,



who drew on the languages of both aesthetics and Newton's Christian providentialism to present a discussion of the cosmic sublime. In the *Spectator*, which was widely read by the educated public, Addison presents this concept in one long sublime passage:

When we survey the whole Earth at once, and the several Planets that lie within its Neighbourhood, we are filled with a pleasing Astonishment, to see so many Worlds hanging one above another, and sliding round their Axles in such an amazing Pomp and Solemnity. If, after this, we contemplate those wide Fields of *Ether*, that reach in height as far as from *Saturn* to the fixt Stars, and run abroad almost to an Infinitude, our Imagination finds its Capacity *filled* with so immense a Prospect, and puts itself upon the stretch to comprehend it. But if we rise yet *higher*, and consider the fixt Stars as so many vast Oceans of Flame, that are each of them attended with a different Sett of Planets, and still discover new Firmaments and new lights, that are sunk farther in those unfathomable *Depths* of *Ether*, so as not to be seen by the strongest of our Telescopes, we are lost in such a labyrinth of Suns and Worlds, and are confounded with the Immensity and Magnificence of Nature. (*Spectator*, No. 420, 1712)

Eye, telescope, and imagination can just about totalize the sweep from our solar system to the expanse of stars outside it, but when the mind considers the immensity of the universe, it becomes unmoored, so that “we are lost” and “confounded.” The progress from (1) sight to (2) imagination to (3) being “halted” in the attempt to comprehend the limitlessness of the universe is a common feature of the cosmic sublime. Here, for example, Edward Young in *Night Thoughts* (1742–1745) reformulates the Addisonian sublime of infinite worlds: “what swarms / Of worlds that laugh at earth! Immensely great! / Immensely distant from each other's spheres! / What, then, the wondrous space through which they roll? / At once it quite engulfs all human thought; / 'Tis comprehension's absolute defeat” (IX: 1102–1107).

The excitement of the Addisonian sublime was that it invited the reader or watcher of skies to experience a deep pleasure in probing the limits of reason rather than its foundations. The Addisonian cosmic sublime is distinct from the rhetorical sublime of Longinus because the sublimity belongs to a material point of origin rather than to rhetoric, and also because Addison makes the crucial analytical point that the emotion of sublimity results from an operation of the mind, not from the immediacy of the material. We find the universe sublime because it is infinite and incomprehensible but also because we find ourselves experiencing an emotion that corresponds to the mental activity of trying to comprehend the incomprehensible. For Addison this is not a condemnation of either nature or humanity – it is the way things are and, like Newton, he considers this to be part of God's necessary mystery. Addison's combination of the idioms of aesthetics, natural philosophy, and psychology is a complex, and indeed profound, theory of the sublime and it adumbrates many ideas that Kant would develop later in the century.

The Newtonian confidence underlying the cosmic sublime had its limitations, however, for whatever knowledge we might have through the new science of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the immediate experience of sublime objects, ideas, and space elicits terror and a sense of human insignificance, invoking the fear that reason might itself be subject to limits. Students of British Romantic literature often begin their study of the sublime with Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*. This work was a major influence on later writers, particularly William Wordsworth. What is striking about Burke's theory is the importance he attaches to fear as an element within sublime experience, thus carving out a place for the anxieties of the sublime that is in counterpoint to its benignities. At the same time, however, Burke's discussion is most centrally about making the sublime a "term of art," a technical term for a variety of aesthetic experience.

Which is not to say that Burke leaves out philosophizing altogether. In fact, he links the differential pleasures of the beautiful and the sublime through the categories of everyday life. The beautiful, he argues, is an aesthetic that is fundamentally social in its orientation: it is balanced, symmetrical, "smooth and polished," "light and delicate" (chapter 26) and, as many have noted, is lined up with attributes of femininity. The sublime, quite differently (and Burke insists that the two are immiscible), is fundamentally solitary in its orientation, and associated with power, violence, and masculinity. Burke takes up the subjective experience of the imagination, and his taxonomy of sublime conditions splits the aesthetic into a set of conceptual as well as perceptual antinomies: the beautiful is orderly, balanced, social, aggregating; the sublime is disorganized, abysmal, extreme, isolating, and disaggregating. He bases his taxonomy on Lockean principles and seems to aspire to the independent rigor that describes the differentiating subjects of natural philosophy, such as taxonomy itself, the discipline of organizing the observable world into categories. The sublime experiences of vastness, deepness, infinitude, loudness, tininess, emptiness, and others in Burke's psychology of sublime effects draw us toward the object we observe and also scare us and remind us of our individual solitariness. As an aesthetic experience, the sublime effect offers us pleasure within fear because our incomprehension is taking place within a controlled framework.

The very large number of essays written about the sublime in the eighteenth century does suggest that the category was both a trouble and a glory for Enlightenment and Romantic literary theory and practice – a trouble as it continually called attention to apparently irreconcilable differences between knowledge and experience. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla have made a powerful and convincing argument that eighteenth-century aesthetics as a social discourse did not merely serve theories of aesthetic disinterestedness, but was rather the vehicle for theorizing individual and social morality; in other words, aesthetics and ethics were intertwined. That is, the idiom of the sublime in the eighteenth century remained meaningful across different intellectual interests in natural philosophy, epistemology, and *belles lettres*. The eighteenth-century philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith pursued this language of morality. In Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), the principles of ethical aesthetics act as the motor of social organization,

with our faculty of imagination allowing us to imagine ourselves in the place of others, and hence, sympathize with them. The argument advanced by Smith and others about the progress of moral sentiments through the work of the imagination as a harmonizing agent modeled the imagination as poised and comprehensive, and able to reconcile discordant elements – not unlike the aesthetic of the harmony of “the beautiful” that is contrasted with the sublime in Burke’s treatise.

In “The Principles which lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy,” written (though not published) probably in the decade before Burke wrote his *Enquiry*, Smith makes a striking call to arms against the sublime experience, calling it a “disease” of the imagination. The sublime, for Smith, is less in opposition to beauty than it is an aberrant form of beauty, and in need of treatment. Smith’s essay, a lucid history of celestial theory from Pythagoras through Newton, is, at the same time, a treatise on the sublime – the subjective aesthetic responses of wonder, surprise, and admiration. Although the text belongs to a natural-philosophical idiom, Smith does argue two important theses related to the theorization of the sublime. He argues, first, that philosophy addresses itself most importantly, not to ignorance, but to the imagination; and, second, that the imagination desires to *be tranquil*, and therefore the resolution of the disturbing experiences of wonder and surprise is the desideratum of philosophy. Smith implicitly foregrounds the Longinian tradition of the sublime, focusing on the sublime as rhetorical grandeur rather than disturbance; in fact, it is precisely against disturbance that he takes aim. Unsurprisingly, Smith shares his aesthetic categories with Addison in his *Spectator* pieces. “Greatness” and “grandeur” might characterize equally harmonious and disturbing visions and ideas of nature. In fact, the Burkean comparison of the beautiful and the sublime is only one way in which the sublime was used in the eighteenth century, and not a tremendously important element in the idiom of sublimity. For John Dennis in 1704, using the terms of “Astonishment” and “Surprise,” the salient feature of sublimity is that it “does not so properly persuade us, as it ravishes and transports us, and produces in us a certain Admiration, mingled with Astonishment and with Surprize, which is quite another thing than the barely pleasing, or the barely persuading” (455). Dennis is interested in the intensity of emotional response: rather than being opposites, if the sublime differs from the experience of “pleasingness” (understood as an aspect of “beauty”), it is so by way of changes in degree, not kind. Unlike Dennis or Addison, Smith’s moral criticism of the affect of “Wonder” is its suggestions of ignorance, and of “Surprise,” that it betrays naïveté or unpreparedness on the part of the perceiver. Wonder and surprise are results of ignorance and irrationality: “Thus the eclipses of the sun and moon, which once, more than all the other appearances in the heavens, excited the terror and amazement of mankind, seem now no longer to be wonderful, since the connecting chain has been found out which joins them to the ordinary course of things” (sect. II, p. 9). Smith says we feel wonder as a set of psycho-physical responses to things that appear to us unexpectedly and/or in juxtaposition to things we did not expect to see. We experience a disturbance or “gap” between these things and the mind is unable to make the leap over it, to make what Smith calls a “bridge”

(sect. II, p. 9) between them. He argues, following Hume, that we take object relationships as given or natural, but that, in fact, this “naturalness” is the effect of habit and custom. When confronted with a relation between objects when we are not expecting one, surprise is followed by wonder; as he puts it, “The stop which is thereby given to the career of the imagination, the difficulty which it finds in passing along such disjointed objects, and the feeling of something like a gap or an interval betwixt them, constitute the whole essence of this emotion” (sect. II, p. 9). Disturbance is the functional equivalent, in Smith’s analysis, to Burke’s sense of terror. However, when knowledge supplies the links between the objects, the irritation of sublimity resolves into truth: knowledge is the weapon that destroys the sublime:

Philosophy, by representing the invisible chains which bind together all these disjointed objects, endeavours to introduce order into this chaos of jarring and discordant appearances, to allay this tumult of the imagination, and to restore it, when it surveys the great revolutions of the universe, to that tone of tranquility and composure, which is most agreeable in itself, and most suitable to its nature. Philosophy, therefore, may be regarded as one of those arts, which address themselves to the imagination. (Sect. II, p. 12)

In Burke’s discussion, what matters is the psychological response to the sublime. Smith aims to demystify the sublime by showing that it is a pernicious psychological effect produced by intellectual errors of ignorance. It is rather a good thing for us all that Smith never published his essay.

By the end of the eighteenth century, theorists of the sublime came to attend to it as a function of the mind rather than simply of the perceiving eye. The sublime defines the difficulty we have as thinkers and imaginers, in making sense of the apparently inhuman immensities – the abyss, mountains, the oceans, and the universe. As a focus of philosophical inquiry, insofar as the sublime is considered as part of the mechanics of the perceiving self, it can appear that the world is annihilating itself. This is the sublimely terrifying question with which Shelley ends “Mont Blanc”: “And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind’s imaginings / Silence and secrecy were vacancy” (142–144). That is, do we interpret the awesome view of the mountain as an example of the meaninglessness of the universe? Is the sublime something we encounter or something we project to animate the empty stones of earth and the light of the stars? By not answering the question, Shelley prompts a *frisson* of sublimity within us.

Discussion of the sublime as a quality of mind, while present in all of its theories at the very least as a response to sensation, was undertaken in the philosophical idiom by the idealist Kant. His work certainly influenced the philosophical idealism of the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and, through Coleridge, the poetry of William Wordsworth. Kant keeps both world and self in play, first, by showing sublimity to be a process in which the infinite cannot be mastered by the mind, and, second, by showing that our very inadequacy in such conceptualization, and the odd

physical and mental results of it, proves to be our triumph. But whether or not any individual poet was directly influenced by Kant, there is much to be noted about Kant's theory that is resonant in Romantic poetics.

What Kant makes clear is that the sublime belongs to the function of our mind that makes judgments. That is, to make a judgment such as, "that is sublime," requires more than the subjective experience of sublimity – it requires the experiencing self to be able to know what s/he is experiencing. It is a thought that organizes the experience by reflecting upon it. Kant makes a distinction between beauty and sublimity that is not unlike Burke's: he says that beauty is form, and sublimity is formless. So the boundaries of the beautiful are clearly observable. The sublime, on the other hand, is formless, unbounded, and limitless. When the understanding and imagination cooperate, we are in the realm of the beautiful; when the imagination and reason are reflectively engaged, we are in the realm of the sublime. Kant divides the sublime up into two kinds. One kind is the "dynamical sublime," which is also much like Burke's ideas of the frightening power we see in the actions of Nature: earthquakes, thunderstorms, volcanoes, and so forth. In the dynamical sublime, we are overpowered by the strength of natural phenomena – overpowered that is, as we imagine being overpowered by this object or event. Echoing Burke's idea of sublimity experienced in safety, Kant writes, "We may look upon an object as *fearful*, and yet not be afraid of it, if, that is, our estimate takes the form of our simply *picturing to ourselves* the case of our wishing to offer some resistance to it, and recognizing that such resistance would be quite futile" (110). Far more interesting is his analysis of what he calls the "mathematical sublime"; when it operates it shows both the limits to imagining and the freedom entailed in reasoning. The mathematical sublime arises when we try to imagine something of a magnitude so great that we cannot find an object with which to compare its measurement. That is, we usually apprehend the size of something by (often implicitly) comparing it to something either greater or smaller. But something which is absolutely "great," such as infinity, is sublime because there is no measure against which to assess its magnitude. We see here why Kant's mathematical sublimity is particularly suited to discussions of the cosmic sublime, which deals with the vastness, the depth, the extent, and the infinitude of possible worlds. In fact, Kant was very interested in the heavens and in 1755 had written a treatise, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, which touches on questions of the immensity of the heavens.

But beyond this connection to cosmology, the mathematical sublime makes the point that it is when our imagination fails us as we strive to "get our heads" around the idea of limitlessness or infinity that what we see instead of the whole or totality of infinity is *the inside of our own heads*. At that point our faculty of reason carries out the work that the imagination could not do, and formulates an *idea* of infinity, proving at that moment that reason is not only superior to the imagination, it is also superior to sensory experience. The human capacity to frame the idea of infinity as a totality, he writes, "evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense" (98).

Much Romantic poetry continues to take up the topic of how the sublime is produced within consciousness. Kant made a significant shift from the objects of perception to the objects of conception, and there is a strand within Wordsworth's and Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetry that belongs to what we can call the "austere" sublime. For the Romantic sublime holds together the astringency of high altitude – the clouds, "Whose pathless march no mortal may control!" (2), writes Coleridge in "France" (1798) – and a quite different devastating extravagance, when, as Wordsworth writes, "the light of sense/Goes out in flashes that have shown to us/The invisible world" (*Prelude* 1805: 6.534–535). Like Kant, Wordsworth is also concerned with internal conception, and in his poetry he launches that experience out into an organic universe. Thus, in "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" (1798), he writes,

And I have felt  
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 A motion and a spirit that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things. (94–103)

Wordsworth also formulates a stern and austere version of the sublime experience of inwardness – invoked not as terror but as malaise, what Wordsworth calls in his autobiographical poem of poetic development, *The Prelude*, a "blank desertion" that precipitates "visionary dreariness" (1850: 1.395, 12.256). This austere sublimity is imaged most intensely in paintings by J. M. W. Turner, where it is only the viewer's imagination that can organize the canvas's scarcely differentiated elements of snow and storm and sea. Fairly early in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth brings reason and wonder together, calling the imagination the "highest reason in a soul sublime" (1805: 5.41). This definition brings together many of the topics of sublimity. First, we find the rhetorical sublime: the elevation of language to describe lofty concepts. Second, the phrase holds in precarious balance the structuring agency of human reason and mysterious soul, where both the objects that reason contemplates and the emotions generated by that observation overflow their boundaries and become wonder, astonishment, and awe. This is what Wordsworth narrates as the reconciliatory moment when he understands, having climbed Mt. Snowdon, that there, in the mountain's chasm, had "Nature lodg'd / The Soul, the imagination of the whole" (1805: 18.650) – sublimity bringing self and the external world into an apotheosis of transcendence.

Wordsworth's ideas of the sublime are influenced by Burke, but he also shares something of the aim of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*; that is, to write a "philosophical poem." Not surprisingly, Coleridge takes a Romantic look at this poetico-philosophical genre. In May 1815, he writes to Wordsworth, "Whatever in

Lucretius is Poetry is not philosophical, whatever is philosophical is not Poetry,” and adds with comic and infuriating Coleridgean bombast that he *had* expected that Wordsworth’s *Recluse* would be “the *first* and only *true* Phil. Poem in existence” but that would remain to be seen (*Letters* 4: 574).

The idea of a philosophic poem, one that would unite the rhetoric of high poetics with an account of the ways in which the world and the mind work, accompanied the numerous eighteenth-century poems that aimed to respond to or correct Lucretius’ fundamental atheism; his account of the randomness of cosmic events included his own point that it was all too messy to be working to a plan, and furthermore, the gods, if they did exist, were busy enjoying themselves lying about on clouds, and wouldn’t have the inclination to create a universe. At the same time the Lucretian poetic form – via Creech’s translations from 1682 through the many-times reprinted 1714 annotated edition – shaped the genre of the “philosophic poem,” examples often contain anti-Lucretian polemic. The ambiguity of Lucretius’ influence often resulted in a repeated poetic strategy in which a Lucretian sublime reach is followed by an anti-Lucretian recoil. So, for example, Richard Blackmore’s “The Creation” (1712) uses the new convention of a “philosophic poem” to write an Intelligent Design sermon (xxxviii). So David Mallet in “The Excursion” (1728), considering the unbounded cosmic space, first expands into the exhilarating infinite: “Ten thousand *Suns* blaze forth; each with his Train/ Of peopled Worlds”; and then immediately contracts, “Beneath the Eye, / And sovereign Rule of one eternal Lord” (2.4–6). The question of who would be able to equal or surpass the Lucretian poem continued throughout the eighteenth century and into the Romantic period. One of the most interesting of these Lucretian philosophical poems is Anna Letitia Barbauld’s “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” which includes its own version of the cosmic sublime. The day’s storm past, the speaker meditates in a darkening landscape, which opens her intellectual imagination: “This dead of midnight is the noon of thought, / And wisdom mounts her zenith with the stars” (51–52). Once out into the void beyond the solar system, the speaker is accompanied by a reflection in which the mind is capable of, asymptotically as it were, approaching the limits of knowing. “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” draws together the sense sublime of the glorious heavens, as well as the stuff of a negative sublime – for at each stretch further into outer space, the speaker is beset by doubts about this expanse – “Seiz’d in thought, / On fancy’s wild and roving wing I sail, / From the green borders of the peopled earth / And the pale moon, her duteous fair attendant / To the dim verge, the suburbs of the system, / Where cheerless Saturn ’midst his wat’ry moons / Girt with a lucid zone, in gloomy pomp, / Sits like an exil’d monarch” (71–74, 78–81). But the power of her own curiosity propels the speaker forward:

Here must I stop,  
Or is there aught beyond? What hand unseen  
Impels me onward thro’ the glowing orbs  
Of inhabitable nature; far remote,  
To the dread confines of eternal night,

To solitudes of vast unpeopled space,  
 The deserts of creation, wide and wild;  
 Where embryo systems and unkindled suns  
 Sleep in the womb of chaos; fancy droops,  
 And thought astonish'd halts her bold career. (89–98)

But ultimately, as in so many philosophic poems, the brave advance of knowledge is followed by a fearful recoil. Christian providentialism is, ultimately, in control:

Let me here  
 Content and grateful, wait th' appointed time  
 And ripen for the skies: the hour will come  
 When all these splendours bursting on my sight  
 Shall stand unveil'd, and to my ravish'd sense  
 Unlock the glories of the world unknown. (117–122)

The courage the speaker has mustered during her contemplation collapses. Yet even though she surrenders to providentialism, the poem hints at the transformation of Lucretian sublimity into romantic Prometheanism, in which the bringer of knowledge to mankind is martyred for that access, and self-knowledge takes over the sublime skyscape. The Promethean figure, as it appears in the work of the younger generation of Romantic writers – Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Mary Shelley – aims to bring the cosmic sublime down to earth, and to challenge the gods with human invention and creation, and to invoke the power of the human mind as the most sublime of all creations, capable of conceptualizing the splendor of the astonishment and awe, while still remaining enchanted by it.

The sublime is a category of mental activity, aesthetics, and of lived experience. Its longevity as a term people have used for making sense of their experiences suggests that it is a feeling that gives rather more pleasure than pain. For the Romantics, it gives a pleasure that arises from the mind experiencing the external world as not yet entirely knowable, but nonetheless accepting Prometheus' desire to know.

See PHILOSOPHY; PSYCHOLOGY; VISUAL CULTURE.

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## Periodicals

*Kristin Flieger Samuelian and Mark Schoenfield*

Questions of taste were widely disputed throughout the Romantic period, and with particular intensity in the “polite” periodicals. Journals such as the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, and *Blackwood’s Magazine*, following the earlier *Gentleman’s Magazine*, were aimed at readers eager to occupy or to emulate the growing class of gentlemen, that is, those men who derived their income from ownership and professions and who, although not aristocrats, could model aristocratic ideals. Though less frequently, the journals also addressed women positioned to bolster these ideals, and would sometimes seem to address one gender in the guise of being overheard by the other. Not just a subject for periodicals, taste was also intimately connected to their battles for readership and their efforts to shape popular opinion. In 1802, the newly formed *Edinburgh* announced an innovative system of reviewing, changing from abstracts and excerpts of numerous books to extensive evaluations of cultural, scientific, and social phenomena structured around selective titles. Rather than seeking to reflect or anticipate public taste, this Whig-allied journal declared a mission of forming it. The *Edinburgh* was answered by the *Quarterly*, started in 1809 by Tory thinkers who, like the publisher John Murray, worried about the “effect such [Whig principles], so generally diffused” were “likely to produce” (Smiles 1: 93), because, as Walter Scott observed, the “politics” of the *Edinburgh* were “so artfully mingled with information and amusement” (Lockhart 3: 140). As Gary Dyer notes, Thomas Love Peacock’s novels satirize the way in which the Romantic public sphere “is exemplified by the quarterlies”: “Peacock’s characters quote the *Edinburgh Review* numerous times, the *Quarterly* even more. He reproduces these forums as microcosms of the public sphere in order to burlesque the public sphere itself, and the celebration of it” (121). These quarterlies were reinforced and challenged by other periodicals across a political and aesthetic spectrum; few cultural sites remained indifferent to them.

Radical voices challenged the quarterlies' hegemony, and forged their aesthetic principles based on the aspirations of their intended audiences (see Gilmartin and Wood). Some, like *The Black Dwarf* (1817–1824), developed distinctly oppositional aesthetic strategies, favoring satire and carnivalesque exaggerations, in seizing, for example, Burke's condemning phrase, the "swinish multitude," as a badge of honor (Jones 87). Other identifiably radical weeklies such as Hunt's *Examiner* (1808) or Cobbett's *Political Register* (1802) sought to consolidate a readership that melded the middle and working classes. The *Examiner* pilfered from mainstream newspapers such as *The Times* to generate ruminations on aesthetic subjects such as fashion or sports that appeared to have no political charge except through the context of their republication within the *Examiner*, where they signified a commonality across class. Such journals produced a radical aesthetic that cannibalized, as much as it opposed, the polite aesthetic of the middle-class journals. In turn, the techniques developed by radical journalists were appropriated by Tory magazines such as *Blackwood's*.

Whether Whig or Tory, radical or mainstream, journals did not articulate a theory of the aesthetic by which to govern their articles. Rather, aiming at forms of pleasure and instruction, they developed methods for engaging the senses and interests of their audiences, and, in the repetition of these methods, a periodical aesthetics developed. In this chapter, we have identified three main – though not exhaustive – elements of this aesthetic, and although we discuss them separately, under the headings of "Literary Aesthetics," "State Aesthetics," and "Celebrity Aesthetics," the interdependence of these tendencies registers as significantly as their distinctness. By accretive examples, we hope to demonstrate a periodical aesthetic that is universalizing in its claims, yet moored to the repetition of detail and example that periodicals, by virtue of their regular recurrence, enabled, and that both depended upon and extended an emerging corporate editorial identity.

### Literary Aesthetics

In 1818, *Blackwood's Magazine*, appearing as a monthly miscellany, extended its fare of articles beyond the reviews of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* to poetry, satiric parodies, articles on sports and arts, fictional tales, and historical explorations. At first, in Philip Flynn's assessment, "flat – no fizz, no flash" (137), the foundering journal was rescued by a change of editor from the real, yet pedestrian, Thomas Pringle and James Cleghorn, to the imaginary but daring "Christopher North," who was greeted as a conquering hero in the staged pages of "Maga" (as *Blackwood's* was known within its inner circle). The success of this strategy ushered in a new paradigm in which the personalities of celebrities became touchstones for aesthetic analysis. This new industry of celebrity, Jason Goldsmith observes, "alienates the individual from his or her public image," while the "celebrity image becomes one mechanism through which the nation is contested as a publicly imagined community" (30). Rejack and Schoenfeld have noted that "between the imagined individual and the imagined nation innumerable gradations of celebrity," both of

persons and of activities, “were interlinked” (3), affording new opportunities for periodical aesthetics.

When *Blackwood's* declared in 1819 that “nothing is more remarkable in the literature of the day, than the substitution, which has been accomplished, of its lighter branches, for the more severe studies by which the proceeding century was distinguished,” it was gesturing toward a trend of periodical culture which Maga was already exploiting and expanding. This article on “The Decline of the Taste for Metaphysics” asserted that the “illustrious men,” “Locke, Berkeley and Hume,” are “secretly rated in public opinion, beneath even the popular favourites of the day” (682); the article avers that the “consequence” of the current diffusion of knowledge—something achieved primarily by the explosion in periodical circulation—is “to alter the standard of literary taste.” It then blends in a single list the causes and effects of that alteration: “to change the distributors of favour, and vary the objects of reward . . . – to vulgarize philosophy and learning, – and to extinguish in all, but the noblest bosoms, the old longing after immortality” in favor of “the tumultuous applause of the moment” (687). The aesthetics of celebrity, managed by the multivoiced periodicals, balanced “the curiosity of a great and penetrating mind” with “the phenomena of the material world in all their variety of brightness and wonder” (687). Genius contended with and through contemporaneity, fashion, and fun. As Brian Rejack has shown, the periodicals deployed nascent gourmandism, which offered a middle-class aesthetic for the pleasures of food consumption and culinary taste, as a discourse from which to draw metaphors and comparisons. At the same time, *Blackwood's* projected an aestheticizing rhetoric as a universal analytic of cultural assessment: De Quincey's persona, in “On Murder, Considered as One of the Fine Arts” (1827), contends that everything, a murder, a thievery, even an ulcer, “has two handles”; murder can be considered morally “or it may also be treated *aesthetically*, as the Germans call it, that is, in relation to good taste” (200).

In periodical culture, present literary celebrity eclipsed future fame. Robert Southey declared “the invention of reviews to be the worst injury which literature has received since its revival”; where readers once sought to learn from a book, now “everybody is a critic” preferring the pleasure of “censure” to the task of education (177); nonetheless, in a more idealistic moment, he commiserated with Wordsworth that critics “cannot *blast* our *laurels*, but they may *mildew* our *corn*” (Wordsworth 2: 173). Hazlitt framed this struggle between an idealized aesthetic and the new focus on the present in his essay “On Different Sorts of Fame” (1816): “The spirit of universal criticism has superseded the anticipation of posthumous fame, and instead of waiting for the award of distant ages, the poet or prose-writer receives his final doom from the next number of the *Edinburgh* or *Quarterly Review*” (2: 61). Hazlitt argues that this condition evolves from the synergy between the periodical's ability to produce an image of the self, the reading public's desire to see themselves mirrored in the fame of others, and the structure of sympathy which underlies the tautological structure of fame, in which one is famous for, and identified by, repeated actions, writings, or traits. Tom Mole identifies this dynamic as a “hermeneutics of intimacy” that “succeeded commercially because it marketed as a commodity an escape from

the standardized impersonality of commodity culture. It therefore had attractions for both entrepreneurs and consumers, and answered the problem of individuation through consumption" (*Byron's Romantic Celebrity* 25).

In the myriad registers of the Romantic-era periodicals, this aesthetic, oriented to the contemporary moment, linked a range of topics by analogy and structure. While aiding in the development of professionalized disciplinary discourses around sciences and arts, it also mediated between professional and popular voices. Because the medium required the inculcation of reading routines, the exploitation of habits of consumption, and the development of systems of distribution and circulation, the aesthetics of the periodicals reflected and engaged concerns throughout British society. In both serious and comic modes, periodicals asserted analyses of taste that focused on contemporary material conditions. In the same volume as "The Decline of the Taste for Metaphysics," John Wilson published "On the Connexion between Pugilism, Statuary, Painting, Poetry, and Politics." Wilson declares that "the art of pugilism can effect the stability of an empire only by means of the influence which it exerts over the intellectual and moral character of a people, through the medium of the imagination and the fine arts" (722). Wilson asserts a chain of influence, beginning with boxing, which influences the fine arts, and these in turn produce a civilizing effect on the populace, while, simultaneously, the aesthetic terms of fine art are reasserted in the craft of boxing. In part, Wilson is playing to the contemporary popularity of boxing and of particular famous boxers. He notes the advantage the ancient Greeks had in sculpture was access to seeing the "naked body in contention as well as in repose," and declares that modern fighters, such as Jackson and Neate, are "fit to peel against any Greek that ever entered a ring" (722–723). Statuary, then, would "impart its vigor to the sister art" of painting, and hence can "scarcely fail of being friendly with poetry" (723). This metonymic structure of influence reflects the circulation of knowledge and taste that *Blackwood's* and other periodicals produced, but is represented emblematically as the article dissolves into parodic poetry attributed to the great fighters of the day. As one example, a portion of the *Aeneid*, describing a fight, is translated into "Flash" slang: "With *daddles* high uprais'd and *nob* held back, / In awful prescience of th'impending thwack, / Both *Kiddies* stood" (726). This is a joke in that it is printed side by side with the original Latin, which is not glossed at all, while these lines have several notes, after the style of a Latin Variorum. This continual mutating of language, the mixing of high and low diction, neologisms crafted from the collision of different discourses – all represent the processes of periodical culture in developing its own genres.

In an 1807 letter, Wordsworth reminded his friend Lady Beaumont of Coleridge's observation that "every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished" (2: 150). Wordsworth was defending his *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807) against its weak reception (*Memorials of Coleorton* 2: 17); Francis Jeffrey's review ended with the hope that Wordsworth's "open violation of the established laws of poetry, will operate as a wholesome warning" to other poets (231). Wordsworth's response has both the transhistorical rhetoric of aphorism and a consciously local application of

establishing Wordsworth himself, in 1807, among history's original writers, not despite but because of the public's initial inability to relish his works. Greatness and originality are at once universal and contingent. Entailed in this notion is the claim made by the *Oriental Herald* (1824), in "Introductory, on the Nature and Effects of Modern Periodical Literature," that "the taste of the public has, in great measure, created the literature, rather than the literature [having] created the taste" (226). As it is the periodicals that have formed that public taste, they have created the taste not only by which they will be enjoyed but also by which enjoyment will be disseminated and experienced. In his essay "On Murder," De Quincey parodies the Wordsworthian ideal, arguing that the killer John Williams, like "Aeschylus or Milton in poetry," has "carried his art to a point of colossal sublimity; and, as Mr Wordsworth observes, has in a manner 'created the taste by which he is to be enjoyed'" (200).

Like the Wordsworthian ideal, periodical writers forged new reading publics and simultaneously restructured notions of greatness and originality. When founding the *Spectator* nearly a century earlier, Joseph Addison articulated the idea that a writer must first cultivate the tastes that then establish his writing as normative. He wrote that his aim was "from day to day" to slowly recover his readers from their "desperate state of vice and folly" (1: 53). Daily applications were necessary, because "[t]he mind that lies fallow but a single day sprouts up in follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous culture" and because domestic routine masks the violence of cultivation: "I would therefore in a very particular manner recommend these my speculations to all well-regulated families that set apart an hour in every morning for tea and bread and butter, and would earnestly advise them for their good to order this paper to be punctually served up, and to be looked upon as a part of the tea equipage" (1: 53). Part of the apparatus – ritual and material – that establishes the middle-class family as a unit, the daily newspaper both identifies its members as well regulated and effects (or perfects) their good. As Jon Klancher demonstrates, this imagined intercourse between reader and periodical author, which Addison characterized by epistolary exchange, is overwritten in the Romantic period by the palimpsest of commercial exchange: "[T]he brutal sphere of textual consumption overwhelms the gentler world of textual 'reception'" (137).

In this competitive marketplace, Romantic periodicals developed their aesthetics and the strategies for constituting appreciative audiences. Journals "registered the increasingly heterogeneous play of sociolects – the discourses of emerging professions, conflicting social spheres, men and women, the cultivated middle-class audience, and less sophisticated readerships" (Klancher 20). The structure of periodicity, the play of repetition and novelty in the sequences of regularized publication, as Addison notes, was an analogue for an aesthetic rooted in both cultural and economic norms. In 1739, David Hume, a writer formative for the founders of the *Edinburgh Review*, described the mechanism that both Addison and the *Edinburgh* evoke when he argued that the "same love of order and uniformity, which arranges the books in a library, and the chairs in a parlour, contributes to the formation of society" and that this aesthetic of order, reinforced by the patterns of repetition it identifies, is necessarily founded "on some preceding relation" (2: 214).

Hume's promiscuous mingling of the books in the library with the chairs in the parlour recalls Addison's stated ambition in the same number of the *Spectator* to bring "philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses" (1: 53). No relation, aesthetic or otherwise, is *sui generis*; a taste for poems or for the order and uniformity necessary to social formation is the product of "constant and assiduous culture."<sup>1</sup>

For the *Edinburgh Review*, cultivation of one aesthetic necessitated the rejection of another. Reviewing Southey's *Thalaba* in the initial number, Jeffrey attacked "the perverted taste for simplicity that seems to distinguish our modern school of poetry" (63). Their aesthetic failure arises from not recognizing that "their self-invention is merely a compilation of earlier sources" (Schoenfield 75), a recognition that Jeffrey signals in the opening sentence of his review: "Poetry has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question" (63). Originality is a chimera; taste, by contrast, can "establish the habits of reading by which a community signified itself"; the *Edinburgh's* "leading aesthetic principle is taste, rather than originality" because taste "signals a communal organization in which the individual confirms selfhood through its similarities" (Schoenfield 75).

Jeffrey's argument for taste builds from the communal and serial reading Addison had outlined in the *Spectator*. In the first paragraphs of the review of *Thalaba*, Jeffrey aligns the law, religion, economics, and poetry as institutions grounded in past precedents, and goes on to represent genuine originality as not a flight from past methods, but a particular engagement and understanding with it. The *Edinburgh's* success was immediate; an 1835 retrospective was repeating a critical truism when it announced, "No critical and political journal ever obtained so brilliant a celebrity, or gave so powerful an impulse to public opinion" (Cross 1: 1). In both obtaining fame for itself and crafting the terms of celebrity and public opinion, the *Edinburgh* spawned imitation and competition, often at the same time.

The *Edinburgh* sought to forge new audiences by capitalizing on the specific economic and social conditions of its readers. Other periodicals sought to capture already established readerships, like prizes in a naval skirmish. They were all, however, operating in new territory, characterized by imitation and improvisation. Strategies were various; they ranged in tone, politics, geography, and degree of success. *Blackwood's*, the *Quarterly*, and the *Edinburgh* boasted print runs in the tens of thousands and readerships an order of magnitude more. Others, such as Francis Blagdon's *Phoenix*, begun around 1809, folded in about a year after meager circulation numbers. Even those that lasted only a short time, however, could contribute to the swelling mass of periodical readership and the transformation of the habits of reading across print culture.

## State Aesthetics

As Ian Duncan has demonstrated in his analysis of the king's progress of 1822, the staging of national events – and their subsequent record in the press – was



instrumental in organizing the interplay between Scotland as a “nation” and as part of a greater Britain. In “On the Edinburgh Music Festival” (1819), *Blackwood’s* uses the occasion of the “second Musical Festival in this city,” three years before the king’s visit, to consider the aesthetics of music. This article is typical of *Blackwood’s* use of a public event to trace the coextensive development of aesthetic and social realms, and in its predicting a continual evolution that merges Scottish and British sensibilities. Noting that “in common with all pastoral nations,” Scots have “from the earliest period of this history, been passionately fond” of music that “consists in the simple expression of natural feelings,” and consequently, throughout Great Britain, “Scotch music” is “the usual expression to denote those simple and touching strains which spring from genuine feeling” (184). It asserts that, like Burns’s poetry, the music has “spread far beyond [Scots’] native sphere”; the consequence, however, is a Scottish “contempt for the complicated system on which [foreign music] depends” (184). Holding a middle position, the journal argues at once for the native aesthetic of passion and the “acquired taste” of more complex artistic forms. The result is a divide between the “generality of men” and “our artists and professional men,” who have “created a language unintelligible to the rest of mankind, and established a criterion of taste”; from this linguistic differentiation arises “a division of society into the *musical* and the *unmusical*” (184, 185). Both groups “entertain a sovereign contempt for the other” and the result is musicians who “have aimed at what is *new*, rather than what is *beautiful*; and sought rather to display their own powers than to develop the real beauties of their art” (185). It is the popular periodical, a corporate being that collects under its own persona a range of talents and understanding, that can bridge this divide, both in analyzing the history of its development – hence denaturalizing the social division – and in translating between the two.

The rest of the article performs the bridging by categorizing the three basic impulses of music: to awake the “enthusiasms of war,” the “tenderness of love,” and the “ardour of *devotion*” (185), which in turn correspond to both the structures of individual desires and the social contexts and institutions that organize them, as when armies are rallied by music, or chamber concerts are “adapted to our ordinary and domestic feelings” (196). The article argues for a consistency of simple single-voiced compositions for expressions of love, and more complex communal sounds for those that denote religious devotion. This strategic oversimplification emphasizes the general periodical discourse by which the aesthetic norms of artistic expression underlying social configurations were neither natural nor artificial, but “cultivated,” the aesthetics by which the periodicals shape perceptions and experiences of the body and body politics. The article notes that the Edinburgh festival helps to remedy the lack of music in the Presbyterian Church and so, through its yearly repetition and consequential imitation, *Blackwood’s* looks forward to “the change which it would produce on the national habits.” *Blackwood’s* (in a nod to those periodicals that preceded it) credits the Scottish advance in “knowledge, wealth, and power,” but opines that the “progress of manners,” by contrast, has been slow and singles out Edinburgh professionals as especially uncouth (189). Aware that music may seem to instill not manners but effeminacy, the article marshals a series of

examples of manly musicians, culminating in Achilles, the “most terrific personage that poetic imagination has feigned,” and, to emphasize the function of taste and decorum, quotes from Alexander Pope’s translation of the *Iliad* (1715–1720) a moment in which Achilles “soothes his angry soul” with his harp playing and “sings / The immortal deeds of Heroes and of Kings” (190). This transformation of manners is coextensive with the consolidation of state power, to which *Blackwood’s* was committed, bringing the violence of, for example, individual revenge under the mollifying practices of legal punishment and organizing the violent nature of men into armies, sports, and the sublimated stories such as those that Achilles sings. After eight pages of historical and theoretical analysis, the article describes the performances for two pages, and concludes by crediting the institutional structure that allowed individual performers to excel. This nod to institutional structure as the precondition for individual success emphasizes the contingent structure of identity in the periodicals – and so authorizes the various experiments in identity in *Blackwood’s* – and establishes a dialectic between institution and individual that is mediated by aesthetic experience.

Arguing for a new aesthetic for periodical readers, the institution also proposed new aesthetic formulations for other literary forms. The novel of manners, viewed as a feminine form, usually written by or directed toward women, provides a useful example. Reviewers emphasized that the novel of manners expressed and regulated the ordinary, as an aesthetic norm of the genre (counterbalanced yet occasionally interpenetrated by the gothic mode’s excess and spectacle).<sup>2</sup> In 1816, the *Monthly Review* recommends Jane Austen’s *Emma* to readers “who seek for harmless amusement, rather than deep pathos or appalling horrors” (320), and the *British Critic* distinguishes it from “fanatical novels and fanatical authoresses” of whom “we are already sick” (98). In differentiating *Emma* from gothic novels, reviews emphasized the everydayness of its characters and their communities, but also of its literary goals; the *Gentleman’s Magazine* notes that *Emma* “delineates with great accuracy the habits and manners of a middle class of gentry; and of the inhabitants of a country village at one degree of rank and gentility beneath them” (248–249).<sup>3</sup>

Walter Scott, reviewing *Emma* for the *Quarterly* at the request of John Murray, who published both the review and the novel, praises Austen’s early novels as “belong[ing] to a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times, and which draws the characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordinary life than was permitted by the former rules of the novel” (189). Paradoxically, such praise renders the novel passive for the reader, figured as a “youthful wanderer” who can “return from his promenade to the ordinary business of life, without any chance of having his head turned by the recollection of the scene through which he has been wandering” (200). While the work of Austen, Frances Burney, and Maria Edgeworth criticizes the ordinary as a condition compelled by institutional and economic pressures and so seeks to disrupt the easy return to “ordinary business” that Scott highlights, reviews positioned their novels as celebrations of the ordinary. This disruption of these novels, as Claudia Johnson argues, required female authors “to develop strategies of subversion and indirection which

would enable them to use the polemical tradition without being used completely by it" (19). Subtlety and satire, however, were novelistic techniques that reviewers could strategically misread and misrepresent, as when Scott renarrates the conclusion of *Emma*:

The plot is extricated with great simplicity. The aunt of Frank Churchill dies; his uncle, no longer under her baneful influence, consents to his marriage with Jane Fairfax. Mr. Knightley and Emma are led, by this unexpected incident, to discover that they had been in love with one another all along . . . and the facile affections of Harriet Smith are transferred, like a bank bill by indorsation, to her former suitor, the honest farmer. (196–197)

Scott's image of Harriet's affections as an endorsed bank bill transferred easily by signature suggests the social work he argues *Emma* does. How have Harriet's affections been transferred, and from whom? Emma has allowed Harriet's class status to be determined by her intimate friendship with Emma herself; it is this intimacy that is transferred to Robert Martin. Manners and emotion merge in a seamless ritual at this plot point; homosocial female desire is redirected into normative heterosexuality and Scott's review presents this transformation as the usual workings of the bourgeois marketplace and its aesthetic companion, the novel of manners. The novel itself resists this reading, but it is the lens through which Scott, the premier male novelist of the moment, wishes the novel perceived. His review had begun by posing novel-reading as a vice, which, like debauchery and drunkenness, was so common "that they are hardly acknowledged," and then, in offering mitigation for this practice, announces that "the judicious reader will see at once we have been pleading our own cause while stating this universal practice" (188, 189). As the anonymous and corporate identity of the *Quarterly* reviewer, Scott speaks for both specific individual identity and universal human nature; further, the reviewer is a mediating instrument by which these are continually aligned. His summary reinforces this alignment by emphasizing Emma's willingness to conform to what the "judicious reader" has recognized all along as inevitable, ordained by the rules of her genre.

In reviews throughout the early nineteenth century, the policing of literary strategies was linked to the construction of modern gender. To explain why the ancient Greeks were incapable of writing novels, the *Quarterly* reviewer of Edgeworth's 1814 *Patronage* rehearses their material conditions:

Slavery spread a gloomy uniformity over three-fourths of the population of Greece and Rome. The free citizens were devoted chiefly to public affairs, and their private life exhibited nothing but a stern unsocial strictness on the one hand, or a disgusting shameless profligacy on the other. To them that steady settled influence of women upon society was utterly unknown, which in modern times has given grace, variety, and interest to private life, and rendered the delineation of it one of the most entertaining and one of the most instructive forms of composition. (301)

This mythology of the modern invention of the private sphere locates women within two productions: first, the creation of a private space and, second, the means of its representation. In reading a novel, a woman can imagine her own household transformed with “variety” and “grace” – she becomes a locus of consumption through this production. The salient opposition in ancient Greece between slaves and free citizens is now between free citizens (male) and women, whose influence is “steady” and “settled,” that is, conservative, rather than reforming. This description, excluding Mary Wollstonecraft from the category of woman and homoerotic practice – here conjured as “shameless profligacy” – from the activities of a contemporary “free citizen,” focuses desire onto marriage.

In a somewhat earlier review, of Thomas Ashe’s *The Spirit of “the Book”*; or, *Memoirs of Caroline Princess of Hasburgh, a Political and Amatory Romance*, the *Satirist* confronted a novelization of an extraordinary union, the marriage of considerable inconvenience between the Prince of Wales and his immediately estranged wife, Princess Caroline. While we focus on only this review, the figure of this marriage and other spectacles of royalty permeated the periodicals and their aesthetic norms, playing on, for example, the increasing size of the prince and the excessive habits of the princess. The *Satirist* review deploys what Kim Wheatley describes, with reference to responses to Shelley, as the “vituperative rhetoric” of “reviewers as a historically specific version of the ‘paranoid style,’ a heightened language of defensiveness and persecution” (1, quoting Richard Hofstadter). Persecution and prosecution were woven, in the Romantic period, into a combined rhetoric reviewers used across the political spectrum. The intensity and focus of the *Satirist*’s reviews demonstrate what Margaret Russett identifies as a “prosecutorial style of literary criticism” (16). The title page of the *Satirist* quotes Juvenal, with an English verse translation that sets out the aims of the journal: “Follies and vices uncontrol’d prevail: / To sea, bold Satirist; spread wide your sail!” The *Satirist*’s 1811 review of Ashe’s *The Spirit of “the Book”* is marked by this juridical stance.

*The Spirit of “the Book”* offers a back-story to the 1806 investigation into possible adultery by Princess Caroline.<sup>4</sup> The royal commission’s report, known as “the Book,” was printed in 1807 and suppressed, although its existence was common knowledge. Ashe’s version is a sentimental *roman à clef* written as a series of letters from Caroline to her daughter Charlotte and its slender narrative structures her as a heroine of sensibility and the reader’s intimate friend. This manipulation of epistolarity also structures the author as the princess’s intimate friend, and the *Satirist* organizes his review by attacking this claim as imposture. Declaring that “The Spirit of the Book does not contain a single fact that has not appeared long ago, in all the newspapers” (325), the *Satirist* opposes the novelistic convention in its application to a political spectacle that is the appropriate target of the periodical. Ashe’s own story, told in his *Memoirs*, begins with a similar notion: he claims to have had access to a purloined copy of “the Book” and to have intended to publish excerpts in a weekly newspaper unless paid off (3: 87). Prevented by an injunction of a corrupt government from publishing the information in its original form, he publishes its “spirit.” To prove Ashe’s unworthiness to trade on this imagined intimacy with contemporary royalty,

the *Satirist* draws on the periodical staple of character assassination: “Our object is merely to shew the character of the man, that the public may know what confidence to place in his imposter book” (321).

The *Satirist*'s strategy links absurdity and threat. Ashe is a buffoon because he cannot pass his work off as the memoir of a royal princess. He is a predator because he nonetheless imposes on an unsuspecting public, duping his victims and readers into believing in, and paying for, something that has no substance. The *Satirist* uses Ashe's arrest for passing a bank note with a forged endorsement to indict both man and book. Ashe was acquitted of the 1811 forgery charge, but the *Satirist* transforms his putative crime into the crime of self-making, highlighted by serial aliases: although most English readers may believe that money is “coined by means of a die . . . Mr. Ashe, *alias Anvil, alias &c. &c.* can inform them that . . . it is sometimes, like horse shoes, *forged* by means of an *Anvil*” (320). Ashe is a real forger and the *Satirist*'s zeal to spot forgeries of all kinds recalls the policing gesture suggested in its motto from Juvenal. The novel, another forgery, lacks the stamp of royalty partly because its representation of the princess is implausible. Ashe's Caroline shares with her daughter details of erotic encounters with both her husband and her lover. This candor discredits the work since no mother worthy of the title would write so to her daughter. In pretending to assume Ashe meant readers to believe in the factuality of the letters, the *Satirist* shifts the terms of his offense. Charlotte's invisibility as an addressee is a function of the unapologetic awkwardness of Ashe's vehicle. He needed a way to get his material in front of the public, and letters from a mother to a daughter had a solid generic lineage. For the *Satirist*, however, his book is now an impostor because it reveals the princess to be no true mother and, if no mother, then no princess: “to such a letter he has had the villainy to affix the *forged* signature of the Princess of W!!!” (324). The *Satirist*'s rejection of Ashe's *Spirit of “the Book”*, like the *Quarterly*'s acceptance of *Emma*, demonstrates the concerted efforts of periodicals to engage simultaneously social conventions, political hierarchies, and domestic organization, by projecting an aesthetic onto the novel.

### Celebrity Aesthetics and Dancing

While the periodical aesthetic was embedded in literary allusion and complex forms of textual and cultural citation, it also extended into the physical world through the emerging systems of celebrity. When people of fashion took walks, they moved not only along Pall Mall but also through the periodicals. Their activities were reported, sometimes with breathless admiration, sometimes with sober criticism, often in a tone of ostensibly disinterested reportage that enabled both. As the premier figures of fashion, the voluminous royal family garnered much periodical attention in the years between the seventeen-year-old Prince of Wales's affair with Mary Robinson and his coronation four decades later. The scandals of the later Georgian period coincided with an expanding print culture produced, in Eric Eisner's words, by “an accelerating set of technologies of publicity” (21). Mole calls George III “arguably the first

monarch to have also been a celebrity” because “daily newspaper reports on his health and innumerable caricatures recast the public fascination with his role as monarch into a public fascination with his existence as an embodied . . . individual” (“Introduction” 6–7).

Even before the rise of the major quarterly reviews, royal weddings, drawing rooms, and renovations, meticulously described in magazines, were sources for aesthetic admiration or prurient fascination. A *Walker’s Hibernian* article on Queen Charlotte’s birthday party in 1791 records the participants and the dances (nineteen minuets and three country dances) and adds details of court dress, stressing royal moderation: “The Ladies head dresses were not very large” nor “very wide,” while the gentlemen’s “were very moderate.” The Prince of Wales, “as usual,” was “the best dressed gentleman” (“Account” 154). The prince’s dress included the “gold tissue” of his waistcoat and cuffs, and “a Diamond sword, the magnificence of which surpasses any thing of the kind ever made” (154). This subjective aesthetic judgment resolves into a quantitative assessment: all totaled, he wore “about his dress the value of eighty thousand pounds in diamonds” (154). The prince’s dress, a sign and enactment of the extravagance often a subject of parliamentary debate, reintroduces the “party distinction” supposed to have melted away in celebration of “a Sovereign, whose conduct has endeared her to every subject” (154). In the polite rhetoric of eighteenth-century periodicals, the *Hibernian* uses the discourse of fashion and decorum at once to insinuate and to assuage political potential – an aesthetics of the state that, like the literary aesthetics of the later monthlies, reinforced norms through the cultivation of a taste that was always already assumed. We conclude with a subject that, like celebrity royalty watching, though seemingly more innocuous, serves as a test case for the convergence of literary and state concerns. That subject is dancing.

The *Hibernian*’s meticulous listing of the dances and dancers at the queen’s birthday indicates the centrality of dance to the construction of the polite as normative. Yet dancing was also a potentially liminal activity – hovering between courtship and adultery, ritual and wild abandon, public display and intimacy, the professionalism of the ballet stage and the amateurism of the country party. Dancing consequently offered periodicals a subject for honing aesthetics and for intimating its relation to social norms. Was dancing an art, equal in stature to music and poetry? Was it a salubrious pastime – healthful exercise that, in the words of the 1820 *Literary Chronicle*, “gives the blood that free circulation which removes obstructions in the system and raises the animal spirits to the tone of cheerfulness” (Cantab 840)? Or was it, as a writer to the *Imperial* claimed in 1822, an unhealthy and dangerous pastime – too often “carried on at improper hours, in crowded places, and to an unjustifiable excess” (West 165)? The importation of two new Continental dances – from Germany the waltz and from France the quadrille – added British nationalism to the arguments. As the adjectives in the *Imperial* quotation suggest, the typical focus of anxieties about dancing and excess was young women – ball-mad teenagers “suffering,” as Austen put it in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), “under the insatiable appetite of fifteen” (26). The volatile combination of voracious appetite and absence

of judgment is typified by “Ellen,” who writes, in the second of a series of letters to the 1820 *Literary Chronicle*, “I do think, if ma’am was to refuse my attending dances, I should either elope with the major, or sink in the fish-pond” (841). Dancing either destabilizes the reason of adolescent girls or exacerbates already unsound judgments.

Yet the real interest of these pieces was often men rather than women. “Ellen” is likely a fabrication, as is “M.P.,” the widow whose letter follows hers. M.P.’s argument is at least as silly as Ellen’s. She bases her claim that clerical dancing is a sin on the evidence that her husband, a divine, “caught his death at a dancing party,” a “judgment on him” unqualified by her being “out with a *quadrille*” at the time, “and I lost the *game* through it” (841). The italics highlight the pun, but its effect is not to associate dancing with card playing but to demonstrate the widow’s muddy and hypocritical logic. The sequence of the letters forms a coherent argument whose aim is casual misogyny rather than either pro- or anti-dancing polemic.

Articles about dancing were part of a discourse that sought to establish class and national identities by defining the English gentleman as peculiarly actuated by taste and propriety, and it does not seem to have mattered whether writers held that dancing aided or militated against the exercise of these traits. Articles quoted and borrowed from one another, even when they were not in direct dialogue. Defensive essays cited history, classical mythology, scripture, and medical discourse to demonstrate dancing’s alignment with both art and nature. In “The History of Dancing” (1805) in the *Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany*, “J.S.” argues that dancing “goes hand in hand with Music, Painting and Poetry” (426) but is superior to at least the last two, inasmuch as it is “gestural” rather than representational. In a mixture of antiquarianism and Rousseau-esque anthropology, J.S. argues that “we must look back to those periods in the history of the world when Society existed in its simplest state” for an understanding of the value of dance (426). “Among the ancients, motion and gesture were much more used than among the moderns” (427), and this chronology is both natural and implicitly hierarchical: “In the beginning of Society, signs would naturally come before sounds, and the language of gesture be understood prior to the use of words. Words are but arbitrary and confined, but gestural language is fixed and universal” (426). The author offers an anecdote from Garrick’s biography as evidence that dancing, like acting, “is an art founded in nature” and hence superior to those “whose character is only imitative” (427).

Such articles depend on the Burkean notion that the imitation and ritualization of nature are not its opposite but, in James Chandler’s formulation, a “second nature . . . a way of thinking that conveniently collapses certain troublesome oppositions” (72), “at once metaphorical and metonymous with Nature” (67). Whether dancing originates in or replicates nature does not alter the claim that it is “natural” and therefore accords with unadorned gentlemanliness. A letter, “On the State of the Art of Dancing in Edinburgh,” published in the *Scots* ten years after the earlier piece, makes the case for including dancing among the liberal arts as an essential part of the education of a gentleman. Dancing has a low reputation because it has been

misidentified as a trivial, boarding-school accomplishment and badly taught by fops and mountebanks instead of by “a man of true genius, who, to a perfect knowledge of his profession adds correct taste” (23). “Under the direction” of such a man, “we contract habits, which we may with propriety carry along with us into the most polished life: and here the lessons of the school may be adopted in our intercourse with mankind” (23). Dancers become English gentlemen, men for whom propriety, first contracted as a habit, has become second nature. Or, rather, they would, had not “this branch of education” been neglected, underrated as “*professedly an accomplishment,*” and “confided to men of the meanest education, ignorant of every essential qualification – men who, without any attachment to the profession, have fled to it as a *dernier resort*” (23). The conclusion to this litany of demerits suggests that one feature of naturalized gentility is anti-Continental: dancing masters are like the ubiquitous and suspect French émigrés, whose last resort is to flee to Britain and pass themselves off as gentlemen.

This implicit nationalism becomes explicit in an 1826 *Literary Chronicle* diatribe on the quadrille by “V.” The principal speaker of this imagined dialogue complains that the quadrille has been “import[ed]” into England together with “French foolery and French silks,” and its proponents have “assaulted” such English institutions as “Roger de Coverly” [*sic*] and “Chatsworth House,” country seat of William Cavendish (682). The use of metonyms representing opposite ends of the political spectrum – the benign Toryism of Sir Roger de Coverley, the squire of Addison’s *Spectator*, and the Whig refinements of the Dukes of Devonshire – suggests a unified English identity belied by the speaker’s nostalgia and anti-Catholicism. He longs for the days “when dancing was dancing – not a little angular shuffle, like a knight over a chessboard,” and, in a remarkable compression of Protestant xenophobia, he calls the separate forms of the quadrille “that bead-roll of foreign monsters” (682). Their introduction into dancing practice, he suggests, is at once emasculating and infantilizing, obliging “a man of five-and-thirty” to “put himself under the care of a dancing-master” and “be a second time initiated in all the mysteries of first position, and one, two, three, four” (682). This occult initiation – or, rather, occulted, since what was elementary is remade as alien and mysterious – allies the quadrille with revolutionary and gothic excess. Nationalism combines loyalist and republican rhetoric, comparing the longed-for “ancien regime of dancing” (682) with a jab that could be applied equally to either the current English or French monarch: “sickly and heartless Quadrille rules it now in the throne,” followed by “crowds of parasites, as heartless as herself” (683).

Despite their political differences, together these articles demonstrate that dancing provided a way of explicating Englishness. Since Englishness could mean either support of or opposition to a current government, the apparatus of these articles could be appropriated by writers from a variety of political positions. In a July 1807 letter to the *Satirist*, “Saltator” (the name in Latin means “leaper” or “dancer”) ironizes both the antiquarian and classist defenses for dancing in an attack on Lord Grenville and the recently dissolved Ministry of All the Talents. “Antiquity and the Sacred Origin of Dancing,” by “Saltator,” draws from a fantastic 1,600-year-old



Greek source, “Lucianus de Saltatione,” for “indubitable proofs” of the legitimacy of dancing as an art (502), but saves most of its satire for the gentlemanly defense as a strategy for criticizing the Whig old guard, anticipating *Blackwood’s*-style Toryism. In Saltator’s “humble attempt to defend the *taste* of her nobility; for if they are depraved what will become of my country?” (501), taste becomes appetite and indicates not propriety but indulgence, even depravity. “Like all other human pursuits,” dancing, a transparent metaphor here for statecraft, “may be carried to excess” (502). And excess of appetite is addiction, just as excessive attention paid to the wrong issues – Catholic emancipation, for example – is obsession. Both indicate not just misdirection but pathology: “When a prime minister . . . is afflicted with the mania, however skillful and accomplished in the exercise, he certainly *dances out of time*” (502). Dancing is a multipurpose metaphor for the writer. Sometimes standing in for mismanagement (dancing to excess is dancing out of time), it can denote distraction, a turning of one’s attention from the proper object. The former prime minister’s admiration for “the *Pas de Tilsit*” and the “*Dardanelles* reel” – references to the treaty that united France with Russia and dismantled the Russo-British alliance forged by Pitt – like his attempts to execute “the favourite Irish hop, ‘Paddy and Pope’ or ‘Georgy knock under,’” suggest a betrayal of his nation by oversetting the balance between domestic and foreign interests. Here Saltator anticipates the Tory nationalism of the *Literary Chronicle* article. A penchant for dance is a penchant for things un-English: “His sovereign entrusts him with the management of an empire, but ah! his passion is – to *dance!!!*” (502–503).

An 1816 letter to the *Examiner* by “Omicron” combines anti-European nationalism and conservative rhetoric to criticize the government through the metaphor of the waltz. In mock disapproval of “the introduction of a dance called the Waltz at the English Court” reported in *The Times*, “Omicron” declares, “[w]e have already quite as much Germanizing among us as we have any occasion for; and it is devoutly to be wished that our English females would be upon their guard, and not proceed one step further from that modest reserve which has hitherto characterized them” (473). This remark targets the Regent’s estranged wife, who, living on the Continent, was a frequent butt of conservative criticism for being both immodest and too German. Omicron commends the “laudable” zeal of *The Times* in warning “every parent against exposing his daughter to so fatal a contagion” (473), then appropriates the metaphor by asserting the danger is not from “a foreign *indecenty* at the English Court” (473), and waltzing is not “the only contagion likely to affect the morals of the females who attend the fetes at Carlton House” (474). The contagion spreads not from across the water but outward from the center – the monarchy, figure of both excessive aesthetic indulgence and political extravagance.

Whether of authors or monarchs; novels, poetry, or drama; dancing or boxing, the periodicals laid claim to their right of judgment as a Burkean second nature. At the same time, in the waltz of consumption, proliferation, and confusions, that claim was always contested and mediated. Both the internal competitions of the periodicals themselves and the external critiques by other agents of the public sphere reveal that the periodical aesthetic was grounded on its own persuasive representations and that

even the most innocuous subjects, in solidifying that aesthetic, served more potent – if sometimes unintended – sociopolitical forces.

See NARRATIVE; NATION AND EMPIRE; SATIRE.

### Notes

- 1 Although Hume's model of aesthetics is complex and controversial, several points from his "On the Standard of Taste" were of particular import for the periodicals. First, Hume argues for a continuity between aesthetic and ethical choice, locating both in sentiment rather than in logic. Consequently, both are subject to the particularities of individual experience and the molding through collective identity. Hume further argues that the distinction between personal prejudice and aesthetic judgment can be approximated by the difference between an individual responding to his own experience and to another's situation.
- 2 Michael Gamer, especially in chapter 2 of *Romanticism and the Gothic*, explores the encounter of the periodicals with the gothic. Discussing Walter Scott's 1810 review of Charles Maturin's *The Fatal Revenge*, Gamer suggests that "Scott's Dantesque descent to that lowest circle of literary hell – gothic fiction – shows him participating unproblematically within the conventions of periodical reviewing" (34).
- 3 For more on issues of gender and the periodical press, see Wheatley's *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture*, especially the Introduction and chapters by Cracium, Bradley, Schoenfield, and Niles. The analysis of Scott's review is drawn partly from Schoenfield's chapter.
- 4 For more on Ashe and the *Satirist*, see Samuelian, *Royal Romances* (96–114).

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## Visual Culture

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Londoners in search of diversion in 1816 might well have found themselves at an exhibition that was attracting record-breaking crowds: Napoleon's carriage, two of his horses, his coachman, his folding camp bed, and assorted items from his traveling kit were all on display at William Bullock's London Museum (popularly known as the "Egyptian Hall"). Coming on the heels of the Battle of Waterloo, it is not surprising that Napoleon-related shows could draw over 10,000 people a day. As prints by George Cruikshank and Thomas Rowlandson show, enthusiastic and clearly unruly viewers swarmed the exhibition space, and indeed the exhibits, for a brush with the possessions of the once-great man (see Figure 5.1). As these prints also reveal, however, it was not the sights on show but the "show" of viewers flocking to the sights that was worthy of visual record. In Rowlandson's print, the crowds completely obscure any sight of the objects on display. Indeed, such prints form a distinct genre in the Romantic period, one that ranges from the summer exhibitions of the Royal Academy, to crowds gathered outside print-shop windows, ogling and chewing over the latest productions. It is hardly any wonder, given this interest in acts of viewing, that Jane Austen, after visiting Bullock's Museum, could declare that her "preference for Men & Women, [which] always inclines me to attend more to the company than the sight," had provided her with "some amusement" (179).

Despite their clear focus on the exhibition as a social space, popular graphic representations of what might be termed "scenes of seeing" help us to register the importance of visual culture in the period, and to articulate the key questions this chapter will address. The first is one of place: where do we *locate* "visual culture"? Rowlandson's depictions of the swarming crowds at Bullock's Museum, at the Royal Academy annual exhibitions, and at the print-shop window, indicate the sheer variety of places where public encounters of a visual kind might take place, and also



**Figure 5.1** *Exhibition at Bullock's Museum of Bonaparte's Carriage Taken at Waterloo*, published by Rudolph Ackermann, 1816 (aquatint), by Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827). © City of Westminster Archive Centre, London, UK/The Bridgeman Art Library.

their class basis – from socially exclusive, to open to all. By using a popular medium – the print – to depict the comparatively highbrow setting of the fine-art gallery (in the case of the Royal Academy summer exhibitions), they also indicate the range of material that could be considered under the rubric of Romantic “visual culture,” and the importance of including elements of popular culture and everyday experience in any attempt to account for it. While “visual culture” is not an unproblematic descriptor, it is sufficiently loose to include many diverse aspects of visual experience in the period: painting, print culture, book illustration, visual media and technology, galleries, exhibitions, and popular spectacles. Legitimately, one could extend the domain of visual encounter to the open air, in the form of picturesque tourism, and the Grand Tour with its emphasis on viewing and collecting objects abroad, though this is beyond the scope of this chapter. What is very much of concern, however, is the place of the visual in Romantic literary texts, which often respond directly to visual encounters and artifacts – but which also engage the visual in figurative and metaphoric terms. Many literary works, particularly poems, are preoccupied by different aspects of visibility, not least by a well-documented anxiety about the costs of indulging the eye at the expense of other faculties, particularly the image-making faculty, or the imagination. I will sketch some of the broader lines of this debate later in the chapter, but intend to focus first on a variety of exhibitions and popular visual spectacles, which help us to situate those debates in a broader cultural context.

It should be stated at the outset, however, that the thriving visual culture of the Romantic period was not by any means a new development, for as Peter de Bolla has shown in his book on the visual in the eighteenth century, *The Education of the Eye*,

it was in the middle years of the eighteenth century that “the culture of visuality for the first time became fully visible” (70). Mid-eighteenth-century Britain was “obsessed,” he argues, with “visibility, spectacle, display,” and this obsession is apparent in the extraordinary array of diversions available to the eighteenth-century spectator: “public hangings and other spectacles of punishment, theatrical performances (in which the distinction between audience and players was rarely maintained), sale room exhibitions, masquerades, ridotti, fireworks, pleasure garden walks, balls, dances, fêtes champêtres, scientific demonstrations, and art exhibitions” (70–71). De Bolla isolates the 1760s as a decade when a rash of public exhibitions of contemporary paintings, with their unprecedented crowds and queues, established a clear vogue for self-display and “observed participation” in visual culture (223). From portraiture to the visual entertainments of Vauxhall Gardens, looking became a more conscious and culturally inflected act, with a range of new practices and forms of representation: looking itself becomes visible.

De Bolla also charts an evolving tension between what he calls the elite “regime of the picture” and the more populist “regime of the eye”: the first is a mode of regarding artworks structured by educated norms preestablished by practices of looking associated with high cultural artifacts, while the second is related to the experience of viewing itself and is “developed within a grammar of the phenomenology of seeing” (9). Associated with the “regime of the eye” is a form of looking that is “sentimental”: it “presents the viewer to the object and to vision, allows the viewer both to recognize itself in the place of the seen and to identify with the process of seeing” (11). More simply, this is a mode of looking that is grounded in the experience and the body of the subject who sees – it does not merely confirm what the viewer already knows, but opens the viewer to new feelings and ideas arising from different associative triggers. Tellingly, de Bolla refers to this sentimental look as a “technique of the subject,” insofar as it foregrounds the presence of the viewer in the visual sphere as an important point of reference. This observation about paradigms for viewing in the eighteenth century suggestively backdates the argument made by Jonathan Crary about the nineteenth. For Crary, the early nineteenth century witnessed a decisive shift between a model of vision based on the geometrical optical model of the camera obscura, and a subjective model of vision located more precisely in the body of the observer – a shift toward the observation of vision as itself an object of knowledge and, more specifically, a moment “when the visible escapes from the timeless order of the camera obscura and becomes lodged in another apparatus, within the unstable physiology and temporality of the human body” (Crary 70). These arguments are both useful for observing the increasing subjectification of vision during these years, and though the precise dating of these shifts is clearly contentious – we should perhaps speak of a continuum of experience rather than a strict historical opposition – it is clear that the years of the Romantic period are particularly fertile for such discussions.

As we move into the Romantic period, however, there is a palpable antagonism between elite and popular culture around the issue of visual display. Gillen D’Arcy Wood, in his study of Romantic visual culture, *The Shock of the Real*, points to a

widening gulf between Romantic theories of artistic production that emphasized original genius and an idealized view of the imagination, and an emerging visual culture industry that capitalized (literally) on mass reproduction, simulation, and spectacle. Wood argues that prominent features of Romantic aesthetic ideology may be seen as a reaction not only to the Enlightenment rationalism of the eighteenth century, but also to the coming into being of the visual culture of modernity, with the profound and at times perplexing paradigm shifts that it produced. It was, he argues, the growing bourgeois taste for visual novelty, and spectacles of the “real,” that provoked unease in more elite cultural circles, which we see in reaction to the mimetic representationalism of displays such as “Belzoni’s Tomb,” mounted at Bullock’s London Museum in 1821. This popular exhibition attempted to replicate the experience of visiting the tombs recently excavated in the Valley of the Kings, by situating the statues, sarcophagi, and other objects on display, in a theatricalized recreation of the scene. It offered a sensational simulacrum of the real, rather than the disinterested display of artifacts, divorced from historical context, that one might encounter at the nearby British Museum (Wood, *Shock 2*). Indeed, the viewing public was fascinated by all manner of mimic entertainments (such as waxworks), which some commentators noted with dismay. Coleridge, for example, dismissed “simulations of nature,” the deceptions of a copy or “Fac Simile,” as “loathsome” and “disgusting” (3). Technologically contrived illusionism, such as that of the panorama, the diorama, and a wide array of popular spectacles, also revealed a complex fascination with reality effects and simulated experience.

### Wordsworth and the Panorama

In Book 7 of *The Prelude* (1805/1850), Wordsworth offers an account of his time in London that is often cited not just as an excellent record of a poet’s response to the spectacles of the great metropolis, which are experienced and listed in all their dizzying manifestations, but as an indicative catalogue of those spectacles themselves. Along with London’s landmark sights, such as St. Paul’s, Wordsworth enumerates a number of outdoor spectacles that both attract and repel: the boisterous cosmopolitan crowds, the parades of the fashionable, traveling musicians, hawkers, “raree shows,” and popular theatrical entertainments at Sadler’s Wells which, in addition to “giants and dwarfs, / Clowns, conjurors, posture-masters, harlequins” (1805: 7.294–295), included the intriguing performance of Jack-the-Giant Killer, and his “invisibility” act. On Bartholomew Fair, to which Charles Lamb took him in 1802, Wordsworth likewise lists the diverse elements of that “parliament of monsters” – from acrobats and ventriloquists to waxworks, clockworks, albinos, the learned pig and other “freaks of Nature” (1805: 7.649–695). Nearly fifty lines are needed to convey the experience of the anarchic spectacle, “a hell for eyes and ears,” which thoroughly stupefies “the whole creative powers of man” (1805: 7.659–669, 655). Wordsworth clearly also visited shows “within doors” – displays of “birds and beasts/Of every nature, and strange plants convened / From every clime”



(1850: 7.230–232) – and finally, “mimic” sights such as painted panoramas, “that ape/The absolute presence of reality, / Expressing as in a mirror sea and land” (1805: 7.248–250).

The panorama, which Wordsworth directly references in these last lines, was the invention of Robert Barker, an Irish painter, who referred to it in his 1787 patent as “Nature à Coup d’Oeil”: nature at a glance, or view at a glance.<sup>1</sup> As the name suggests, this consisted of a 360-degree painting that, in a purpose-built circular building, aimed to offer an “all embracing view” of its subject and thereby simulate the experience of being on the very spot. Barker’s patent, which established the basic template for panoramas that would be followed throughout the nineteenth century, called for the rotunda to be lit from the top, with a central viewing area normally entered from below. The most popular subjects were imposing landscapes, such as the Alps, or cities of particular cultural or historic note, often associated with the Grand Tour. Panoramic representations of faraway places were sometimes promoted, half-seriously, as a substitute for the trouble and expense of travel abroad, but they were also appealing because those places were exotic, unfamiliar, and out of reach of most of the audience (such as Cairo, Constantinople, Jerusalem) – or sometimes, in the case of some Italian sites such as Rome, Pompeii, and the Bay of Naples, because viewers *had* visited these places and could revive their travels in memory, while reflecting on the accuracy of the representation. Important contemporary events – particularly battles and naval scenes – were hugely popular subjects for the panorama. In this vein, the very first panorama Barker displayed at his rotunda in Leicester Square was a *View of the Fleet at Spithead*, which cleverly simulated the sense of being at sea by disguising the viewing platform as the afterdeck of a frigate.

The relocation of the panorama spectator from an objective viewpoint to the very center of the represented scene reflects the shifting paradigms for looking identified by de Bolla, for the viewer is here made conscious of the process of seeing, since it is inevitably foregrounded by the nature of the illusion created. One of the more intriguing aspects of the panorama was that it lacked a visible frame. The viewing platforms were constructed in such a way as to conceal any visual borders or frames, not only around the circular interior walls where the precise location of the painted surface was obscured by the illusion of depth-of-field, but also at the top and bottom of the view. A painted or constructed foreground extended out from below the viewing area, and it would sometimes include three-dimensional objects; above, the represented sky simply disappeared behind the upper canopy or roof. At the top of the rotunda, a velum, or umbrella-like roof, concealed a large skylight that lit the painting with diffuse natural light, which appeared to emanate naturally from the view.

An interesting development and example of panorama technology can be found in Barker’s biggest competition, Hornor’s “Colosseum” in Regent’s Park, created in 1829 (see Figure 5.2). The building displayed a detailed panorama of the city of London and was designed by Thomas Hornor, a draughtsman and surveyor. His viewpoint was the very top of the dome of St. Paul’s cathedral, which had undergone



**Figure 5.2** *The Colosseum, the Panorama of London seen from a Painter's Platform*, published 1829 (color litho) by English School (nineteenth century). Guildhall Library, City of London/ The Bridgeman Art Library.

restoration in 1823. During this time, Hornor spent many months high up on the scaffolding, producing some 2,000 sketches, telescope in hand for detailed accuracy. In the view of the interior, with the painting nearly complete, we see the upper part of the pavilion from a painter's platform suspended from the roof ridge. This perspectival snapshot offers a cross-sectional view of one quadrant of the rotunda, while drawing the viewer into the representation of London, as it spreads away to the west along the Thames. At the same time it shows how the various contrivances that

make the illusion possible are deployed. In the center of the building, another technological innovation: the steam-lift, accompanying the winding stairs, to whisk visitors to their viewing station atop the cathedral.

The viewer of the 1829 lithograph, who sees what the prospective visitors to the Colosseum will not, enjoys a stable viewpoint that only hints at the experience of wonder that the panorama aimed to generate. The strength of the illusion depended not just on absolute fidelity to documentary detail, but also on additional steps the creators took to dissociate viewers from external reference points, and to induce disorientation to a degree that would heighten their receptivity. For example, visitors would often enter through winding stairways or dark passageways, which, by dilating the pupils, would also augment the first impression upon entering the lit viewing area. Furthermore, viewers experienced visual disturbance because of the difference between the represented distance of the painted scene and the relative proximity to the viewer of the painted wall. Finally, the sheer profusion of visual detail, which surrounded the viewer completely, could also be disorienting – though this sublime surfeit, and the inherently excessive nature of the illusion, was the very thing that made the panorama so sensational. Hence Wordsworth’s depiction of the panorama as engaging in a form of aesthetic imitation “fondly made in plain / Confession of man’s weakness and his loves” (1805: 7.254–255). Man’s pleasure in mimetic visual displays, his appetite for sensation, is exploited by the panorama painter and his “greedy pencil,” which takes in “A whole horizon on all sides,” and plants us

upon some lofty pinnacle  
Or in a ship on waters, with a world  
Of life and lifelike mockery to east,  
To west, beneath, behind us, and before. (1805: 7.261–264)

Wordsworth’s lines capture the mixture of entrancement and deception that made the panorama so appealing, and fed the debate about its legitimacy as an art form. It was, certainly, an ephemeral art: the canvases were rapidly produced by teams of painters who, though largely anonymous, were also highly skilled technicians, adept at perspective and proportion. Since the panorama was contrived for commercial exploitation, it necessitated an array of technological interventions, and was thus seen to depend on means and deceptions that were “alien” to the art of painting.

Panorama producers, meanwhile, packaged their work as highly innovative: when Barker opened his first panorama in Edinburgh, he portrayed himself as more than the inventor of a clever visual diversion. He billed his picture as an “IMPROVEMENT ON PAINTING, Which relieves that sublime Art from a Restraint it has ever laboured under” (Wilcox 21). Its radical use of perspective and optics did make it an important contribution to the tradition of illusionist perspective painting, and it had a clear impact on mainstream art, most evident in the larger scale of some paintings, such as John Martin’s vast canvases with their apocalyptic subjects, and in the increased attention to subtle effects of light and atmosphere – indeed, to “freshness” of vision (Wilcox 29). The panorama stood, then, at an interesting

crossing of high art and popular culture. It also gained ground with a growing middle-class audience not only for its entertainment value, but also for its educational and documentary possibilities. The panorama made it possible to *see* things that were otherwise inaccessible, and was a source of visual information for a general public that was increasingly keen to acquire it. The “greedy pencil” of the panorama painter was at least matched by the appetite of the public for visual experience – but more than novelty was at stake here, for even the most crowd-pleasing aspects of the panorama phenomenon were inextricably linked to new ways of conceptualizing and managing the field of the visible.

### **Spectacular Developments: The Diorama and the Phantasmagoria**

Although I have used the panorama as a key example of an innovative visual form in the Romantic period, one positioned intriguingly between artistic enterprise and popular spectacle, it was far from the only show drawing large numbers of fascinated viewers. Indeed, it had some obvious limitations that other visual media tried to overcome: its lack of movement and sound militated against the success of its illusion creation. In response, visual spectacles such as dioramas and phantasmagorias added movement and atmospheric change, and both played effectively to a strong desire to represent the invisible, indeed, to make things *appear*. The diorama, for example, offered a visual experience that involved an unexpected alteration in the scenery before the viewer, such as from day to night. Viewers, seated in a dark theater, would behold a large painted scene (roughly forty by seventy feet in size) alter slowly before their eyes. For example, in “The Castle and Town of Heidelberg” there was a change of season, ice and snow melting and giving way to a full summer landscape. In “Ruins in a Fog,” the mist gradually dissipated to reveal clearly the mountains and surrounding scenery. This apparently miraculous transformation was produced in a completely scientific manner: the scenes were painted on translucent fabric in such a way that daylight from high windows and skylights invisible to the audience, intercepted and altered by moveable blinds that were colored or transparent, could create the naturalistic illusion of three-dimensional space. The manipulation of these blinds was all that was necessary to effect startling changes in the colors and appearance of the scenery, thus turning a static image into a site of unexpected change, often of a temporal nature.

A central figure in the development of the diorama was J. L. M. Daguerre, who, although he is better known for the invention of the Daguerreotype, also had a distinguished career as a stage designer and panorama painter. Daguerre’s Diorama in Paris, for which he designed not only the concept but also his own building, opened in 1822, and the Diorama in Regent’s Park in 1823. Daguerre and his partner, Charles Bouton, exhibited a fresh set of pictures each year, which would open in London after a successful run in Paris. The range of subjects depicted was relatively narrow, generally of either landscapes or architectural interiors, with most shows

displaying one of each. Unlike the panorama, which often exhibited scenes of topical interest, the diorama devoted itself more or less exclusively to what Richard Altick has dismissed as “the public taste for romantic topography, the stuff of picturesque art and of sentimental antiquarianism” (*Shows* 166). However, the dynamic dimension of the diorama also suggests an appeal to other lingering eighteenth-century aesthetic preoccupations – to the aesthetics of the sublime, and to the obscure horror assigned to Gothic subjects and scenes.

The appeal of the diorama drew from the sheer power of its illusion-making capabilities, which contemporary commentators extolled at great length. Reviewing Daguerre and Bouton’s “relocation” of Rheims cathedral and Mont St. Gothard to their Regent’s Park Diorama, *The Times* praised the “magic pencil” of its creators, “who, if they have not given us the realities of these magnificent objects, have at least given us imitations of them so wonderfully minute and vivid, as to appear more like the illusions of enchantment than the mere creations of art” (April 22, 1830). The diorama retained an impressive power to create and control the field of the visible, and to produce illusions so convincingly “real” that they appeared to be the result of magic rather than the “mere” work of art. Moreover, the illusion it produced was both created and removed, and that creation and removal were explicit features of the exhibition – were indeed dramatized by the exhibition. The diorama thus played on its uncanny relationship to time, insofar as past, present, and future were not only controlled and replicated, but also repeated.

Daguerre’s diorama was only one of an extraordinary number of “oramic” displays to capture the popular imagination throughout the nineteenth century. The cosmorama, the pleorama, the myriorama (to name only three), all in various ways sought to make the visible spectacular.<sup>2</sup> Its nearest relative and rival, in scope and popularity, was the panorama, although technologically, with its use of projected light and transparencies, the diorama descended more directly from the magic lantern, the phantasmagoria, and from Philippe de Loutherbourg’s “Eidophusikon” – which is apposite, given de Loutherbourg’s own background in the theater, and interest in the dramatic possibilities of light. De Loutherbourg unveiled the Eidophusikon at his own house in Leicester Square in the 1780s. It displayed painted scenes in the setting of a small theater, scenes such as “Satan Arraying his Troops on the Banks of a Fiery Lake,” from *Paradise Lost*. These pictures were brought to life by adding movement, through dramatic changes of light projected by gas lamps and filtered through colored glass, and by adding sound, in the form of vocal and instrumental music, or indeed thunder and preternatural groans, as the scene required.<sup>3</sup>

Though the Eidophusikon was a distinguished ancestor of the diorama, the possibilities of using *projected* images to create similarly uncanny reality effects were taken up by the phantasmagoria shows first devised in Paris and London in the 1790s. The phantasmagoria was effectively a modification of the magic lantern shows that had been popular throughout the eighteenth century. Magic lanterns were an early portable form of slide projector, which used an arrangement of a lamp and lenses to project images painted on glass slides. The phantasmagoria incorporated two

important changes: first, the image was projected from *behind* a screen, rather than in front, which made the operator invisible to the audience on the other side, thus concealing the mechanism of illusion creation. Second, Paul de Philipsthal, who invented the spectacle, devised a set of rails upon which the projector could be made to move rapidly. Along with adjustable lenses, it was possible to create the appearance of movement (and unnerving changes in size) in the projected image; the illusion of a figure's sudden advance or retreat enhanced the shows' purchase on the spectral and the supernatural. The slides for use in the phantasmagoria lantern tended, to this end, to depict frightening subjects: ghosts, skeletons, skulls, witches, devils, grave-diggers. The bleeding nun, from Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), was a popular apparition, as were certain mythological themes, and more particularly portraits of infamous contemporaries – protagonists of the French Revolution such as Robespierre, Danton, and Marat. Some slides included animated elements, such as skulls with wings that could move in an uncanny manner; this was the case with the head of Medusa, whose eyes and serpent hair could be made to move, as well as to loom out frighteningly toward the audience.

The whole apparatus of the phantasmagoria – from eerie sound effects created with the glass harmonica, to images projected on clouds of smoke, to the total darkness surrounding the viewer (before the diorama, this was the first public entertainment to take place in the dark) – was contrived to induce fear and uncertainty in its spectators. The subjects of the slides for ghost shows were set in opaque black, with the result that the slide conjured up a ghost, a figure in complete darkness betraying no visible evidence that it was in fact an image on a screen. Because the image was made to appear to float in the air, by being projected upon a semi-transparent screen and by appearing to move, the audience was unable to locate the image in space, and thus to “see” the illusion. When Philipsthal first presented his shows in revolutionary Paris in the early 1790s, he presented himself as a kind of sorcerer who could raise the spirits of the dead. These “ghost shows” were further developed in the hands of Etienne-Gaspard Robertson, who mounted his spectacles at a defunct Capuchin convent from 1799. A more frightening atmosphere was created by projecting three-dimensional, mechanically operated figures and tableaux, as well as by introducing electric shocks, ventriloquism, life-size masked figures, and the use of incense and smoke. Philipsthal meanwhile founded a phantasmagoria at the Lyceum in London in 1801, which was such a success that the Lyceum was informally renamed the “Phantoscopic Theatre.”

At Daguerre's Diorama and at the phantasmagoria shows, the concerted display of *illusion* raised the stakes of artistic propriety. At the diorama particularly, as a hybrid of painting and theater, and a clever mixture of nature and art, sensationalism undercut its aesthetic integrity and fed the often fierce debate about the status of visual entertainment in relation to the serious visual arts. For the impresarios of the phantasmagoria and their audiences, the issue was somewhat different: illusionists such as Philipsthal and Robertson were careful to distance themselves from the charlatanism of magic or necromancy, and claimed rather to be rationalists and scientists. Their spectral displays, which appeared to capitalize shamelessly on

the widely held belief in the resurrection and apparition of the dead, were also meant to expose that very belief by holding it up to view. Instead of playing on popular superstition, the spectacle was in fact positioned as instructive, a display of experiment and scientific theory. In spite of these differences, both the diorama and the phantasmagoria are excellent examples of popular visual media in which a preoccupation with seeing is simultaneously material and thematic; the act of seeing receives special emphasis by being *itself* represented, dramatized, and indeed problematized.

One final point to be made about these displays relates to their names. The three I have discussed at length – the panorama, the diorama, and the phantasmagoria – all made use of Greek-derived neologisms that have since been absorbed into common usage, and have subsequently acquired a broader range of meanings, while other inventively named “-oramas” of the period have quietly slipped from view. The case of the “phantasmagoria” is indicative. While its first dictionary definition points us to the extraordinary optical spectacle just discussed, its second, taken here from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is more familiar: “a shifting series or succession of phantasms or imaginary figures, as seen in a dream or fevered condition, as called up by the imagination, or as created by literary description.” By extension, and less precisely, a phantasmagoria is also “a shifting and changing external scene consisting of many elements.” As Terry Castle has argued, this shift from something external and public to something “wholly internal or subjective: the phantasmic imagery of the mind” reflects an equally important shift in post-Enlightenment conceptions of the imagination and of mental activity, by which “ghosts” were absorbed into the “world of thought” in a manner largely naturalized and relatively unexamined (141–143). This internalization, exploited to great effect by a wide range of visual technologies, further underscores the extent to which Romantic culture was preoccupied by the epistemological aspects of vision, and the extent to which seeing – as much as “imagining” – must be understood as historically constructed.

### Exhibitions, Museums, and Galleries

While people flocked to various forms of spectacle in order to immerse themselves in remarkable feats of simulated reality, or to experience the uncertainties endemic to embodied vision, museums and galleries also found themselves situated at different points on the spectrum between crude commercial interest and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge – or art. Museums and art galleries figure very prominently in the Romantic period, situated as it is between the establishment of two major national institutions based in London: the British Museum in 1753, and the National Gallery in 1824. The British Museum, when it was founded in the 1750s, was the first museum open to the public, and its act of incorporation stated that it was “intended ‘not only for the inspection and entertainment of the learned and the curious, but for the general use and benefit of the public’” (Altick, *Shows* 26).

This lofty principle was rather imperfectly translated into practice, and the museum was in fact difficult to access for the general public. One visitor, William Hutton of Birmingham, recounted with outrage how he was unceremoniously rushed past “ten thousand rarities’ in thirty minutes flat,” after having paid a scalper two shillings for his ticket (Matheson, “Viewing” 191). The museum privileged its perceived obligations to men of letters and artists, and by 1808 a parliamentary act stated that “gratifying the curiosity of the multitudes, who incessantly resort to it in quest of amusement” [was] “a popular though far less useful application of the Institution” (Matheson, “Viewing” 192).

After his thoroughly disappointing visit to the British Museum, William Hutton found himself much more agreeably entertained at Don Saltero’s coffee-house in Chelsea, which contained an extensive collection of curiosities that he could peruse quietly, and also learn something about, by inspecting the accompanying catalogue. There were, however, other private collectors who opened public museums, and among the largest of these was the remarkable “Holophusikon” of Sir Ashton Lever. Lever was a passionate collector who spent over a million pounds amassing his collection, which he opened first at his home near Manchester but later moved to more spacious accommodation in London’s Leicester Square. All who could afford the half-guinea entry fee were free to wander at leisure through one of the major natural history collections of the period: by the early 1780s the collection was said to contain roughly 28,000 items, which also included a wide range of British and foreign antiquities, and ethnographic materials, primarily from Cook’s Pacific expeditions. Lever’s displays aimed for striking visual arrangements, to provoke surprise and wonder in the viewer, rather than to convey a strictly ordered system, which was at least in keeping with his stated aim to make the exhibition of natural history the most wonderful “sight” in the world. This emphasis on spectacle was shared to some extent by other innovative museums of the Romantic period, such as William Bullock’s, but opened it to the charge that it was more focused on sensation than on science, and thus too reminiscent of the old cabinets of curiosities in its strategies of collection and display.

Museum exhibitions were thus caught by the competing demands of disinterested public education, commercial necessity, and popular entertainment. To some extent this also affected the exhibition of art in the period, where public interest tended to exceed access. The annual spring exhibitions of the Royal Academy, which was founded in 1768 with Joshua Reynolds as its first president, were an important showcase for the best new art (and a good place to be seen, as Rowlandson’s prints show), but also a means of organizing and controlling the production and promotion of art. Other public and private galleries were established during this time – such as the Dulwich Gallery, in a building designed by Sir John Soane, in 1811 – yet the opportunities for viewing in this period, with few public venues, remained limited. Admission prices also tended to preclude the general public. A number of private galleries and collections would open their doors to properly vetted visitors, on certain days, but many – including William Hazlitt – complained of unfair rejections, and of large tips paid to servants acting as tour guides. The situation was marginally



improved by the creation of the British Institution in 1805, which aimed to further the Royal Academy's promotion of contemporary British artists, and also organized summer exhibitions of old master artworks, with paintings loaned by private collections. Ultimately, a number of important artworks did find their way into the British Museum, which also housed paintings, engravings, and an increasing quantity of antique sculpture. Charles Townley's collection of Greek and Roman marbles, for example, went into the museum at his death in 1805. More famously, the Elgin Marbles were permanently installed in the British Museum in 1816.

A long-mooted plan to establish a National Gallery of art finally came to fruition in 1824, with the purchase by the government of the wealthy banker John Julius Angerstein's collection of some forty-three paintings, including works by Claude, Titian, Rubens, and Rembrandt. Meanwhile, the long-lasting debate over the nature and purpose of art exhibitions, and their proper audience, had taken many forms: it had spurred the creation of a number of artists' societies, and it had encouraged a number of ambitious commercial ventures, such as the literary galleries (which I shall turn to below). It probably contributed in no small measure to the continued health of the print market, since those without access to original artwork still experienced the world largely through the visual medium of the mass-produced print – extending from engraved reproductions of paintings, through the place of both in illustrated books, to handbills, broadsides, and other forms of ephemeral print media. And then, of course, there were the ever-changing exhibitions mounted in print-shop windows, available for free to all passersby.

### **Illustration and Ekphrasis**

Improved techniques in print production made possible a substantial expansion in the market for illustrated reading material, which had the effect of bringing visual culture into direct relationship to literary texts. While wealthier readers could purchase lavishly illustrated books on any number of subjects – art, architecture, travel and tourism, nature and natural history – such as those produced by Rudolph Ackermann at his Repository of the Arts, the less well-to-do had to content themselves with new-format pocket books, often reprints, of British poets and novelists, along with increasing numbers of illustrated periodicals and, by the 1820s, the popular literary annuals. This explosion in visual matter felt, to some writers, like outright competition, for as Wordsworth would lament in his sonnet, "Illustrated Books and Newspapers," the public seemed all too eager to forsake the intellectual rewards of reading for the infantile pleasures of the pictured page. In time, though, there were major illustrated editions of Romantic poets and novelists – with Byron reputed to be the most frequently illustrated Romantic poet in his lifetime. Certainly the evocative and exotic narratives and scenes of his poems, particularly the Oriental tales, made them attractive to illustrators and readers alike, and many paintings on Byronic subjects were beginning to appear at the Royal Academy exhibitions as early as 1814.

Book illustration played thus an important role in the expanding domain of the mass-produced image, in popular as in “high” culture – but more particularly, literary illustration sustained a close and often reciprocal relationship to painting as well as to the print and book markets. In 1815, Wordsworth used two of George Beaumont’s paintings as illustrations, one for *The White Doe of Rylstone* and another in the edition of his *Poems* also published that year. Both paintings were exhibited at the Royal Academy and, in the case of *The White Doe*, the engraving used in the publication included below it a selection of relevant verses from the poem. Many plates used to illustrate books were produced in this way, which made them standalone entities, verbal–visual composites that could be detached and marketed separately as prints. This process also worked the other way around, in that extracts or quotations from poems often accompanied paintings, and were inserted into the exhibition catalogues. When the picture came to be reproduced as an engraving, the relevant lines were generally inscribed at the bottom of the print. The inclusion of poetic extracts in the catalogues could qualify as well as suggest a range of possible meanings, making it possible for viewers to engage in an activity of imaginative association as they toured the galleries. Not unrelated to this practice was the composition of “iconic” poems, inspired by pictures currently at the exhibitions, such as those of Letitia Elizabeth Landon (L.E.L.) – or indeed Wordsworth himself (Altick, *Paintings* 194).

This suggestive interplay between visual and literary culture, though not invariably harmonious, took many other forms. The close relationship between visual images and the printed word is evident in the long tradition of literary painting, where subjects are drawn directly from books. Altick points out that such pictures could be seen as “extensions of the books themselves,” or “detached forms of book illustration,” that give rise to “a new kind of imaginative activity in which the separate experiences of reading and beholding coalesced” (*Paintings* 1). Indeed, readers in the Romantic period, as Henry Fuseli aptly put it, were to become spectators, which was quite literally the case in the literary galleries of the late eighteenth century, such as John Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery. This was one of many purpose-built exhibition spaces, and it was to offer a permanent display of specially commissioned illustrations for a deluxe edition of Shakespeare’s plays. The gallery opened in Pall Mall in 1789 with thirty-four oil paintings completed, and the published editions soon followed. Thomas Macklin’s “Poet’s Gallery” was another attempt to commission and engrave artworks drawn directly from literary subjects, and to thereby showcase poets of Great Britain. Henry Fuseli’s own “Gallery of the Miltonic Sublime,” which opened in 1799, displayed forty-seven pictures from Milton, all painted by Fuseli himself. Although none of these projects was commercially successful, the literary galleries were a fascinating testing ground for the popular eighteenth-century faith in *ut pictura poesis* (as a painting, so also a poem), which held that the two forms were inherently comparable, and that their key differences related to medium rather than message. This premise was certainly qualified in the later part of the eighteenth century, and William Blake’s work was especially alive to the myriad ways poems and pictures operate as independent representational modes. Indeed, one reason why the

literary galleries were not successful may be traced back to the essential incommensurability of poetry and painting (see Altick, *Paintings* 46).

Literature and visual cultural forms clearly interrelate in complex ways during the Romantic period, and not only when commercial considerations are privileged. The prominent place of ekphrastic poems in the Romantic canon, poems that offer verbal representations of visual ones, are good examples of the attractiveness of visual objects as poetic subjects. Though a large subject in itself, it merits noting as one central way in which writers of the Romantic period register their interest in artworks in museums and galleries, as well as with aspects of the visual in more theoretical terms. Best known examples of it include such poems as Wordsworth's "Elegaic Stanzas" (1807) on Beaumont's painting of Peele Castle, Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1820), Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias" (1818) and his lines "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery" (wr. 1819), and Byron's passages on sculpture in the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1818); furthermore, in addition to Keats, Leigh Hunt and Felicia Hemans were prolific writers of ekphrastic verse.

Ekphrastic poems, broadly speaking, aim to demonstrate the superior power of poetry to create an image in the mind (while being clearly indebted to the visual object that makes that demonstration possible), and also to outlive the material object. Although experiments with ekphrasis offered an occasion for Romantic poets to work through their fascination with visual representation, or, as in Wordsworth's "Elegaic Stanzas," with questions of memory and loss – or, in Keats's famous ode, of the permanence and value of art – such poems tend to reassert the primacy of poetry for its capacity to produce more nuanced representations. Coleridge argued in an 1808 lecture that great poets have the "power of so carrying on the Eye of the Reader as to make him almost lose the consciousness of words – to make him *see* everything – & this without exciting any painful or laborious attention, without any *anatomy* of description" (1: 82). Clearly the practice of ekphrasis can be understood as a means for poetry to assert the power of the imagination against the more readily appropriated forms of visual experience available to the reading public, not least those of the illustrated book.

The late eighteenth century witnessed a rapid and diverse expansion of the visual field, most clearly perhaps in the explosion of visual devices and entertainments that duplicated or fabricated encounters with the visual world – whether to offer vicarious experience or, as Bernard Comment suggests about the panorama, to satisfy a double dream – of totality and of possession (19). Moreover, this thriving popular culture, with its phantasmagorias, panoramas, and dioramas, was driven not simply by the economic potential of newly profitable modes of mass entertainment, but also by a lively interest in the aesthetic and conceptual dimensions of looking. In many of the contexts examined here, both visual and textual, the act of seeing receives special emphasis by being *itself* represented or dramatized. An increased appetite for visual encounter is also evident in the expanding market for art exhibitions, prints, and illustrated books, and in museums, where spectacular display often competed with the rational ordering of knowledge, and with it, the kinds of historical encounter it

could represent. Romantic writers were equally alive to the challenges posed by developments, both technological and aesthetic, in the world of looking, and what is often thought to be the Romantic *resistance* to the visible can be seen to reveal a generative fascination with the visual, and indeed with “visual culture” at large.

See SCIENCE; SUBLIME.

### Notes

- 1 The patent is reproduced, in excerpts, in an exhibition catalogue for the centennial of the Mesdag Panorama (see Zoetmulder). The catalogue contains a concise account of the history and techniques of the panorama. Other excellent studies of the panorama include Hyde, Comment, and Oettermann. Gillen D’Arcy Wood and William Galperin include chapters on the panorama.
- 2 The cosmorama consisted of rather small landscape scenes displayed conventionally in a gallery but viewed in relief, through an arrangement of magnifying mirrors. The pleorama was a form of moving panorama shown in Breslau in 1831, in which viewers sat in a boat that rocked as though tossed by waves, while moving canvases on each side recreated the changing views of the Bay of Naples, which was thus traversed in the space of an hour (Comment 63). The myriorama, or “many thousand views” was, by contrast, a more personal visual device, consisting of numerous cards depicting fragments or segments of landscapes that could be arranged in infinitely different combinations.
- 3 Behind the proscenium, de Louthembourg had fixed Argand oil lamps. “By manipulating slips of coloured glass that he had mounted in front of the lamps, lights of various hues were thrown onto the picture, changing the scene from sulphurous blue, to red, to a pale, vivid light, and so on” (Hyde 116).

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## Part 2

# Theories of Literature





## 6

# Author

*Elizabeth A. Fay*

What is the author, and when can one be said to be one? The “author” is a “what,” not a “who”: this is important for understanding the role and function of authorship, the act of authorization, the authority that comes with the written word, and even the difference between authoring and speaking. The author is the identity we as readers attach to a name and to a text. The historical person writing that text cannot be conflated with the textually implicated author, a formation that will often align itself with the narrative voice whether in the first person or third person. The narrative persona, however, is particular to a particular text, and the narrator of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is not the narrator of *Persuasion* (1817), no matter how much we talk about Austen the writer as a continuous identity. Writers change their ideas over time, and cannot be held to single formulations any more than any reader can be the same exact interlocutor for different texts or for the same time on different days or in different years.

Such distinctions and the questions they raise have been pondered by ancient Greek and Romantic-period philosophers and intellectuals, and continue to interest us and elude definitive answers today. Romantic-period artists were apt to mystify the concept of poetic authority, but to be definite in the distinction between poet, poetaster, playwright, author, and writer. The “poet” is inspired and prophetic, as William Blake, William Wordsworth, and S. T. Coleridge have all pronounced. “Authors” are the creators of novels and short fiction, a less distinguished endeavor with which many, including Dorothy Wordsworth, would not want to be associated: “I should detest the idea of setting myself up as an author,” she commented in a letter (454). “Writer” covers the category of prose in general. But a poet is distinguished from the versifier, poetess, poetaster, and other dabblers in the art; in Romantic terms, the poet is a genius.

Although here I will refer to any literary artist as both an “author” and “writer,” this categorical distinction during the Romantic period is intriguing, since the distinction between genres was not so clear-cut in the period. The human role seemed to be classificatory, but the artistic product was more a matter of apprehension than definition. The human role, at least for the Romantics and their contemporaries, was defined by the production and consumption of kinds of verbal artifacts: the literary marketplace created a field of distinction between art, popular commodity, ephemera, and hack writing, but not between what constitutes literature (poetry, fiction, history, biography, memoir, the essay). The difference can be understood in the distinction between Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and George Colman the Younger’s *Blue-Beard; or, Female Curiosity!* (1798): a canonical “lyrical drama” with epic reach, a popular gothic novel, and a “dramatick romance.” But then a slipperiness intercedes: what happens when the act of writing should by definition be artistic, but because of its popularity becomes profitable? Is the verbal product then art or commodity? Were Robert Southey’s epics, despite their genre, not “art” because of their popular appeal? Were the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) not “art” because their genre – the folk ballad – did not qualify as high style?<sup>1</sup> The distinction between art and commodity is one postmodern artists like to play with and play off of, but for Romantic-period writers the traditional boundaries between gentlemanly art and Grubb Street profitability, while still clearly delineated, were daily trafficked to suit the exigencies of need. And indeed, while art was not fungible, profitable writing could still – in the right hands – become art.

At this point another slipperiness intervenes: can a poet be a poet without the proper education and social background? Could John Keats, properly speaking, write poetry rather than merely versifying? Could women write anything more elevated than personal lyric? Finally, what should be thought of the writer or poet who works in many genres or cross-genre, such as Mary Robinson, who wrote lyrics, novels, plays, and essays; or Byron, who wrote across the range of poetic genres; or Coleridge, who was as masterful at the essay as he was with poetry? This chapter will carve out a space in which these questions make sense in relation to one another as Romantic-period questions, but with relevance for authorship today.

Romantic attempts to distinguish through distinctive marks of the high and low were confounded by the realities of the marketplace, and the period’s tendency toward experimentation and innovation. Today we still distinguish the poet from the fiction writer and non-fiction writer; we have inherited that. But we also use the term “author” to refer to all writers, because in addition to the human role of authorship we also must contend with the concept of the “author function” (see Foucault). If artists are concerned to protect their relationship to creativity and inspiration, all those who work with the production of verbal texts must consider their economic value as much as their artistic and/or social value. Philosophers and intellectuals ponder the nature of such production and such protection on several levels: theoretically we must understand the author to be a presence in the text as something different from the historical author and the narrative or poetic “I,” as a function of

the text; we must adjudicate writers' economic role in the literary marketplace with a writer's claims to artistic merit and achievement; we must consider the object-status of the literary text regarding copyright and author-product ownership. Romantic-period authors whose works were being pirated in the Americas and on the Continent anticipated the complex relation of authorship to ownership that exists today. As Deborah Brandt notes, after the Copyright Act of 1790 it is the employer rather than writer who is the "author" of a work in the United States, a distinction that paradoxically complicates the nature of property rights and changes the meaning of "author" and "authorial residue." The author function is, in this sense, less identified with a single, unitary author than with an authorial amalgam consisting not just of a work's creator, but also of editor(s), manuscript readers, employer – all those who have vested interest in the work. If the work's creator retains the right of attribution, that is not the same as the right to the work as property, a problem that bedeviled Romantic-era writers when, depending on the terms of a publishing agreement, the writer might garner little of the work's profits. Trevor Ross's analysis of the 1774 defeat of perpetual copyright examines the debate over literary culture as a public entity or private enterprise, and examines how intellectual property came to be redefined in the aftermath of this defeat (for his summary of the Act of 1710 and the 1774 defeat, see 3–7). The Romantics struggled with the ramifications of this defeat just as the competition in the literary marketplace was leading to an increasing desire to claim authorship on the title page. Add to this the theoretical issues that arise if we accept Stanley Fish's conception of textual authority, which for him resides in the reader as that reader construes the text anew with each textual encounter. If the author does not own copyright and cannot be granted textual authority, what rights and reimbursement can the writer lay claim to for a creation? Finally, anxieties about authorship and authorial status were a growing aspect of the work of writing in part because of the increasing competition for readership. Clifford Siskin's summation of analyses of the new digitization of earlier publications reveals just how much authorship was a growth industry: "we now know that whatever else Romanticism may be, the late 1780s and 1790s saw Britain's sudden and stunning acceleration into print culture, a transformation that raises the issue of whether the Romantic is a *quantitative* – rather than qualitative – phenomenon" ("Textual Culture" 121).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, how to distinguish quality from quantity became a hallmark of Romantic literary criticism and an essential aspect of Romantic theories of the aesthetic.

Before pursuing the concept of the author function further, then, a brief look at popular culture of the period is in order. Popular literature offers a vital reflection of the structure and superstructure of a culture (institutions as well as artistic and intellectual activity), and can also tell us about the state of authorship in the years just prior to the Romantic period. In an anonymous satire entitled *The Adventures of an Author* (1767), we find a common linkage between authority and authorship. As with so many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts that use the term "author" specifically to discuss matters of law, this novel also begins with our young hero, humorously named Jack Atoll, being trained for the law by his uncle, who practices at

Clifford's Inn. However this training was less than desirable: "Of him I was to learn law, equity, and jurisprudence: the first he was altogether ignorant of, except in the common forms of practice; the second he studiously avoided; and the third was a matter he had never considered" (1: 16). Through a series of closely connected adventures, Jack seeks work as an actor, and trains by joining disputing clubs to improve his oratory – which he first learned for the law. He learns of the "hard fate of authors, exemplified in the case of Mr. Hyper, poet, politician, and critic," as the title of chapter 8 tells us, while chapter 12 gives us a short "essay upon epistolary composition" and the next chapter the "ladies [*sic*] sentiments of polite writing" along with an example of Jack's poetry. Later chapters review the "present state of literature" and the "art and mystery of reviewing," with illustrative examples. Chapter 25 discourses on the worth of authors and how poorly they are paid, staging this discussion as a dialogue between a bookseller and "a genius."

Between these sometimes spurious interjections in the narrative, itself a typical picaresque full of love escapades and the requisite duel, we see how close the connection is between the legal profession, theater, politics, poetry, bookselling, reviews, and letter writing. All these aspects of the public sphere require authorship: one who has the authority to speak on a given stage can translate that into a variety of public stages, with oratory and disputation the training necessary for any of them. Thus had Mr. Hyper, the poet, politician, and critic, been created several decades later he could have been a caricature of Coleridge, poet, political orator, and cultural critic. A more serious-minded Jack Atoll might be a literary antecedent of Sir Walter Scott, lawyer, poet, and novelist, although his more immediate reference is to Henry Fielding, magistrate, novelist, and social critic. Historical figures such as Fielding, Scott, and Coleridge hold the public stage because of the authority of their writing – or writing gives them the stage to authorize their public opinions. The connection to intellectualism in the generically mixed *Adventures of an Author* is not subtle either: in chapter 27 we find "An olio of good things, tossed up according to the Shaftsburian system, which may be either swallowed whole, or taken as spoon-meat, by those who have lost their eye-teeth." The novel satirizes all systematic attempts to control social activity from the legal to the philosophical, and it includes authorial production in its negative commentary.

The allusion to Shaftesbury by Jack Atoll's author is not a coincidence. In the 1775 *Annual Register; Or, a View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year*, after the sections on international politics (entitled "History"), English politics, legal cases of note, mortality rates, natural history, "projects" (which includes inventions, schemes, and other activities by citizens for the common good), and antiquities or past history, comes a section entitled "Miscellaneous Essays" that begins with an essay on Shaftesbury's philosophy. The essay's header reads, "Thoughts on Free-thinking and on Free-thinkers, particularly the late Earl of Shaftesbury and the late Lord Bolingbroke; with Observations on these Thoughts." (The same section includes two pieces on slavery.) Later is a section on the year's literary production, by which is meant (except for one volume of travel writing) the year's poetic production. Politics, law, literature, and intellectual inquiry – natural history

includes chemical and medical discoveries – are entwined with philosophical thought through the nexus of morality and taste, and the authorial work of the editor binds these different disciplinary modes of thought together. Thus the editor of the *Annual Register* (most probably Thomas English) is capable of reviewing all sectors of the public sphere because of that connective nexus. For this editor, literature means poetry, and so he reinforces the classical conception of poetry as the highest literary art despite the fact that other genres are proving more popular in the literary market at this time. And indeed, it is morality and taste as reinforced by arbiters of taste that are supposed to differentiate popular literature from first-rate literary production, the poetaster from the poet. If Jack Atoll found it easy to dabble in all the literary arts, so did writers of the first degree during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries find it natural to try their hand at various forms of textual composition, but always with an eye toward genre-status. What differed between Jack Atoll's creator and a Romantic-period author striving for critical recognition was the presence or absence of a philosophical approach, a careful consideration of what morality and taste might mean in the engagement of innovation with tradition, and social or political themes with form.

It is worth examining the case of the *Annual Register* on another point – as a complication of the author and genre question. Begun in 1758 in the midst of the Seven Years' War by Edmund Burke for his publishers Robert and James Dodsley, it was a compendium of the year's news. Initially Burke acted as both author and editor, writing much of the book himself, and selecting and editing state papers and other official documents for inclusion. Burke devoted a large part of the first *Register* to the "History" section, in which he created a narrative whole out of the year's international and national events with particular attention to the war, which had been preceded by the French and Indian War in America. Both wars were ones of empire as the British and French struggled for imperial strongholds. Viewing the historical essay's role as an essential tool of public debate to clarify the British position in a given situation, Burke devoted enormous labor to the task. Although his preface to this volume remarks on the difficulty of binding disparate materials into a continuous narrative, he comments neither on the essay's political positioning, nor on his application of morality and taste to his historical analysis. As author, his point in calling attention to the labor involved in constructing a believable, rational narrative – rather than simply reporting facts – is to portray the historian (no mere reporter or editor) at work.

An historian was understood to be objective, to reveal the truth about past events, and to have a comprehensive vision of those events without unnecessary ideological skewing. An editor, too, is considered to be objective, to weigh what fits or what is incommensurate to the collection of materials under consideration. The *Annual Register* put itself forward as an historical document, a chronicle and reference tool that could be trusted for accuracy yet would not ignore the standards of morality and gravitas. In general we still approach authors and editors as more or less the same; those who create texts in trustworthy ways, and whose voices will be conveyed to us as metonyms for the authors or editors themselves. We may believe in those voices

(and may stop reading if we cannot), trusting them to play fairly with us as readers: to tell us truths, to provide information that we will find useful or interesting, and to respect our trust. Burke did just that with his historical essay: in an age when news was fragmentary and disjointed, he was able to create an overview of the war thus far and an analysis of its origins in a comprehensive manner. This assured the volume of widespread interest and a successful launch for the series. Thereafter Burke's annual volumes had to sustain public trust, and not violate that trust with an overt bias in his authored essays or the selection of documents. The long term of his single-handed authorship and editorship of the *Register* (1758–1765) reveals his ability to convey trustworthiness (a trait he parlayed into a winning profile as politician); his successor clearly sustained this trust, and although the *Annual Register* soon needed multiple editors and then began moving among various publishing houses, it continues to be published today.

In addition to the question of the author as editor, and both the author's and editor's ability to create readerly trust by conveying a comprehensible and shared morality, the *Annual Register* also raises the question of genre. As a compendium of "facts," which would later develop into a more varied collection with the inclusion of literature and literary production as part of the year's chronicle, the *Annual Register* came to portray the nation in a given year. Even in periods when the *Register* was published on a greatly delayed schedule, consumers looked for this historical record of each passing year. After the *Register* required multiple editors and contributing authors to fill its pages, it still needed to convey a single editorial voice, and the sense of single – or at least concerted and like-minded – authorship. A compendium like the *Register* mimics the fictional or historical record by providing this kind of singular vision, a shared sense of taste and political perspective. In doing so it mimics the nation as a compendium of voices and deeds; it portrays the nation in action but through a retrospective. People read it to see what they had lived through, what they had done. In a different way we read a novel in order to see what we think and how we will respond to characters, deeds, emotions, and insights. A novel provides an alternative, imaginative past for a reader when he or she enters into a character as if him-/herself. And the authorial voice is taken to be at once singular and representative of a cultural moment, a shared and somehow univocal perspective. So too does the historical narrative provide us with a way to take the narrated past for our own. What does this say about the author's power to influence how we understand our past, how we construct our imaginative lives, and how we read ourselves into a given narrative?

Coleridge was not the only Romantic writer to consider this question, but in his fragment poem "Kubla Khan" he provided an answer that seems to speak for the Romantic aesthetic and the Romantic ethos. In providing this single-voiced vision of morality and taste, in other words, he replicates Burke's labor in the *Annual Register*, but does so as a visionary rather than as a retrospective historian. In this poem, which according to Coleridge's note added for publication in 1816 is a fragment of a dream vision he had under the influence of opium, the speaker sketches out the framework of the dream and then the vision itself. Despite the claim to, or pretense of, fragmentation

and the promise of a larger whole no longer recoverable, the poem provides the circumstances of artistic inspiration, a description of the fount of that inspiration, and an example of the inspired artwork. The circumstances are the Khan's "pleasure dome," in the poem a literal and geographically delineated place in Xanadu but figuratively an imaginative space in which creation occurs. The fount of inspiration is depicted as a fountain or geyser of water from "Alph, the sacred river," which "ran/ Through caverns measureless to man" (3-4), forcing itself up from the subterranean layers just as creative energy erupts from non-conscious parts of the mind:

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  
 As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  
 A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:  
 Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst  
 Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
 Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:  
 And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
 It flung up momentarily the sacred river. (17-24)

The artwork is the inset lyric with which the poem ends, wherein an Abyssinian maiden appears playing her dulcimer and "Singing of Mount Abora" (41). Or rather, the artwork is her song, which the speaker claims to have heard in the vision but to no longer be able to recall. By portraying the maid in the act of singing, Coleridge gives us an exemplary piece of art; by claiming that her song is the art, not his portrait, he humbles himself and his own poetic authority, thereby gaining our trust; by desiring the return of her song – the muse's inspiration – he gives the poet's perennial plea to be inspired by the muse, and explains that the poet needs the muse not for his own ambitions but because such inspiration is as "honey-dew" and "the milk of Paradise" (53-54). We finish reading the poem only to ponder its brilliant images and reread the three different visions it provides in order to make sense of them, in order to understand the poem as a whole. As readers we refuse the "fragment" designation, seeing the poem as holistic; yet this does not mean we reject Coleridge's project or find him to be dissimulating – clearly the half-memory of the vision is a fragment even if the work is not. We believe the speaker-I to provide an authorial and authoritative conception of the poet's task and experience, and we search to understand the comprehensive nature of that experience within our own experience, our own truth. We take the descriptions of the pleasure dome, the fountain, and the maiden as all being products of inspiration and genius, and we accept the speaker-I's humiliative stance in the final section as evidence of his trustworthiness, and as proof of his natural (rather than self-declared and therefore suspect) genius. These last two are legal proofs, as it were, whereas the first is authority in the first instance, divinely given, poetically sanctioned. Opium, we realize, is merely a truth serum; the vision is the point at which the muse's truth and our own collide. And that "point," the "Coleridge" to which we affix the poem as his veritable product, is both author of the text and author in the text, the believable and knowing "I" of this great lyric which we continue to buy.

What Coleridge achieves in this poem is not dissimilar to Burke's achievement in the *Annual Register*. Coleridge shows genius to be ethical in its trustworthiness; he helps us understand its experience, universalizing the imaginative capacity just as Burke made the year's historical events everyone's history. Coleridge also makes the Romantic aesthetic, in both its beautiful and its sublime aspects, something the reader can share in and explore. The poem's fragmentary form provides a comprehensive narrative even if it purports to be only a part of a whole. Yet Burke's *Register* is a part of a whole that, on the contrary, purports to be comprehensive. Coleridge suggests that the artistic whole is, in fact, unattainable – that fragments may be all that are possible; Burke suggests that making a whole out of parts is necessary to our understanding of a larger whole we cannot comprehend. Burke's solution to the realization that history and historical experience are what Fredric Jameson has termed the "Real," that which is literally unknowable and only comprehensible through figurative language, is to reduce facts to figurative language, thereby weaving fragmented knowledge together so as to image a whole structure: "It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity" (*Political Unconscious* 20). Coleridge's solution to that same problem of the "Real" is to envision it as not a political unconscious but an archetypal unconscious that tells the essential story not of a "fundamental history" but of the history of creativity. Like Burke, his solution formally echoes the kind of history being told. Foregrounding the fragmentation of knowledge by formally mimicking it, he replicates fragmentation in his poem in such a way as to suggest a holistic structure that is unknowable to us but that nevertheless does exist beyond the veil. Writing in different genres, and coming from different perspectives – the retrospect and the prospective – Burke and Coleridge believe their readers will share the idea that the text must somehow make a whole from the multiple events, experiences, voices that comprise human reality. Both authors are the one speaking for the many, each representative in his singularity. This is the author's task, not just here but in every case and in every genre, and the reader expects this and trusts an author who claims to be, or appears to be, doing this.

Two questions arise from my assertion regarding authorial trust. One is, "What happens when that trust is explicitly or implicitly violated?" The other is, "What happens when the authorial voice is multiplied through collaborative writing or the collection of different authors' works?" (I will leave aside the rather different case of the anthology here.) That is, what happens when the sense of author as authors complicates the sense of authorship and authority? These are questions concerning the author function, a concept Michel Foucault developed in his 1969 essay "What is an Author?" but probed more deeply in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

The author who writes the words of a sentence, Foucault contends, is not the same as "the subject of the statement" (*Archaeology* 104), or the "enunciatory subject" (105), the fictive speaker. This is not to claim the "death of the author," as Roland Barthes famously does,<sup>3</sup> in order to distinguish the textual author from the historical person named Lord Byron or Jane Austen, but to distinguish between the author,



who writes many texts and is the same author for each, and the enunciating subject, the speaker-“I” who is unique to each text. But nor is “the subject of the statement [whether a character or the narrative “I”] distinct in everything – in nature, status, function and identity – from the author of the formulation [the statement]” (105). True, they share something through their textual functions, since the distance between narrator and protagonist can be invisible, as in first-person narrative, or is very nearly so, as in third-person narratives such as Austen’s novels, where the narrator’s and heroine’s points of view are at times neatly collapsed. As Foucault explains, “the subject of the statement is a particular function” (which “is not necessarily the same from one statement to another” since each statement is conditioned by what has preceded it) (105). So too is the author a particular function as the “transmitting authority” (104), a constructed public personage or authorial identity. Foucault’s distinctions convey a more fluid sense of authorial identity, since that identity can change from sentence to sentence, and a more fluid sense of authority. Moreover, characters (the subjects of statements) vie with the narrator and the overarching authorial voice for credibility and authority, for our faith and trust. Yet all of them are projections of the author, identified with but not identical to the author, functioning in different ways to sustain the discursive world of the text.

As Foucault points out, prior to the convention of signed publications, texts (stories, legends, epics, folk tales) were circulated as anonymous, “their real or supposed age [being] a sufficient guarantee of their authenticity” (125). The author is “one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing,” not just “because it characterizes a way of speaking and writing, but because it stands as an immanent rule, endlessly adopted and yet never fully applied” (116). We no longer trust anonymous texts; we want to know who the author is, their biographical details, even what they look like. Novel dust jackets, magazines, and even newspaper editorials cater to this desire to “know” the author. We might term this “responsible knowing”; that is, wanting to affirm the writer as an authority, as a subject who knows and whose knowledge will enlighten us. But such desire can escape the normal boundaries of the reader–author relation so that the text is not the middle term between the two, but rather the reader creates his or her own middle ground in fantasizing about the author, learning about the author’s private life, becoming a fan. The veneration given to ancient anonymous texts becomes, when transferred to signed texts, an overwhelming, even frightening aspect of authorship that Byron disdained and Sir Walter Scott shied away from, but that writers like Mary Robinson welcomed for their connections to fame and profit.

The difficulty with Foucault’s definition of the author as ethical principle, then, is that this ethos “implies an action that is always testing the limits of its regularity, transgressing and reversing an order that it accepts and manipulates” (125). Whereas authorship originally referred to a speech, a gesture, an *action*, it became a thing – a property – when the action was transgressive. Once governmental authorities realized that authoring cannot be regulated, it became punishable, and authors became subjects under the law rather than sacred voices. At this point, authority rested with the writing of laws; the writing of texts became a potentially transgressive

act. In order to establish readerly trust, the author must hide transgression, however potential, by establishing a self-referential whole in which the writing subject is seamlessly effaced. That writing subject must be seen to have legal status, not just as the right to speak in the public forum, but to authorize. The writing subject must be represented and replaced by an authorial voice that is always only a posture, a mask or persona that is the creation of an author-subject through language. This persona exists beside the speaking subject, the historical personage of the author, but it is the persona of that text or a series of texts, changing for different genres or modes, or changing through the evolution of the writing subject's thought.

Here again, then, the vexed relation of author to authority is a difficulty that Romantic-era writers had to negotiate with a clear awareness, and at times trepidation. On the one hand, not only did the last two decades of the eighteenth century see an explosion of writing and publications, but definitions of what counted as literature were also changing as books, articles, and poetry became a preferred mediation between experience and reality, and writers competed in "the elaboration of literariness" (Siskin, "More is Different" 810, 817). A sense of "literariness" required the insertion of historicity into the authorial process – a sense that literature had been building up to the current explosion of literary production and its concurrent increase in cultural importance – and occurred at the same time that literature began to function as a sounding chamber or sensorium for understanding and experiencing the world. As this sense of "literariness" grew, every genre became part of the larger experimentation with tradition and invention. The novel in particular was a mixed genre, combining the non-literary with the literary, or verse with prose and dramatized dialogues in innovative ways. Not surprisingly, the novel focused much of the writing and publishing frenzy of the period not only because of its open-endedness as a form, but also because novels soon became more profitable than poetry for those writers increasingly attempting to earn their living by the pen. If literariness went hand in hand with a rapid increase in production, writers were, on the other hand, constantly aware of a policing of such increases both in the practical effects of official censorship during the war years, and in unofficial censorship through public and reviewer ridicule and scorn. Indeed, writers worried a great deal about the effects of periodical reviews because of their direct impact on sales. "Being 'overstocked,'" as Paul Keen notes, "was not the only problem. Critics worried that the demand for literature had not only grown larger, it had gone downmarket" ("Most Useful" 630). Censorship as the figure of the law, in public as well as governmental senses, thus provided the counterbalance to literary proliferation, helping to direct what counted as "authorized" and what would be valued as "literature."

The question of the relation of authorship to law became crucial at the end of the eighteenth century when discussions of copyright began to circulate. Copyright, which establishes texts as material or intellectual property – whether of the author or the publisher or some other legal entity such as heirs – also establishes the authorial act as something inherently vulnerable to violation. The very creation of copyright means that the text can be pirated, and then changed. Although Foucault focuses on

the author's transgressions at the moment of copyright creation (the Romantic period experiencing both the birth of copyright and the embrace of the artist as transgressive), what consideration of copyright also brings to bear is the ways in which published texts, and thus authors, can be violated themselves. Mary Robinson, for instance, was the victim of salacious texts supposedly by her or written about her. British authors whose works were pirated by American printers not only lost any profit from the sales, but also could fear mangled texts being circulated among the American public, and thus damage to their literary reputations and authority.

This last concern, damage to reputation and thus authority, relates to the author's role as participant in the public sphere apart from the question of censorship. Any publication registers an author's voice in the public arena, and any work contributing social critique or advocating a position is also a contribution to the public sphere. Here the formation of public opinion is governed by interested bodies of persons, largely men, who seek open discussion and also attempt to direct debate toward a desired end. In the early part of the Romantic period, radicalizing public debate was dominated by liberal reformers such as Thomas Paine, Richard Price, and even John Thelwall of the London Corresponding Society (Makdisi 20).<sup>4</sup> These men sought to appropriate and silence the more radical, antinomian, and disruptive radicals such as Thomas Spence (who wanted land to be owned collectively) or William Blake, while at the same time absorbing and eviscerating the feminist aspects of Mary Wollstonecraft's reformist agenda. In such a situation, Paine's enormously successful *Common Sense* (1776) could out-talk Blake's prophetic books simply because of their far wider circulation; Blake's project was frustrated by the very small circulation of his texts, which meant an extremely limited participation in the public sphere.

Part of any participation in the public sphere of a given historical moment consists, then, of authority – one's right to speak – and of access to literary reproduction – the circulation of one's text, combined with connection (who one knows). Writers struggle with this last part in order to publish at all, but particularly in order to contribute to the public sphere. Connection consists of two levels: one is the contemporary level of who one knows in terms of supporters, patrons, and publishers, as well as which other writers one knows, what artistic circles one is connected to; the second consists of literary heritage. The first level is also related to the question of professionalism: who is an amateur and who counts as the authorized professional? Keen reveals that this was a fraught issue during the period since those who wrote often had quite divergent agendas. William Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams* (a 1794 novel written to put forward a political agenda) is professional in a way very much at odds with Robinson's novels which, however filled with social critique (like *The Natural Daughter*, 1799), were primarily written to cover expenses. Moreover, does the literary professional become a different kind of writer from a writer who purposely crafts a canonical status, as in the case of William Wordsworth and Byron?

However one approached writing – whether as a gentleman's occupation or as a professional career, as a literary author or as someone who writes in order to sway public opinion – asserting one's authority as a writer with claim to public notice was requisite. Literary heritage may be thought of first in terms of "pedigree," that is,

reference and allusions to classical authors. In Romantic literature this often boils down to referencing Milton and Pope, with allusions to Shakespeare and Cowper – thus covering the terrain of epic (Milton), modern and ancient classicism (Pope’s classical translations as well as his own works), tragedy (Shakespearean high drama), and sensibility (Cowper’s sensitive meditations). In addition to these authors or their works, Petrarch’s sonnets, Pindar’s odes, and other credentials of literacy were also frequently invoked to create a space for the author in the historical community of great writers. Establishing pedigree in this way was especially important for women writers, who were denied the classical education of their brothers. Women writers developed their familiarity with this literary heritage through home schooling by liberally minded fathers, as the Bluestocking Elizabeth Carter was, or through a strict reading regimen in adulthood such as Mary Shelley adhered to; but this also had to suffice for other disadvantaged writers such as Blake, whose art education had trained him in the visual arts heritage but not in classical and modern authors. Without the ability to allude to literary forefathers through form or naming of characters, invocation of authors or their characters, or other direct connection, an author could not speak out convincingly or persuasively.

This necessary aspect of authorship has been termed “intertextuality,” understood both as direct textual connections for specific purposes (such as connecting one’s work to the literary tradition), and as the unselfconscious use of traditional modes and sources which occurs when something is so familiar that it seems natural to include it, such as biblical references, or when the origin of a common figure or phrase is not generally known, such as phrases from Shakespeare or Milton. In addition, we all write intertextually through the use of a common language (to say nothing of adhering to the expectations of form and style). Derrida refers to this commonality as “writing within . . . the *historical* closure” (93; italics his), an aspect of all writing, literary and non-literary, because “[f]rom the moment that the sign appears, that is to say from the very beginning, there is no chance of encountering anywhere the purity of ‘reality,’ ‘unicity,’ ‘singularity’” (91). Authors, then, struggle with the tension between a need to gain power through writing communities both long gone and present-day, and a need to say something new and original despite having to use traditional tools such as form and language. Artfulness often consists of saying something that consists of calling attention to the dilemma of needing to seem to be new and original within the constraints of tradition. Authors uneducated in their literary heritage cannot take advantage of this artistic problem that underlies the need to convey textual and writerly authority, as well as the need to create something distinctive, something worth reading because it does say something that adds to what has already been said. We must be mindful at the same time, that literary creation takes place within a larger social reality that is that work’s “source or ontological ground, its Gestalt field” (Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 5). The Romantic period was the beginning of how to think about culture and its products sociologically, the latter a reflection of the former rather than products of timeless genius. Madame de Staël’s *Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions* (1800) was, as Jameson notes, the first full consideration of cultural and

historical relativity (5). That is, Staël articulated contemporary concerns and anxieties over the authority, authorship, and particularity of a work.

The conception of the author as the originator of a fictional world that reveals truths about our own worldly experience is a deeply Romantic one, yet one at the same time contested by a growing awareness of the interdependencies of cultural products and the society in which they take form, and of the relationship between creativity and the historical moment. Prior eras viewed literature as allegorical teachings about the next world or about God's Book of Nature or, more recently, about political history and moral values. Romantic literature begins the trek inward: the use of fiction to analyze personal experience, introspective ideas, emotive responses, and interpersonal relations as all of these reflect on and engage the sociopolitical climate of a turbulent world. The fictional world constructed must convincingly interlineate other fictional worlds (through allusions and familiar paradigms and structures), as well as lived experience (through revelatory assessments of everyday life), with its own "original" staging of a drama. Truths such as those intimated in "Kubla Khan" are revelatory because of how they resonate with our own experience, because of what they tell us about our own nature; such truths must speak to us individually and yet be recognizably universal, pulling us into the community. In this way the introspective becomes part of public sphere debate; the lyric poem and the historical record are yoked in their ability to appeal to both the private and communal aspects of our truth-hungering.

Some literary theorists contend that pitting the introspective against the historical invokes a dynamic conflict between the idea of an originary author (the "genius") and the constructed subject (the writer influenced consciously and unconsciously by historical events, structures of thought, social institutions, conditions of birth and family, and so on). Thus the fictional depiction of a particular train of events, as created by a London-based middle-aged man of means in 1789, will be very different from a work by the same man in 1822, as it will be from a work by a rural-based woman of little means in 1789, or by an immigrant writer in any year. The "genius" that we associate with a particular style is, along with that style, the product of hard work; a confluence of education, experiences, friends, and correspondents; a need to articulate particular visions and the opportunity to do so. These elements combine what a writer may be consciously aware of as he or she labors to refine a vision and a style that adequately conveys that vision, as well as what he or she may be unconscious or only peripherally conscious of. We know that Austen's characteristic style, for instance, was deliberately crafted over time as she combined her own sense of comic irony with familial interests in the church, the navy, land ownership, well-made marriages, and theatrical stagings. We can trace Blake's creation of a visual-verbal style that reflects his conception of a modern-day version of biblical prophecy, of words saturated with life-energy.

An author is him- or herself, then, also introspective and revelatory, and communally implicated. And although male writers were fairly insistent that an author as both a Romantic genius and a representative of the people is a "man speaking to men," as Wordsworth famously put it in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical*

*Ballads* (737), women writers were also anxious to put themselves forward as able to speak representatively, and as capable of shaping public debate. Like radical men writers, women writers had to be wary of charges of transgression, of overstepping legal and cultural authorial boundaries. Stephen Behrendt argues that women writers were eager to participate in the political debates of the 1780s and 1790s, but were corralled into the bracketed realms of lyric poetry and novels, where the imagined world of the text should have only an emotional relation to the experiential world, but that any revelation of “truth” should be of the touchstone kind, familiar through pious teachings and cultural sensibility. As Behrendt shows, however, within those constraints women were able to create strong conduits to and within public debate, and to influence political discussion.

For authors concerned to engage with and form the public opinion of their historical moment, whether men or women, the act of writing has an overtly dual role; it is inwardly expressive yet communally directed and directive, as in Blake’s prophetic texts. It is also self-conscious about the reader, often implicating that reader in the text. What happens when a writer uses the implied reader to help create authorial identity, inevitably communicated through style? Anna Barbauld’s *Hymns* (1781) and *Lessons* (1778–1779) were written expressly for children, the boys she was teaching at the boarding school she and her husband governed from 1774 to 1785, although with an eye toward the adult reader. They project a particularized child-addressee whose identity formation is not only the reason for writing the work, but which is already enough in process that the child’s personality provides a dialogic resonance within the text that helps construct it. But although these works create textual space into which the boys could read themselves, the space is at once particular and communal, available to any child reader. Barbauld’s implication of a reader rather than the muse would seem the opposite of Coleridge’s project in “Kubla Khan,” but her *Hymns* convincingly articulate a truthful vision that is both singular and community-forming. Where her work deviates from “Kubla Khan” is that it is at once lyrically powerful *and* politically influential, intent on forming a future community of morally sensitive adults.

Another way to implicate the reader in order to further authorial presence and an authorial agenda is to fuse the invocation to the muse with the implied reader to produce an address. When Wordsworth addresses his sister Dorothy or his friend Coleridge in *The Prelude* (1805/1850), their voices are dialogically present within the text – so much so that the speaker anticipates their response and answers it concurrently with his own voicing of ideas and understandings. Although the direct addresses to Dorothy Wordsworth and Coleridge occur in separate sections of the epic poem and have different functions – the sister’s to refer to healing (a lyrically private moment), the friend’s to refer to their joint poetic mission (a political intervention in public sphere debate) – we begin to realize on rereading the poem that both textual addresses are present throughout the work, and contribute to the personality conveyed by the speaker’s voice. As this realization takes hold, the voice gains the discursive quality of a group, or of familial conversation. At the same time the insistent “I”-ness of *The Prelude*, repeatedly calling attention to individual and

isolated real and imaginative experience, attempts to deny this dialogism, to stamp it as confirmation of individual genius rather than collective insight and collaborative inspiration. But this very insistence points to textual sites where the lone poet was not alone, and where the sacral communication of epiphany and transcendence can only make sense in the very act of communicating such revelation to knowing others: the friend, the sister. That Dorothy is referred to in the poem as a sister-friend, and Coleridge as friend-brother, further reinforces the interpersonal texture and verbal layering of the poem's speaking, of its authorial identity. And as much as William's allusions to Coleridge and his works are deliberate intertextual experiments, his inner circle knew that the same was true of Dorothy's unpublished journals and poems. Indeed, William's poetic vision and voice were as deeply shaped by his experience of writing in communion with Dorothy as they were by Coleridge's early influence (see Fay, *Becoming Wordsworthian*).

The Edgeworths' body of work, particularly *Essays on Practical Education* (1798), raises a different problem of authorship: collaboration and collectively voiced literature. Whereas collaboration may hide the duality or multiplicity of authorial hands under a pretense of a singular or continuous authorial voice, as in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, collectively voiced literature subsumes multiple voices in different ways. During the Romantic period this form of authorship was most often practiced through the representation of multiplicity as singularity: Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his daughter Maria Edgeworth usually published their works as individually authored works, though it was understood that the works came out of a common project with shared precepts and goals, but the *Essays* were a collaborative project from the beginning, signed by both of them. How can we know who is speaking, however, when the narrative voice refers to "we" rather than "I"? Who is the author in this case: "we have frequently been obliged to record facts concerning children which may seem trifling, and to enter into a minuteness of detail which may appear unnecessary. No anecdotes, however, have been admitted without due deliberation" (1: iv-v)? Who has been obliged, who has duly deliberated? This authorial identity continues through the work: "We are well aware that we have laid ourselves open to ridicule by the trifling anecdotes that have just been mentioned; but if we can save one child from an hour's unnecessary misery" (1: 234), the voice explains in the chapter "On Temper." The collaborative voice in this case takes on the group identity of producers of parliamentary bills and reform treatises; it gains authority through its collectivity, and subliminally gains legal authority through its discursive resemblance to such tracts. Rather than worry whether father or daughter is writing at a particular moment, the reader is assured that the calm explanations have been fully considered and judged. The author is trustworthy, clearly non-transgressive since the reform is toward producing better citizens, and yet burgeoning with genius for the Rousseau-influenced pedagogy. We must read on.

Other forms of the multiple voice are less trustworthy: William Wordsworth sometimes gleaned phrases or fully articulated lyrical moments from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entries but presented them as his own, as in "I wandered

lonely as a cloud” (1802). When William and Coleridge collaborated on *Lyrical Ballads*, it was only later that one’s contribution to the other’s poem would be revealed. There the anonymity of the first edition created a sense of collective work but individualized voices, and when a single poem was later revealed to have lines contributed by another, the line between singular and collective authorship become as complex as those in the Edgeworths’ *Practical Education*. However, because the textual problematic was not foregrounded in *Lyrical Ballads*, the reader is left to mull over authorship and voice, and the issues of authorial credence become compromised. In yet another formulation of the communal voice, Wordsworth included several poems by Dorothy and other women in his circle in his editions of collected works, sometimes under their own names, evincing a different collective practice in which the inclusion of a very few texts by family members within the larger whole casts a consonance of tone and imagery over the other-authored texts (Fay, “Wordsworthian Lives”). These texts are incorporated so as to convey their differences as distinctions within similitude, but in the end as Wordsworthian. By including them, Wordsworth lends these poems and verses authority and gains our trust for them.

The different valences of authorial function and identity, and the questions authorship raised in the Romantic period, are still crucial ones for us today. In particular, the connection between the authorial act, legal constraints, and political institutions has gained greater force as the stakes for the rights, responsibilities, and penalties associated with copyright have increased through the digitization of texts and increased opportunities for literary piracy. The twenty-first century has seen an increased interest in multiply voiced and collective authorship, especially in feminist productions and in new electronic media such as blogs and wiki websites. The Romantics’ fear of excessive and therefore devalued verbiage should not be isolated from our own, and the reading of a Romantic poem and a poem read on *Salon.com* should be seen as similarly entangled acts. In fact, what we understand from reading Romantic-period writers, what we analyze meta-textually from our engagement with their works, can help us negotiate the literary production of today. But such illumination is possible only if we keep in mind the literary problems of authorship and the author function that those writers were themselves negotiating and resolving.

See HISTORIOGRAPHY; PERIODICALS; READER.

## Notes

- 1 Although Wordsworth carefully crafted his ballads as literary experiments, his philosophical insistence on the poetics inherent in rural speech – its “natural” cadences – still caused the volume to be attacked for not exhibiting enough artistry to count as “real,” that is, artful poetry.
- 2 In addition to analyses such as that of James Raven, see Siskin’s *The Work of Writing* (23–26, 155–163).



- 3 “The Death of the Author” first appeared in English in *Aspen* 5–6 (1967) and was subsequently included in *Image-Music-Text* (1972).
- 4 Makdisi summarizes the scholarship of several critics and Blake specialists on this point in *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* in order to illustrate the ideological struggle to dominate public debate even within the radical movement.

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# Reader

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## **Preliminaries: Terms and Loose Definitions**

*Reader.* It seems straightforward enough: “a person who reads written matter; a person who is able to read.” So says the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and that might seem to be the end of it. But no. The same source tells us that “reader” also names those who read works for publishers and report on their suitability for publication, as well as those who serve as publishers’ proofreaders. Clearly, then, defining a “reader” involves discriminating among diverse and even competing denotations. To “read” a text normally involves related operations of perception, cognition, interpretation, and “processing.” We first register the letters and symbols on the page (perception) and then formulate them into words with whose external (typographical) forms we are already familiar, “comparing” what we perceive with schemata we already possess for the words of our own languages. Interpretation proceeds to interrelated logical processes involving broader comparisons among the words themselves (and the multi-word units we assemble from them) and our individual prior experiences with those words in previous situations in which they have “meant” something – anything. “Processing” is what occurs at the outermost circles of signification that radiate from the point of origin in that initial act of perception.

According to this formula, reading is an inherently *social* act, even when one reads alone, because it depends upon a constellation of prior reading experiences that have taught the reader both the conventions of the reading activity and the complex linguistic, social, and cultural interactions that constitute communicative language. The *proofreader*, however, is less concerned with what we think of as “content” than with mere surfaces: the “correctness” of the typography, “forms” rather than “content.” Nevertheless, this reader remains attentive to “meaning”;

otherwise she or he cannot determine the “correctness” of punctuation, spelling, or usage. Still, this “reader” is akin to modern mechanical devices that harvest data stored in various forms (print, microforms, data cards like credit cards, and other media). Paradoxically, such “mindless” (or perhaps “personless”) reading typically requires another device (most often now a computer) to “process” the data to make it usable: to make it “mean” anything significant. For example, Franco Moretti suggests “distance reading” for mechanically “reading” and “processing” the contents of more nineteenth-century novels than any individual can realistically “read” in conventional fashion (“Conjectures” 57). In “distance reading” the scholar/reader/technician analyzes data that is functionally separated from the reading activity itself. From such data researchers can produce (that is, “process”) metadata like “word clouds” that can graphically represent the comparative frequency with which user-selected words, phrases, or other semantic combinations occur.

A “reader” may also be one who “expounds to pupils or students; a teacher, a lecturer” (*OED*), like the British academic whose rank is one level (or grade) beneath that of a professor. This role lends a more immediately explicit *public*, performative aspect to what we mean by a “reader,” rather in the sense that “professor” identifies not only an academic’s job and title but also that person’s *function* as one who “professes” the matter of her or his academic field.

Finally, there are those little books that have for more than two centuries provided early reading experiences for countless children. These anthologies, which have long been called “readers,” are typically instruments of instruction and occasionally of entertainment intended to form the minds – and the attitudes and behaviors – of their young consumers. These “readers” matter to the present discussion because they identify as a “reader” an inanimate (but not powerless) instructor and shaper, an instrument that trains us in how to read.

### What Was a Romantic-Era “Reader”?

Not everyone who could read during the Romantic era was what the twenty-first century might call a “reader,” nor can we define those readers in any way that yields a homogeneous group. In fact, the reverse was true: “reading” was pursued by a broad variety of citizens – of all ages – and for quite different ends. There was reading for utility – the ability to make out rudimentary written instructions and communications – and there was reading for intellectual or aesthetic pleasure, to name only two paradigms. William St. Clair draws a useful distinction among Romantic-era readers. A first group, whom he calls collectively “the literate nation,” includes ordinary laborers and tradespersons, low-level clerks, and those whose socioeconomic status precluded full access to the sophisticated, reading-intensive educational experiences we associate with the upper and upper-middle classes. “The reading nation” he regards as “the men, women, and children . . . who regularly read English-language printed books” (13–14), a second group whose circumstances provided time and means to read for pleasure as well as for mere utility. For the third

class, “the non-reading nation” (14), experience with written texts (“books”) came largely from illustrations or other visual materials, oral transmission, or second-hand accounts of written texts furnished by their more literate contemporaries. These non-reading “readers” matter here because part of the reading public was in reality a “hearing public” (Webb 34) who listened while working, dining, or even relaxing as others read aloud from various printed sources, a practice that extended also to coffee-houses and public houses. Moreover, by 1800 increasing numbers of printed texts – literary or otherwise – were adorned with illustrations, many based upon originals by prominent artists such as Thomas Stothard, Henry Fuseli, and John Opie. Illustrations offered relatively cheap ways for publishers to engage readers (and promote sales) through the enticing vehicle of visual images. As books were produced in smaller and therefore cheaper formats, beginning in the 1770s with early “mass” publishers such as John Bell and John Cooke and continuing later with James Lackington and Thomas Tegg, their increasingly numerous illustrations were repeatedly reused. By 1790 there was also a flourishing trade in another mixed-media genre that was aimed at both the marginally literate and the more sophisticated literate citizens: the popular caricature print. These prints – the specialty of graphic artists, including James Gillray, Isaac Cruikshank and his son George – combined striking visual images with wordy and frequently allusive captions, speech balloons, and other embedded verbal materials; however indirectly, such prints, which circulated widely and were posted prominently in the windows of print shops along public thoroughfares, inevitably contributed to the piecemeal growth of a variety of reading among the ostensibly non-reading public.

Still, these are not the readers with whom we instinctively associate the Romantic “reader,” although they are unquestionably relevant to any larger sociological construction of the term. The later eighteenth century witnessed a striking alteration in both the number of readers and the understanding among the broader public culture of what it meant to be a reader. Indeed, Jon Klancher claims the Romantic period may have marked the last time that “it was still possible to conceive the writer’s relation to an audience in terms of a personal compact” (14). Previously, writers and their publishers had encouraged readers to consider themselves members of a *community* of discourse, which partly accounts for the prevalence of epistolary writing and its associated rhetoric during the century before the accession of George IV in 1820.

In fact, broadening the base of “readers” was important not just for the consumers of public (that is, published) writing, but also for those who produced it, those who disseminated it, and those who sought to control that body of writing and its influence and effects among both the reading and the non-reading publics. Two centuries ago, publication (“public-ation”: the making public of) lent the printed word an authority that it has not yet wholly lost, despite the explosion of the electronic media and their social and political reach. Before the Romantic period, books were fewer, more expensive, and generally devoted to culturally sanctioned authors, subjects, and objectives. The authors reflected the Western European history-of-ideas tradition and included both classical-era and more “modern”

authors; among these, British authors were gaining added visibility in the run-up to the establishment of a national, and nationalistic, “British” canon as part of the nineteenth-century educational curriculum. Subjects included both Greek and Roman works in the original and in translation and “classic” works of earlier European literature, religious works, and a variety of prose treatises on economic, historical, theological, and especially moral subjects. The implicit objective of this corpus of printed material was to inform, and thus to *form*, an educated and sophisticated citizenry capable of exercising moral, economic, military, and scientific leadership in the making of what would become the nineteenth-century imperial and industrial behemoth that proudly styled itself *Great Britain*.

Not surprisingly, this enterprise was rooted in historically conservative views of who and what constituted one’s fitness to belong to this inherently self-aggrandizing ruling class. Hereditary privilege, of course, which entailed both wealth and the physical property in which that wealth was grounded, and which insured one’s access to the ruling class and its institutions, formal and informal alike. Education, too, which typically involved elaborate training in languages, the arts, elitist physical “sports” (such as fencing and hunting), and extensive travel (for example, the “Grand Tour” that gave countless young British men their experience of the Continent and beyond). This combination of hereditary privilege and select (and, typically, *selective*) education, both grounded in traditions of “old money,” insured that the social network thus defined would inevitably remain both limited and closed, a *clique* whose parameters were effectively defined by economic factors. From this closed network, those without property, privilege, or education were effectively barred. Conspicuously excluded were the lower classes – and women generally.

Enter the age of capitalism, which furnished a crude but effective means for circumventing those hereditary obstacles to advancement. The enterprising journalist Daniel Defoe demonstrated early in the eighteenth century that it was possible to earn one’s living by writing for, and selling to, a buying public rather than depending upon aristocratic patronage. Enter, next, the eighteenth-century novel, rooted in the lives and experiences of women and the middle and lower classes and demonstrating how the native intelligence and wit of these ostensibly excluded individuals enabled them to thrive – even to succeed – in the world of privilege, where the money that one could acquire, save, invest, and live upon might make one the functional equal (albeit not the old-social equal) of the comfortable titled aristocrat. This paradigm of the self-made individual who succeeds in the unbalanced public world and even manages to exert influence and real power within and upon the public sphere culminates some two centuries later in the tales of the self-made, local-boy-makes-good entrepreneur in which the nineteenth-century American writer Horatio Alger specialized. In all such tales of “making it” – which inevitably involve an intricate combination of native ingenuity, dedicated perseverance, and unquestionable moral rectitude – literacy plays a significant and indeed an essential role. Foundational for education and advancement, literacy remains a cornerstone of morally inflected policy in the twenty-first century. In 1966, for example, amid the civic activism that characterized the 1960s, the American teacher Margaret

McNamara established a school-based program for reading motivation that soon took the name “Reading is Fundamental.” This ongoing program has produced parallel initiatives elsewhere, including the United Kingdom, while maintaining close ties with both the national governments and private philanthropic foundations.

The connection among government institutions, private foundations, and the acquisition of a “reading ability” beyond the merely functional is important to any idea of the Romantic-era “reader.” For education, of whatever sort, is seldom independent of ulterior motives that drive both the beneficiaries of that system and those who support and attempt to direct it. Why was there during the Romantic period – and why is there still – such a debilitating stigma involved with the failure (or for that matter the refusal) to speak “standard English”? Why did the English feel compelled to impose upon nineteenth-century Ireland a total ban on the *Irish* language and a concomitant requirement that education be in standard English? Why is the “Cockney” idiom, like all “non-standard” variations upon the linguistic standard, regarded as an indicator of linguistic, educational, social, economic, and even moral inferiority? When the Radical journalist William Cobbett discussed grammar in 1817, in his newspaper the *Political Register*, he made it clear that grammar and the standardization of language were inextricable from politics. Cobbett linked the educational system to the economic advantages of the aristocracy, who, he argued, controlled access to education (and therefore literacy) through a series of fees, taxes, and other economic impositions that placed this fundamental element of self-improvement beyond the reach of the lower classes. Olivia Smith writes that “the division between those who knew grammar and those who did not, was, according to Cobbett, one of the primary means of class manipulation” (1). By controlling the teaching (and the acquisition) of grammar, the privileged could effectively perpetuate the exclusion of the disenfranchised majority of the population. One practical effect of this exclusionary practice remains evident when spoken (or written) utterance in non-standard idiom is dismissed out of hand as unworthy of a hearing (or a reading); its failure to conform to the linguistic expectations of the majority is represented as incontrovertible *proof* (not just mere dubious “evidence”) of its total lack of value or validity.

### What Was at Stake?

In thinking about the Romantic-era “reader,” then, we need to understand what was at stake in the growth of reading (or “readership”). All parties agreed that the more people learned how to read – and then actually *did* read – the greater grew the danger to the social, political, economic, and religious status quo. Reading expanded rapidly at all levels of society (St. Clair 11), but because the privileged classes were a decided (albeit powerful) minority, the numerical balance was a genuine worry, since they were already quite literally outnumbered, and likely to become more so. Indeed, the “status consciousness” that had pervaded eighteenth-century British culture was

now giving way to a significantly different and numbers-driven “class awareness” that reflected a shared conviction among authors that they had a growing stake in shaping the interpretative and ideological frameworks of the audiences they addressed (Klancher 3). This new awareness of the role of reading (and the writing that drove it) in forming and articulating social strata (“class”) is inseparable from the dynamics of literary production and consumption during the Romantic period. During that period, “reading” came more and more to be about “class.”

Some among the social and political establishment flatly opposed any extension of literacy, the more reactionary among them fearing (as Burke had fretted about the French Revolution) that it would spark a precipitous alteration of the power structure. Others, though, saw in the spread of literacy evidence of mankind’s inexorable march toward an inherent greatness of person and of purpose: the utopian anarchist William Godwin, for example, advocated reading and collegial community discussion of one’s reading as a means of improving the entire body politic. Others, however, likened the spread of literacy to that of a virulent disease that threatened to consume all. It was playing with fire (or with poison), they reasoned, to encourage reading among those who might (very probably) as a result grow discontent with their “station” in life, which the custodians of society and culture had always encouraged them to regard as inevitable and unchangeable, even if unfortunate. Such words as “orders” and “stations” imply an organic worldview in which the places that people occupy appear appropriate because they reflect how the natural universe is structured. “Class,” on the other hand, suggests a construct, a “made” (or manufactured) arrangement that does not occur “naturally” and that therefore holds the potential for upward (or downward) mobility. An obscure writer of the time, Patrick Colquhoun, wrote in 1806 that the “lower orders” needed to receive through their reading an appropriate dose of “religious and moral instruction,” nothing more, since “by indiscriminate education those destined for laborious occupations would become discontented and unhappy in an inferior situation in life” (13). Don Herzog has explained how all sides of this debate over print, literacy, and reading were informed by the then-current discourse of disease, poison, antidote, and inoculation.

There was no escaping the universally evident concern that the act of reading at all posed an implicit *threat*. The contemporary Marxist critic Terry Eagleton has observed that the simplest and most effective form of censorship is “the perpetuation of mass illiteracy” (56), which insures the exclusion of the illiterate from access both to knowledge and to the power (or empowerment) that it brings. This is why the assertions of entrepreneurs like the bookseller James Lackington that at the beginning of the volatile decade of the 1790s “all ranks and degrees NOW READ” (255) were so worrisome to so many. The most worried parties were, predictably, the privileged classes, who were at first less immediately concerned about periodicals (probably because the heavy taxes that could be imposed on them seemed to make them less readily available to “ordinary” readers of the lower classes) than they were about longer texts. Even canonical authors such as Coleridge declaimed against novels, for example, citing their “enervating” effect upon otherwise “healthy” readers in his



*Biographia Literaria* (1817). In *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), his contemporary, Thomas Love Peacock, has the reactionary character Mr. Flosky (who was in fact loosely modeled upon Coleridge) complain sardonically about “a *reading public*, that is growing too wise for its betters.” That “reading public,” Mr. Flosky complains elsewhere, “shuns the solid food of reason for the light diet of fiction” and consequently falls into the “vulgar error” of mistaking fantastic novelty for real substance (105, 57, 75). This reactionary attitude reflects in the spirit of Alexander Pope’s observation a century earlier, in *An Essay on Criticism* (1709), that “A little [i.e., small, inadequate] *Learning* is a dang’rous Thing” (l. 215) – dangerous, because, as Pope continues, “*shallow Draughts* intoxicate the Brain” (l. 217). Those who proceed upon inadequate grounding characteristically act unwisely and dangerously, especially in the opinion of those who consider themselves their “betters,” which is precisely the import of Mr. Flosky’s wry irony.

There were voices on the other side of this divide, however, including that of Charles Lamb, who in 1825 cheerfully endorsed the “enlargement of the reading public” that was making “re-prints of good old books” increasingly “accessible to the purses of poor people” (1: 272–274). It was in fact this matter of “poor people” that gave pause to so many contemporaries, whose reluctance to enfranchise the poor within a larger, literate reading community betrays an inherent class bias. Extending literacy – and with it “reader” status – began in earnest in the eighteenth century, as Alan Richardson asserts, and included a “children’s literature” industry that began in 1744 with John Newbery’s successful venture (109). By century’s end this industry included Evangelical writers such as Hannah More and Sarah Trimmer who appreciated the power of such writing as an instrument of social control. Concurrently came the rise of mass education in Britain, a development that wholly altered the national culture by enfranchising ever greater numbers of readers from the lower and working classes. But such enfranchisement came at the cost of effectively infantilizing these less experienced readers; much of the writing directed at them employs the same rhetorical and pedagogical strategies found in writing for children, strategies aimed for the most part at ensuring obeisance and conformity to the expectations of the putative “betters” who address them.

Nevertheless, the 1790s also witnessed the widespread circulation of radical republican (“Jacobin”) texts, including Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* (1791–1792), whose British publishers were unsuccessfully prosecuted for their actions. Britain’s political and religious establishment found itself confronted by a “mass readership” that had seemingly sprung up almost spontaneously. In fact, that readership had emerged from a “highly unregulated, disorganized, private, and largely unprofessional patchwork of educational institutions” that included village schools, Sunday schools, charity schools, clerks’ and mechanics’ schools and institutes, and a variety of self-instruction, to name only a few of the springs that fed this stream of literacy (Richardson 119). When Lamb celebrated the mass readership some three decades later, he was voicing an observation that appears repeatedly in both private and public writing from the period. The ability to read was, in reality, a democratizing phenomenon that challenged the social, cultural, political,

and economic hegemony of the privileged classes, which is precisely why those classes chose so often to trope the growth of literacy (and readership) in terms of poison, contagion, and incipient rebellion. That post-revolutionary “poison” enjoyed a resurgence during the Regency in the popular radical discourse of writers such as William Cobbett, William Hone, and Thomas Wooler who addressed their literate working-class readers in lively prose and verse. Paradoxically, when it proved functionally impossible to silence the radical press, the reactionary sociopolitical establishment responded by bombarding the citizenry – and the working classes in particular – with mass-produced social-control propaganda that masqueraded as “useful” information, as for example in the *Penny Magazine*, published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK). This society, established in 1826 at the urging of the Whig politician Henry Brougham, published books and tracts likewise intended to counteract the radical publications by providing a more level-headed discourse and subject matter.

There were of course other attractions for the emerging Romantic-era readerships, many of which were also branded as distracting or even subversive. Fiction, poetry, and even travel writing offered readers avenues to more attractive places and experiences than what surrounded them, and so were widely disparaged as likely to increase their discontent with their individual and collective circumstances. Moreover, print had already by the 1790s acquired the unsettling tendency to confer “an apparent legitimacy” upon ideas and behaviors that had seldom appeared in print before (St. Clair 12–13). The great success of “mass” publishers such as William Lane’s Minerva Press, which produced literally hundreds of novels a year both for individual purchasers and for the many circulating libraries it maintained, demonstrated the futility of this reactionary resistance to the spread of reading.

Romantic-era publishers were of course invested in the elaborate tug-of-war over readers and their functions in public culture. Theirs was a unique capacity for disseminating polemic, propaganda, and alarmism, and many of them willingly embraced this role, which could be a profitable one (else why would they have persisted?). At one end of the spectrum were groups such as the Evangelicals and spokespersons, including Hannah More; they produced their Cheap Repository Tracts in huge numbers for distribution – usually for a penny or so, or even free – among the poor in particular. Describing piously humble acceptance of social misfortune and civic injustice as the necessary worldly fee for admittance into a better post-mortal life for those who dutifully repudiated resistance, rebellion, and reformism, these tracts adopted (and adapted) many of the visual and readerly conventions of the more sensational broadside and chapbook publications that catered to the lower-class reader’s appetite for racy diversion.

Two decades later, in the aftermath of the Luddite disorders, the quashing of reform movements throughout the nation, and, most notably, the notorious “Manchester Massacre” of August 16, 1819, the popular radical press mounted an appeal to the “common” reader that was no less energetic, although by then the message was activist and almost insurrectionist, not admonitory and conformist. Journalists, including Cobbett, Hone, and Wooler, inveighed in dramatic political

pulpit oratory and in memorable verse forms against institutional and ministerial oppressions, appealing to a readership whose volatility had so alarmed the government at all levels that it had in late 1819 passed the widely despised Six Acts aimed at the suppression of individual and collective discourse in the press and in the street. From his safe expatriate home in Italy, Percy Bysshe Shelley that same year wrote inflammatory political poems in familiar, popular verse forms and sent them back to England to his liberal journalist friend Leigh Hunt who, not surprisingly in those dangerous days, suppressed them. The Romantic era was the first in which authors of all sorts began deliberately to craft written works for that marginally or minimally literate audience whose numbers were growing exponentially in tandem with the emergence of the modern industrialized England whose horrors Friedrich Engels would expose in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845).

### The Romantic Reader as Social Animal

Reading involved a distinctively *social* aspect, in other words, and one that authors, publishers, and those who supported and promoted them, recognized and appreciated. The most polemical, ideologically driven publications tended to appear in the cheapest and most accessible forms and formats in order to place them within the reach of the lower classes (for whom the price of even a relatively cheap book often equaled or exceeded a full week's wages), including the free or nearly free reactionary Cheap Repository Tracts and, later, Cobbett's *Political Register*, reduced to a single-page pamphlet in 1816 to evade the stiff taxes the government had imposed upon periodicals as a means of suppressing opposition. When the reactionary establishment sneeringly dubbed this cheap version "Cobbett's two-penny trash," Cobbett immediately seized upon the phrase, wearing it as a badge of honor much as the radical London publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton had done some two decades earlier when in 1794 he named his radical paper *Politics for the People; or, A Salmgundy for Swine* in response to Burke's notorious description of revolutionary Parisians as "the swinish multitude" in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Indeed, Eaton's contemporary, Thomas Spence, had followed in 1795 with his own paper, *Pigs' Meat; or, Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*. Both men were arrested and tried on charges of treason and sedition; to the delight (and public celebration) of all advocates of a free press and free public discourse, both were acquitted in a show trial that proved to be a humiliation for the government. And the notion of reading as a subversive activity began to mix with the actual and the virtual public function of the Romantic-era reader.

Not all reading bore such political implications, of course. People read for many reasons: for entertainment, for instruction, for intellectual and moral "improvement," and for purely vocational purposes. Reading offered opportunities for broadening one's horizons in many ways, and it is therefore instructive to notice how often in *literary* works the characters themselves report on their own reading programs, often remarking on what they have learned from their reading. Think, for

example, of the famous roster of (actual) gothic novels that provide the basis for animated conversation in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (wr. 1798; publ. 1818). Or consider the reading programs pursued in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) not just by Victor Frankenstein but also by his doomed fiancée Elizabeth Lavenza, his friend Henry Clerval, his explorer-adventurer rescuer Robert Walton, and even the poor tragic Creature himself.

Jürgen Habermas famously situated the rise of the "public sphere" amid the eighteenth-century milieu of the coffee-house and the periodical literature that assumed such prominence during the period. Indeed, the conversation that characterized both the public coffee-house culture and its more cloistered private form, the salon, furnished a model for that periodical literature, which encouraged not just reading but also responding, as is evident from the burgeoning columns of letters to the editor, letters that editors themselves were happy to furnish when actual correspondents failed to provide authentic letters.

By the Romantic period in Britain, the protocol of the letter-to-the-editor had become sufficiently familiar that journalists and other authors freely adapted it or turned it into a minor literary genre in its own right. But letters had in fact been the stuff of prose fiction in particular from the novel's beginnings a century earlier. While some title pages identified novels as histories, including Daniel Defoe's *Roxana, The Fortunate Mistress; or, a History of the Life and Vast Variety of Fortunes* (1724) and Henry Fielding's *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742), the other thread of the early English novel was epistolary. Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), although subtitled "The History of a Young Lady," is nevertheless a fictional conversation in print that is conducted through the medium of letters among Clarissa Harlowe and her circle. Richardson's earlier *Pamela* (1740), which Fielding burlesqued in *Shamela* (1741) and then built upon in *Joseph Andrews*, announced its epistolary nature unabashedly on its title page as "a Series of Familiar Letters." The format stuck. Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1792), for example, adopts the epistolary form to enable the author to advance the cause of post-revolutionary French republicanism by using letter-writing characters to "say" what was ostensibly hazardous for Smith to say in her own personal or authorial voice. With epistolary novels, and indeed the epistolary format generally, the author assumes an open and relatively unbiased reader whom the author then manipulates and subtly shapes through the rhetorical and intellectual give-and-take that is documented in the exchanges of letters.

Inherent in the Romantic-era dynamics of epistolary writing (whether in fiction or in the daily and periodical press) is the concept of conversation – of a dialogue that possesses self-reflexively public aspects even when it is conducted behind a screen of ostensible privacy or limited circulation. Reading, and then responding to what one reads by means of a letter that others, in turn, read (and perhaps respond to in turn), models one sort of the public exchange that the reactionary forces in any culture typically target as objectionable, if only because the more people are permitted to "talk," the more likely they are to do so – in ever greater numbers. The fear among reactionary elements of culture is that reading, predicated as it is upon literacy, may

destabilize the existing structure of things by subjecting it to scrutiny by “uninitiated” commentators. Hence the notion of “inoculating” readers against the “contagion” or “poison” of oppositional opinions.

### The Romantic Reader and Modern Theory

In 1968 Roland Barthes famously announced “the death of the author,” putting a poststructuralist twist on a notion whose “modern” germ may be traced back to “New Criticism” in the United States and, slightly earlier, to the Russian Formalists. The latter demanded that the analysis of poetry (in particular) be conducted in an essentially scientific, almost clinical, language that largely stripped literary works of any inherent cultural, historical, and psychological content or “coding.” Naturally, the author was among these excluded elements, along with accompanying conceptions of “authorial intent” and the like, an exclusion with which the New Critics largely agreed. For both groups, the literary “work” (and for both groups it was generally a *poem*) was to be assessed as a constellation of “devices” of physical (poetic) “craft” deployed upon the social and linguistic “map” of the individual reader’s consciousness. Late twentieth-century literary and cultural theory encountered in the poststructural movement called deconstruction (and associated especially with Jacques Derrida) the proposition that any relations that might be thought to exist between language and literally *any* thing that exists outside language are unreliable at best. Derrida’s position itself has roots in Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, and (still earlier) in Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose *Hermeneutics and Criticism* (1838) attempted to separate “hermeneutics” and “criticism” by regarding the objective of the former as determining the *meaning* of discourse and the latter as determining the *truth* of discourse. For Derrida, the modern (and principally Western European) penchant for searching for an immanent (typically philosophical) “Truth” that lies *outside* the field of discourse itself is inherently both old-fashioned (Derrida calls it “nostalgic”) and futile. Like Ferdinand de Saussure before him, Derrida argued that the relations between word (“signifier”) and concept (“signified”) are arbitrary rather than determinate, and that the “meaning” of any word (or signifier) emerges not from any inherent “meaning” but rather from the word’s interaction with all other words (or signifiers) in that language, viewed as a system. This fundamental principle informs Barthes’s declaration that “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. . . . the birth of the reader must be the death of the Author” (148). What Barthes and others propose is at once both a “Romantic” and an anti-“Romantic” formulation: it empowers the individual reader and makes her or him both the repository *and the source* of “meaning,” while simultaneously removing the author as “agent” and reassigning her or him the semi-Platonic role of disengaged and “automatic” intermediary between the artifact and the “divine” vision that inspires it. Already

in 1805 Schleiermacher had questioned the sanctity of Romantic-era ideals about the “originality” of the individual author: “Consider to what extent a number of writers can be viewed as one,” he wrote, because any language usage “has its basis more in the culture where the language is spoken than in the individuality of the writer” (73, 76).

While Barthes was eliminating the author, “reader-response criticism” (and its principal proponent, Wolfgang Iser) declared that “meaning” is generated by the reader’s interaction with the text: interpretation involves any given reader “extracting” from a text a set of “meanings” (or signifieds) that reflect her or his *own* cultural and intellectual conditions more than they represent (or objectify) any comparable set of “meanings” (or signifieds) that an *author* has embedded there. It is a matter of emphasis and of focus – not the “author” but the reader or decoder. There is, ironically, an almost Platonic circularity (and idealism) to this formulation, which decentralizes the author and renders her or him not an “original” genius at all but rather a largely unengaged “mediator” (or “medium,” or “intermediary”) in a transaction involving the reader and an abstract Truth or content. Perhaps influenced more than they wished to admit by second-hand or even first-hand knowledge of the conceptions of “reader” and “reading” that were being articulated by contemporaries such as Schleiermacher, the British Romantics exhibit a surprising ambivalence about the extent to which “genius” is ever truly “original.” This may be one reason why there was such interest during the period in “unlettered” poets and writers (Ann Yearsley, John Clare, John Jones, and countless other “rural Miltons”), whose skill belied received notions about the poet’s calling and status.

Attuned to the dynamics of readers and reading, Percy Bysshe Shelley distinguished *numerous* virtual readerships among the contemporary reading public. While he asserted that his esoteric work *Prometheus Unbound* lay beyond the capacities (and the generosity) of the great majority of his contemporaries (he addressed the great lyrical drama to later generations), he envisioned another more gritty readership for the overtly political verse written in a “popular” idiom that he called an “exoteric” poetry and that parallels the incendiary verse published in the later Regency radical press. No less than More, Shelley knew how to adopt and adapt popular literary forms in service to an ideological agenda. Indeed, Shelley’s ideological agenda is apparent, largely unchanged, throughout his oeuvre and virtually from start to finish, which reflects the consistency of both his social and philosophical vision and his understanding of the ways in which to write for multiple readerships – and indeed to *market* those writings most effectively to pre-targeted audiences (see Behrendt).

Another aspect of Romantic-era empowerment of the reader (which always implies decentralizing and even canceling out the author and her or his “author”-ity) appears in the many “fragments” that pepper the literary scene. Coleridge’s two famous fragments, for example, “Kubla Khan” and “Christabel,” demonstrate a faith in the savvy reader’s ability to follow textual hints through to conclusions that the poet leaves unstated. “Kubla Khan,” whose ostensibly fragmentary status is advertised in the poem’s subtitle and elaborated in the prose

preface, proves to be a *complete* three-level demonstration of human inability to sustain a paradisaic, visionary state in the face of the interruptions of a mundane world that is inherently inhospitable to “vision.” The poem, together with its preface and full title, illustrates the intellectual and philosophical point that is its subject. In an analogous fashion, “Christabel” – which its author likewise labels a fragment – provides enough hints in its images, allusions, and echoes of pseudo-chivalric *formulae* to enable the sophisticated reader to “finish” the tale that the poet claims to have left incomplete.

William Wordsworth offers an even better, if somewhat surprising, example of reader empowerment. In “Simon Lee” from the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth’s narrator relates his encounter with the frail old man whose feebleness renders him incapable of severing an old root at which he is laboring and which the narrator parts with a single stroke. In the midst of his tale, the narrator says,

My gentle reader, I perceive  
 How patiently you’ve waited,  
 And I’m afraid that you expect  
 Some tale will be related.

O reader! had you in your mind  
 Such stories as silent thought can bring,  
 O gentle reader! you would find  
 A tale in every thing.  
 What more I have to say is short,  
 I hope you’ll kindly take it;  
 It is no tale, but should you think,  
 Perhaps a tale you’ll make it. (70–80)

This passage possesses an element of multistability that may strike us as profoundly “modern” in its dissolution of the arbitrary boundaries that usually separate author, reader, and tale. Wordsworth assigns to his reader the responsibility for determining the signified of which the poem’s narrative tale is the apparent signifier. In doing so, he makes the reader his partner in the act of joint activity that Jean-Paul Sartre called “directed creation”: when it comes to the “meaning(s)” of any work, it is the reader’s responsibility to bring it (them) into being: “[t]he reader must invent them all in a continual exceeding of the written thing. To be sure, the author guides him, but all he does is guide him.” So while on the one hand “the literary object has no other substance than the reader’s subjectivity,” on the other hand

the words are there like traps to arouse our feelings and to reflect them toward us. Each word is a path of transcendence; it shapes our feelings, names them, and attributes them to an imaginary personage who takes it upon himself to live them for us and who has no other substance than these borrowed passions; he confers objects, perspectives, and a horizon upon them. (Sartre 45)

The “Romantic reader” is, from this perspective, both an agent and an object in a process that is necessarily culturally mediated; the “Romantic text” is itself, then, also a sort of “moving target” within a complex and ultimately interactive process. Art itself is, as Tilottama Rajan writes, “a dialogue between illusion and its deconstruction” that exists “in all works that are reflexively concerned with their own nature as signifying structures” (*Dark Interpreter* 261–262).

Rajan has subsequently suggested that “in transforming the reader from recipient to supplement, the author renounces his authority over the reader” (*Supplement of Reading* 2). During the Romantic period, she argues, authors began both to imagine *and to stage* relationships with their readers that were fundamentally different from those to which earlier writers (and readers) had become accustomed. “By including characterized readers and staging scenes of reading,” Rajan writes, “they create a relationship with speaker, audience, and situation, and ask us to consider not simply the structure of signs but also the life of signs in literary communities and in psychic life” (*Supplement* 11). What is most important here, and what has become increasingly important in the wake of poststructuralist theory, is the deliberate shifting of agency away from an originating author and toward, even onto, a co-producing (or co-performing) reader. “Originality,” which was so important to eighteenth-century aesthetics, is thus rendered not private, personal, and unique but, instead, public, interpersonal, and communal. The shift in the balance of public social and political power that the privileged classes feared in the wake of the French Revolution finds a corollary in the shift of power that is facilitated by the spread of literacy and the access to a public “voice” that comes with it.

If, as Richardson and others have argued, reactionary (or simply very cautious) writers treated the “lower orders” with an infantilizing condescension to “teach” them to be compliant rather than assertive, other writers clearly wanted to expose that meddlesome intermediary to rid the public discourse of his or her presence and influence. This was Wordsworth’s objective, as is evident from his assertion in the Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* that readers should judge for themselves whether the poems are “poetry” or not, and should not be misled by “Critics” who would use their “authority” to rob those readers of their liberty to read and decide for themselves, trusting instead to their own innate “judgment” and to their own experience of prior acts of reading. Indeed, poststructuralist reassessments (or reformulations) of a hermeneutic of reading necessarily grapple with the decidedly “modern” notion of the reader’s need to “find” herself or himself both through *and in* any given text (“text” in the expansive sense in which Barthes describes it in “From Work to Text”), both as an individual entity (if there is any longer such a thing) and in terms of her or his difference from others. As Romantic aesthetics repeatedly suggests, the process is inescapably ongoing; it is never finished. This is why when Keats announces at the beginning of *Endymion* (1818) that “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,” he immediately continues with the declaration (separated from the main clause only by a colon) that “its loveliness *increases*” (1–2; my emphasis). Any aesthetic object – any literary work, for example, that is published and read – *increases* in whatever qualities we may choose to name precisely because more and more



readers come to it, participate in its co-creation (its realization or “performance”) in their own time, and are in some fashion altered by this experience.

Keats is stating from one perspective what T. S. Eliot states from another a century later when he claims that the creation and publication of every work alters in some fashion, even if only minutely, the entire existing order of art. For Eliot, as for theorists of reading and art nearly a century after him, what matters is not the author but rather the art – and indeed “the artistic process,” since “the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (44, 49, 47). For Britons of the Romantic era, what it came down to was simply this: reading was a mechanism, a vehicle, for expanding one’s horizons, intellectually, socially, politically, economically, spiritually, and aesthetically. To be a *reader* was to be a participant in cultural change, rather than a bystander; to be active, not passive, in both what one was and in what one was becoming. Everyone understood this, and everyone proceeded accordingly. It is no accident that the boom in reading (Jackson 9) that coincided with the Romantic era accompanied the three great revolutions that ushered in the Romantic era itself, the Industrial, the American, and the French. Each of these in its own way was about liberty, self-determination, and the physical and cultural means for achieving them. Books, it turned out, were no less powerful arms than guns and sabers – and nor were readers less a force than armies and navies.

## Conclusion

In a broad sense, then, while eighteenth-century readers were implicitly encouraged to regard their reading as a community-building activity founded upon an essentially egalitarian conversational model, by the later Romantic period the paradigm had shifted dramatically. After the turn of the century, readers became increasingly aware of the impossibility of entering that sort of “community” in a materialist, capitalist culture that implicitly placed citizens in competition with one another, splitting rather than uniting them in any sort of common cause. For these readers at the beginning of the modern era, reading provided a means of learning (1) *who* they are; (2) how and why they in fact constitute fundamentally different and separate communities; and (3) how to take action in creating change and addressing issues of class. The growing power and influence of the periodical press during the Regency went hand in hand with publishers’ efforts “to intimate to their readers extraordinary powers of mind to be realized in the act of reading itself” (Klancher 15). Printed pages began to be “readers” in that sense of texts that aim to teach one how to “read.” There were more and more periodicals, ranging from essentially “literary” periodicals to radical political ones (for example, Wooler’s *Black Dwarf*), along with other ideologically driven ones, such as the *Saturday Magazine* (sponsored by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) and the SDUK’s *Penny Magazine*. All of these began to train their readers in how to “process” the signs and symbols of cultural converse. Moreover, they empowered readers to begin to use those signs and symbols themselves to define themselves in terms of class relationships and in the process to

lay out the groundwork for their own oppositional rhetoric. The practical consequence of this empowerment was the virtual elimination of the power of church, state, or party wholly to silence dissident discourse. It is at precisely this sort of democratization of (reading) experience that all “reform,” all social activism, ultimately aims, because it resituates both authority and agency in a self-sufficient and engaged “reader,” rather than in an elitist and authoritarian “top-down” model of perception, cognition, and action. This alteration at the very foundational level of social activity was one of the Romantic era’s greatest achievements.

See AUTHOR; CLASS; PERIODICALS; VISUAL CULTURE.

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# Poetics

*Jacqueline Labbe*

Poetics has been central to the academic and cultural understanding of Romanticism. From the nineteenth century onwards, as the writing of the decades on either side of the turn of the eighteenth century came under increasing scrutiny, readers have found the poetry of this period especially distinctive. The Victorian interest in Wordsworth, for instance, identified a specific style of writing primarily concerned with constructing the subject through a merging of the internal structures of Memory with an external, revived Nature. Later formulations found meaning in, for example, John Keats's engagement with truth and beauty; Byron's with angry satire; Percy Bysshe Shelley's with a disembodied, almost ethereal politics; Samuel Taylor Coleridge's with a philosophy of conversational poetry; William Blake's with a countercultural disregard for convention. In the last few decades, this has in turn been enhanced by a new receptiveness to working-class poetry (especially John Clare) and that by women (especially Anna Letitia Barbauld, Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, Mary Robinson, and Charlotte Smith). This opening of the canon has encouraged a more historically nuanced investigation of poetics that has begun to eliminate some of the class- and gender-bound barriers formerly erected within the scholarship (see, for instance, Curran, Fulford, Labbe, Landry, Wolfson). In thinking about Romantic poetics, then, it is necessary to think about how poetry has been read, and why it has been read. The academic mode of supposed objective evaluation that developed in the late nineteenth century, based on an understanding of desirable aesthetic qualities, was preceded by a century's worth of the consideration of the components of poetry and the process by which *good* poetry could be distinguished from *bad*. Romantic-period critics of poetry were also, commonly, poets; their theories of poetry arose from their efforts at composition, and were embodied by the poetry itself. As this essay will show, the Romantic period drew on and engaged with a

debate about the value of rules versus the value of untaught genius, and subsequent approaches to Romantic poetics often danced to variations on this theme. However, studies of Romantic poetics in the early twenty-first century are often as much about interpretations of the process of Romantic poets reading and writing their culture as they are about the art of poetics. In this way, readers and scholars seek to understand Romantic poetics through a rather complex weaving of art and artist.<sup>1</sup>

The art of poetry in the Romantic period has attracted critical attention since the period itself. Wordsworth's familiar question, "What is a Poet?," stands in for a number of attempts to understand what makes verse poetic, what distinguishes the true genius from the hack, what differentiates poetry from doggerel. Throughout the eighteenth century, writers debate the issue, seeking to define poetry and its essential elements, and by extension the traits of the person most well equipped to elevate mere versifying to the status of Art. In *The Battle of the Poets: An Heroick Poem in Two Cantos* (1725), the anonymous author ranges camps of poetry in a mock-epic battle for the laurel crown. Phoebus Apollo, having grown tired of "the lust of Int'rest, and the Trade of Song; . . . the jilting Tricks that Fortune play'd, . . . [and] the partial Jumble Chance had made," sees poetry as debased by a turn to the commercial that would have appalled Dryden (3). He calls the poets to war in search of a true champion, and the fight commences in a confusion of poetic weapons:

Satyrs, Epistles, Verses to the Fair;  
Songs, Epigrams, and Plays, are thrown in Air:  
Translations, Elegies, the Epick Strain,  
Are made the Sport of Winds, and hide the Plain.  
Some are made stronger than they were before,  
And some are forc'd to fall, to rise no more. (10)

The poem, itself a satire, points to the desire to hold poetry to high standards, not just of composition, but of moral and artistic worth. The figure on whose power and significance the poem dwells is a critic, sharp-eyed and wide-ranging, who is permitted to cross from camp to camp in search of quality that transcends devotion to politics, personal vanity, or indebtedness to older models. He does not find this figure, and the poem ends with Apollo making an arbitrary choice of winner, supported neither by the critics nor by the muses. This indeterminate battle nonetheless suggests that concerns over poetic integrity, and the question "What is a Poet?," are not particular to the Romantic period but also engage the eighteenth century at large.

### Eighteenth-Century Interventions

For instance, Edward Bysshe's *The Art of English Poetry*, which went through multiple editions between 1708 and 1762, premises that the poet has qualities both natural and acquired. This treatise offers "Rules for making Verses, and a Dictionary of Rhymes,

which are the mechanick Tools of a Poet” (iv), but it also notes that the true Poet does not simply, and blindly, follow the rules of others; although true poetry requires sense, propriety, elevation of thought, and purity of diction, these operate as the parts of poetry only. The Poet is born such, and yet even the true Poet needs rules and tools to realize and design the “true Genius of Poetry” (v): “can we not better judge by a Piece of Painting, how beautifully Colours may be dispos’d; than by seeing the same several Colours scatter’d without Design on a Table?” (iv). For Bysshe, Rules, as extracted from existing poetic practice and as derived from previous poetic masters, furnish the poet with the necessary arms, to use the metaphor of *The Battle of the Poets*. Bysshe’s concentration on rules and forms characterizes the guides that follow and complement his as the century progresses. Charles Gildon’s *The Complete Art of Poetry* (1718) presents poetry as the “Mother of all Learning” (n.p.). Reflecting that attention to the rules of poetry has come to signify “criticism” (“Instruction in this Kind . . . [is] branded with the unpopular Name of *Criticism*, which by the Ignorant Writers in Vogue, has been misrepresented as an *ill-natur’d* Thing” [n.p.]), Gildon sees this querulism as a problem that debases poetry, which has come to lack the necessary guiding principles that distinguish it from other, lesser forms. He offers “*particular Rules* of every sort of Poetry . . . as disencumber’d from Terms of Arts” as possible – that is, he seeks to avoid jargon and instead privileges plain speaking (n.p.). Gildon holds up Bysshe’s text as an example of a hide-bound devotion to “Rules for the *Structure* of an *English* verse,” whereas his text offers images and topics for poetry, suitable to stoke Imagination’s “Ethereal Fire” (n.p.). Gildon’s title-page epigraph, however, is telling: “Why is He honour’d with a Poet’s Name, / Who neither knows, nor wou’d observe a Rule?” Both Bysshe and Gildon, then, while acknowledging the need for a non-specified Genius, see that Genius as only brought to create true poetry through an understanding of poetic tradition and knowledge of formal rules.

Bysshe and Gildon address their books to the true poet who aspires to write the poetry of genius. For them, such poetry can only emerge once rules, forms, and examples have been internalized within the imagination. Rules themselves will not elicit real poetry, but neither will genius unassisted by a knowledge of poetry’s art. As the century progresses, similar volumes appear, but the emphasis on genius begins to be subordinated to the importance of observing rules. In *The Beauties of Poetry Display’d. Containing observations on the different species of poetry, and the rules of English versification* (1757), poetry is presented as an expression of prayer and gratitude to “the Divinity,” and as a means to a moral education. It arises from its rules: “[e]very Species of Poetry has its Rules, which, being founded on Nature, must be observed by everyone who would excel in this agreeable Art; we shall therefore consider each Species in particular, and afterward add the principal Rules relating to English Versification” (iv). This treatise presents poetry as inevitable once the rules are learned; genius is not a necessary corollary, since poetry, as a subsidiary of Nature, will grow naturally if the right conditions are present: that is, if the rules are correctly observed. Poetry, as a form of Nature and as an Art, occupies a curiously hybrid space, but this does not trouble the anonymous author for whom true poetry does not “deviate from [its] original intention” (iv). The enchantment of rules also

permeates the Circle of the Sciences' regular publications concerning poetry, such as *The Art of Poetry on a New Plan* (1762) and *Poetry Made Familiar and Easy to Young Gentlemen and Ladies* (1769), although in these texts genius is once again a valued addition. In the first text, poetry is presented as the original science, while its language is elevated above the "common language" (ii). Its necessary elements are "enthusiasm," "fertility of invention," "sallies of imagination, lofty ideas, noble sentiments, bold and imaginative expressions, harmony of numbers, and indeed that natural love of the grand, sublime, and marvellous, which are the essential characteristics of a good poet" (ii–iii). Genius may be embedded in these "essential characteristics," but what stands out is the need for "harmony of numbers" although, the text hastens to add, "the harmony of words" without a just appreciation of the underlying design resembles nothing so much as the eunuch who "sacrifice[s his] manhood for a voice" (vi). *Poetry Made Familiar and Easy* reiterates that one must be born a Poet, and that not only Poetry, but also Genius, Sense, and Imagination are derived from Nature. The true Poet "is distinguished by a Fruitfulness of Invention, a lively Imagination tempered by a solid Judgment, a Nobleness of Sentiments and Ideas, and a bold, lofty, and figurative Manner of Expression. . . . [H]e forms a Design or Plan, by which every Verse is directed to a certain End, and each has a just Dependence on the other" (8). Thus order and a kind of organic form are the point and the identifier of true poetry, and thus Poetic Genius can be "assisted by proper Rules and Directions" (9).

These handbooks agree on one overarching principle: that true poetry derives from a thorough understanding and application of rules. Genius runs a close second, but Genius without an adherence to rules remains in a rude and unformed state. Poetry resides in Nature, and Nature observes natural rules and natural law. Hugh Blair's highly influential *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) begins to reverse the hierarchy with its distinction between prose and poetry: "many subjects of Poetry may not be feigned; as where the Poet describes objects which actually exist, or pours forth the real sentiments of his own heart" (Lecture XXXVIII, 104). The Poet, drawing on Imagination and the Passions (which are themselves "enlivened imagination" [104]), seeks to "please, and move" readers, and by pleasing and moving, may also instruct, indirectly, bringing readers along on a wave of poetry. Blair identifies the "most common" way to achieve this: "this language of Passion, or Imagination, is formed . . . into regular numbers" (105). Blair, then, may argue the point more subtly than Bysshe, but his Lectures, validated as they are by his academic position as Professor of Rhetoric at the ancient University of Edinburgh and one of the leaders of the Scottish Enlightenment, demonstrate the enduring association between true poetry and the true poet, and the rules and traditional forms of poetry. Whereas the earlier texts are directed at general readers and interested parties, Blair's lectures establish an institutional approach to the study and composition of poetry. The diverse efforts before his Lectures, however, show that poetics was a live issue for eighteenth-century writers, complemented by the variety of dictionaries, encyclopedias, collections, and companions that offered more bite-sized definitions and exemplars. The conclusion that poetry could be understood if one mastered its



constituent parts accompanies an at times perfunctory gesture toward the need for Genius. Blair's text, then, also institutionalizes the need for Genius to enliven and energize the rules and numbers of poetry.

### Romantic-Period Theories

Disquisitions on the art of poetry do not end with Blair; however, they begin to reveal a dissatisfaction with a settled adherence to the rule of rules. In *The Art of Poetry, According to the Latest Improvements. A Poem* (1797), "sir Simon Swan," an indolent baronet, provides the "editor" Joseph Fawcett with a new understanding of how to get ahead in the world of poetry in the 1790s ("the path to poetical celebrity" [vi]). This world has become completely in thrall to rules and forms, and expects nothing less than full adherence to established taste:

Let letter'd Toil her sinews chiefly strain,  
 Faults to escape, not beauties to attain.  
 . . .  
 Careless of raptures then, correctly write:  
 The dullest work, if well-revis'd, is wit.  
 . . .  
 To thee thy Muse shall affluent laurels bring,  
 If up she mount on *mathematic* wing.  
 . . .  
 A grace to forms, devoid of grace, impart,  
 Suit technic knowledge to the polish'd throng. (1, 2, 8, 9)

The true poet is now distinguished completely by an adherence to form. Hence, if writing sentimental poetry "let sorrows shade the lay . . . In each smooth line, harmoniously complain" (3). "Polite" poetry, to be successful, "one peaceful tenour must the numbers keep, / And sweetly lull [readers] into classic sleep" (5). Only the "harsh, coarse horror of a GERMAN muse" can be allowed to "agitate the gentle throng" (10). The poet is chiefly distinguished by his wealth, class position, and idleness: "whose path through life is, like his numbers, smooth" and who "calmly moulds his strains," with the help of a compliant press, printer, and stationer, into a "super-fine" product complete with illustrations "to aid the Muse's voice" (12, 13, 14). Fawcett's satire updates *The Battle of the Poets* to imply that the battle has been lost – or rather, that poets themselves have ceded their ground to the poetasters. In *The Art of Poetry*, art (that is, technique: strict attention to the rules) has triumphed. Given the continued popularity of texts such as those described above, the title of this poem seems designed to provide an update on earlier treatises that insisted on the need for true poetry to conform to preexisting rules. Fawcett's successful poet, of course, acts as a cautionary figure: in its satirical elevation of fashion and superficial application of rules and form, the poem makes plain that poetic genius (rather than poetical celebrity) is expressed through difference, not conformity, through what

goes on in a poem besides the observation of rules. The poem's critical eye on the status quo, and Fawcett's reputation as a liberal social commentator (his earlier poem *The Art of War* was widely admired), are reinforced by association: the poem's printer, Joseph Johnson, was by 1797 well established as a radical commentator on current events.

That Fawcett matches *The Art of Poetry* with *The Art of War* suggests the importance that debates about the nature and content of poetry maintained in the Romantic period. The conventional understanding of poetics in the period, however, overlooks its indebtedness to a century's worth of interest in the question. Why is the idea that a new poetics distinguishes the period so pervasive? Rather than being new, poetics in the period takes on the terms that have been making the rounds for decades. Fawcett's poem brings to the fore the worry that poetry might be, like so much else, a victim of a consumer society, transformed into an object and valued chiefly for its ornamental function: "A beauteous shape when all the letters wear, / More beauteous still the words and thoughts appear: / And when fine writing and fine paper join, / Each reader deems the writing super-fine!" (13). There is nothing about Genius in Fawcett's poem except for its casual dismissal in the Advertisement:

I expressed my own opinion of the requisites for acquiring the honours of a poet, with the warmth of one eager to recommend himself to the patronage of so great, and the esteem of so wise a man; when, judge, gentle reader, of my surprise, to perceive his features gradually relaxing into a smile as I went on, and, by the time I had made an end of my enthusiastic effusion, his sides actually began to shake. . . . [My] sentiments upon the subject in question were exceedingly obsolete. (vi)

When Wordsworth writes in his own Advertisement to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, one year later, of "poetic pleasure," natural human passions, and a "long continued intercourse with the best models of composition," he demonstrates his familiarity with the terms of the poetics debate (i, iii). The continued familiarity of Wordsworth's writing, coupled with the historical obscurity of Fawcett and his predecessors, creates a situation wherein Wordsworth's Advertisement, and subsequent Prefaces, can be seen as originary rather than contributory. Romantic-period poetics, with its points that poetry may be learned through judicious reading, but that the Poet still stands out from the crowd of readers as a unique Genius; that poetry-making emerges from a conditioned subjectivity (the "right stuff") that is itself sparked by a familiarity with, to use Wordsworth's phrase, "elder writers" (iii); and that form and function are engaged in an eternal dialogue demonstrate an investment in historical forms and a complementary move to develop and evolve those forms.

The period is unusually interested in formal distinctions, formal mergers, and formal innovation. From Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784, and expanded in later editions) through the *Lyrical Ballads* (also with variant later editions) to Scott's verse romances, new forms of poetic mixing showed how poetry could be made new

by a judicious alchemy of the old. All the songs, odes, sonnets, epistles, epics, and so forth showed the continuing interest in mastering and reinvigorating traditional forms (not to mention the Romantic-period vogue for volumes such as *Bagatelles: Or miscellaneous productions; consisting of original poetry, and translations*, 1795; *The British Jester; a collection of bon mots, witty stories, and anecdotes; to which are added humourous poetry, and toasts and sentiments*, c.1800; *The poets jests, or, mirth in abundance*, c.1790; *The Olio: being a collection of essays, dialogues, letters, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, Pieces of Poetry, Parodies, Bon Mots, Epigrams . . .*, 1792). And the distance between “high” and “low” forms of poetry was reduced when tales of mad mothers and suicides appeared in ballads, broadsides, and collections of “true” poetry – all of which is to say that the period was as unsure about what constituted “true” poetry as any of the preceding decades. The terms of the debate may have widened, as invitations to think about the nature of poetry began to be issued by the poets themselves: Charlotte Smith’s and William Wordsworth’s prefaces; Anna Seward’s and William Lisle Bowles’s anxiety to differentiate their sonnets from Smith’s; Mary Robinson’s, Byron’s, and Letitia Landon’s self-aware and deliberate theatricalizations of their poetic personae; Coleridge’s and Keats’s interest in the possibilities of poetic “notes to self.” Self-reflexivity, often described as key to Romantic-period poetry’s innovations, develops from this kind of implied conversation with the reader via the poetry. Self-reflexivity – where the poem seems to reflect on its own poetic state and embeds within its tone, imagery, and plot a subjectivity that arises from and is integral to the poem itself – in many ways transfers the debate about the art of poetry *to* the poem. The poem itself enacts its state of being – its poetics. The point of the poem *is* the poem; it creates a self-ness through poetry, through the histories and the memories the poem realizes. This is an important poetic development, but it arises from and is contingent upon an approach to poetry that recognizes and seeks to clarify its constituent parts before reassembling them. Thus new and old intermix, at levels of composition and expectation.

Continuity emerges within such widened parameters. When Blake provides illustrative plates to Robert Blair’s 1743 poem *The Grave*, the contemporaneity of the poem is suggested. But when Keats’s “Ode on Melancholy” (1820) rehearses not only the imagery but also some of the nihilism of the Graveyard School, the latter poet’s Romantic poetics coincides with its earlier incarnation on a formal and a thematic level. Similarly, when Thomas Gray elegizes unheralded youth in his “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1751), we see not only some of the seeds of Smith’s sonnets but also the forerunner of Felicia Hemans’s *Records of Woman* (1828), which take as their subject many “heart[s] once pregnant with celestial fire; / Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway’d, / Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre” (Gray, “Elegy” 46–48). And yet Smith, Keats, and Hemans are not simply fashioning like from like; they are developing forms of introspection, self-regard, and historicizing that make new art out of old, a recombinant poetics whose nightmare avatar is Mary Shelley’s Creature and whose heir in terms of available metaphor crosses species entirely: Herman Melville’s White Whale (*Moby-Dick*, 1851).

## Locating Romantic Poetry

The inventiveness of Romantic-period poetry thus depends on an understanding of and an engagement with preexisting debates and conclusions about poetics. The question, “What is a Poem?,” evolves from firmer, perhaps more pedagogical explorations of “the Art of Poetry.” By the end of the eighteenth century, such established convention had become something not simply to reject or overturn, but rather to revisit, to explore anew. Romantic poetics is thus partly about the new, partly about fashioning the new from the old, and partly about the longevity and continuing viability of tradition. The attraction of new forms of expression pulls at one part of society, while the reassurance of older forms pulls at another. Formal exploration, moreover, is matched by another, more spatial variety: Romantic poetry’s interest in location and geographies. Again, this is not unique to the period; it takes up the slack left by the loco-descriptive and the country-house poem, for instance. Readers have continually been struck, however, by what has been seen as a transformation of space (mere location) to place (specific localities, meaningful because they are specific), and a transferral of emphasis from description to meaning inflected by forms of subjective response. Whether the Lakes of Wordsworth, the South Downs of Smith, the London of Blake and Robinson, the Scotland of Scott, the Wales of Iolo Morganwg, the Ireland of Thomas Moore, or the East of Byron, localities are as much about the speaker of the poems as they are about specific landscape features. Such poems are written as pathways to personalized identities of the poets, avenues leading to introspection and authentic self-expression. The poets make use of place to suggest modes and models of self-development. The overall force of such poems is to establish for readers a kind of familiarity: by coming to know the locale, we come to know the speaker – and by extension the poet, in poems that concentrate on (as Blair phrased it) “objects which actually exist, or . . . the real sentiments of [the poet’s] own heart” (104). To this may be added that such a stance may also feign the real: the concentration on actual locations obscuring the poet’s substitution of speaker for Self.

A poetics of memory infuses such evocations of place. Smith’s sonnets to the River Arun, the South Downs, her family seat of Bignor Park, and her blank-verse longings for a lost childhood in Nature that underpin *The Emigrants* (1793) and *Beachy Head* (1807), for instance, institute the Romantic-period sense of the imaginative powers of localities. In “Sonnet V: To the South Downs,” her contrast between her past (“once a happy child”) and her present (“this sad breast”) is dependent on the “hills below’d” that remain constant and, as such, are a constant reminder of what has been lost (1, 6, 5). This is complemented by the river itself, detached from its poetic heritage (it cannot supply “one kind Lethean cup” [11]) and instead merely carrying out its natural imperative to flow to the sea. The South Downs provide for the speaker the necessary counterpoint to her own changed, yet unchanging, circumstances: no longer oblivious to the world of care, she sees in her surroundings the lost world of peaceful “oblivion” (14). It matters, in this kind of self-presentation, that

the speaker can draw such contrasts, just as it matters, in her last sonnet (that is, the sonnet placed last in *Elegiac Sonnets*, thus capping the collection just as “Tintern Abbey” caps *Lyrical Ballads*), that “these old paternal trees” can withstand “the threaten’d storm” whereas the speaker is unable to: “Not for me / Return those rosy hours which *here* I used to see!” (“Sonnet XCII: Written at Bignor Park, in Sussex, in August, 1799” 4, 5, 13–14; emphasis added). The speaker needs to be at a specific place at a specific time so that “Memory, with faithful pencil, [can draw] / The contrast” (“Beachy Head” p. 163): memory is sparked by place.

Smith’s association of memory, place, and a poetics of contrast informs a Romantic emphasis on such personalized connections between self and locality. While Wordsworth is often discussed as the founder of such a memory-based poetics, he follows Smith’s example to the letter. He also, however, uses place to establish what might be called future memory: that is, he memorializes places so that, in the future, the place might serve as a memorial of the personae he utilizes. Such an action is evident in “Poems on the Naming of Places,” first included in the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* and later expanded, which create, through poetry, an association between person and place that results in “naming,” an Adamic act that draws place into the human community. In “There is an Eminence” (1800), a hill that catches the last gleams of the “setting sun,” and that, contra Smith, “send[s] / Its own deep quiet to restore our hearts,” is rendered a familiar aspect of the scene “we can behold . . . from our orchard-seat” (2, 7–8, 3). The inclusive “we” draws in the reader, who is invited to share the view and in that way occupy the same space as the speaker. When “she who dwells with me” in full “communion” “to the lonely Summit . . . giv[es] my Name,” the softened reader is drawn into the activity (14, 15, 17). That no actual “name” is forthcoming – the poem is both deeply familiarized and highly non-specific – perhaps gives some sense of the underlying imposition of the naming act of the poem, but the poem itself testifies to a newly created locality, an Eminence that is no longer nameless even if it is still rather nebulous. Similarly, in “There is a little unpretending Rill” (1820), Wordsworth again presents a speaker who inhabits a locality made to be important by virtue of the connections it creates among its human inhabitants. Like the Arun, the rill itself “furrow[s] its shallow way with dubious will” – that is, the path it follows is not actively chosen, an act of will, but merely *where it goes* (5). However, unlike the Arun, whose natural imperative stands as a marker of loss, this “little unpretending Rill,” for the speaker, comes to represent a moment of human connection, and hence continually realizes that connection: “The immortal Spirit of one happy day / Lingers beside that Rill, in vision clear” (13–14). Just as Smith’s poetics of a specific place reiterates what has been lost, so too Wordsworth’s equivalent poetics reminds him of what is continually available. It is necessary that the poets place themselves and their poems within a familiarized geographical space; it is necessary that memory, secured through the mnemonic devices of rivers, hills, and trees that are known, enlivens and personalizes those known places. The poets anchor a specific kind of persona in such spaces, one that is presented as itself knowable through the evocation of knowable localities. Underlying such acts of familiarization, one might query the feasibility of such

continual returns to place; it is not impossible to unpick their sincerity topoi. Yet poets such as Smith and Wordsworth clearly saw currency, artistic, imaginative, and perhaps commercial, in such stances, and perfected them through repeated use.

Locality, however, was not confined to this kind of personalized use. Poets such as Blake, Coleridge, and Robinson used generalized urban settings as metaphors. London came to stand for a number of states of mind and body. Blake's "London" (*Songs of Experience*, 1794) famously creates images that link site with symbol: "chartered street" and "chartered Thames," "[I] mark in every face I meet / Marks of weakness, marks of woe" (1, 2, 3–4). Moreover, "London" chimes with a contrast evident throughout the century, that the city, or urban space in general, encourages degraded human behavior ("mind-forg'd manacles" 8). Coleridge's reference in "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison" (1800) to Charles Lamb "pin[ing] / And hunger [ing] after nature many a year / In the great city pent, winning thy way, / With sad yet unbowed soul, through evil and pain / And strange calamity" clearly portrays "evil," "pain," and "calamity" as conditions of residing in the "pent" city (despite Lamb's own avowed preference for city life; 11–15). This is the same locality in which Robinson's "January, 1795" (1795) is set: "Pavements slip'ry; People Sneezing; / Lords in ermine, beggars freezing; / Nobles, scarce the Wretched heeding; / Gallant Soldiers – fighting! – bleeding!" (1–4). This is Blake's London as well, a city of separated populations and uninterested leaders. The poem's sparse style uses rhythm to suggest the pace, and the tendency to rush past unpleasant spectacles, that inform urban life. It makes use of the metaphorical nature of the urban, while also supplying a series of images that, like Wordsworth's Rill, establish a "vision clear." Where Coleridge, however, and to a certain extent Blake, present the city as itself the cause of suffering, Robinson draws attention to place as *inhabited* space. In "London's Summer Morning" (1800), the city is not vicious, although neither is it interested in anything but commerce and its own activities (in this way, resembling Smith's river following its natural imperative). The "poor poet [who] wakes from busy dreams, / To paint the summer morning" (41–42) is an ambiguous figure, whose dreams may inform her or his poetry (has the poem enacted the dream: "Who has not wak'd to list the busy sounds / Of summer's morning" [1–2]). Or, the dreams may be just that – fleeting images in contrast to the "real life" offered before the poet even wakes up. The morning's busyness stands in contrast to the poet's late awakening. The city itself thus stands in contrast to poetry-making – although, as Robinson has crafted a poem from such detachment, she in true Romantic fashion causes the poem to question its own preliminary conclusions.

Whether the homely countryside or the indifferent cityscape, locality in Romantic poetry becomes an active part of the poem, setting the scene but also contributing to meaning and purpose. The poetics of place can also be used to establish the significance of unknown or unfamiliar places. Scott's metrical romances, for instance, develop the myth of Scotland first offered up by James Macpherson's *Ossian*, but, where Macpherson's play with fictiveness to a certain extent undermined his version of place, Scott's verisimilitude and attachment to a locality – rendered much more specifically than even Smith's South Downs and Wordsworth's Lakes – created

Scotland in his image for contemporary readers (an identity that resonates throughout the modern tourist industry in Scotland). For readers in London, Scotland might be an unknown, even exotic place, but Helen Maria Williams's Peru, Robert Southey's South America, Byron's East, Landon's Italy and India, and Hemans's Greece literalize and make readable places most readers could and would never see for themselves. These poems, in which history, topography, politics, reminiscences, and the imaginative remapping of space co-mingle, present locality as especially conducive to an enhanced understanding of the Romantic equivalent of a global ethos. This is not to say that the places they represent are necessarily accurately rendered; as Landon's speaker sighs in the opening lines to *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829), "Another tale of thine! Fair Italie – / What makes my lute, my heart, aye turn to thee? / I do not know thy language, – that is still / Like the mysterious music of the rill; – / And neither have I seen thy cloudless sky / . . . yet Italie, thou art / The promised land that haunts my dreaming heart" (1–5, 7–8). However, the Italy that she presents, like the East of Byron's *Tales*, is more than the metaphor that the city signifies for, say, Robinson. Landon, Byron, and writers like them draw on presumptions of character and theme associated with such localities, but they also push at them, many times through contrast with the known; hence, Byron's "stern Hassan," through his very resemblance to the enigmatic Giaour (who is himself Christian and therefore should be more a point of identification than mystification), is rendered knowable even as both characters are presented as exotic Others.

Whether close or far, known or new, specified or generalized, personalized or disinterested, locality in these examples operates to underpin a poetics deeply interested in the making of poetry itself – its art and artistry. Place serves as more than a backdrop or starting point – in many ways it *is* the point, enabling, through contrast, analogy, or its own fictionalization; narratives within a poem about selfhood; the imaginative deployment of self-conscious symbolization; political and historical visions and revisions. A final example highlights a particular way in which locality can be harnessed to purposes at more than one remove from geography. In 1786, Sir William Jones delivered a lecture in which he stated,

The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source . . . there is a similar reason . . . for supposing that both the *Gothic* and the *Celtic*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*; and the old *Persian* might be added to the same family. (28)

Jones's theory of families of languages resonates with the treatises seeking to establish families and species of poetry. Its introduction of a new potential source language and its easy manner of relating the new to the known highlight the exploratory and scientific impetus that underpinned humanistic study and composition during the

period. Jones's translations of sacred Hindu texts into English poetry – that is, not merely English-language but also tonally English in style and structure – push ideas of locality into realms of relocation, even dislocation. Can place be maintained if the language with which place is conveyed itself undergoes transformation? Is there a source language for poetry – for the imagination? Does poetics in the Romantic period ask new questions, or reverberate within and amplify the old ones?

### **Reading Romantic Poetry**

Although poets in the Romantic period may have had different views, as the study of Wordsworth in particular and “Romantic poetry” in general got underway in the nineteenth century, a consensus grew that Romanticism was defined by its newness, its rejection of Enlightenment balance and order, its brash incorporation of the elements of revolution into poetry and its subsequent move away from revolutionary poetics to a more internalized and unworldly style, itself disrupted by the disillusioned radical politics of the poets of the 1810s and 1820s (see Perkins, Trilling, Hartman, Abrams). This narrative overtly relies on a limited canon of five or six poets, with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats at the center, Byron slightly to one side, and Blake a movable feast. Reading this Romantic poetry and its critical tradition, one sees poetry as patria; upholding true Englishness, it points out the flaws of a modern society losing its sense of what is important, finding a new poetry based on understandings of the centrality of imaginative development and its elusiveness. In this narrative, the essence of Romantic poetry coincides with an essence of nationhood: Wordsworth as the heir of the national bard Shakespeare (it is no coincidence that touristic versions of both were established in the nineteenth century). Whether venerated, or dismissed as overpromoted, Wordsworth as the progenitor of poetry-as-patria was central to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critical readings of Romantic poetry and poetics, as Stephen Gill makes plain. The accompanying story, however, was a usefully simple (though critically complex) vision of a Band of Brothers, a poetics defined by its confinement to such a small group. Thus Romantic poetry as benevolent patriarchy grew as the obverse of patria. Upholding this identity were theories of the philosophy of such poetry: its organic nature, its unfolding of truths, its interventions and correctives to various social problems, its recognition of universal values of beauty (see especially Abrams but also Brooks and Bloom). By the middle of the twentieth century certain conclusions were drawn that situated Truth, Imagination, Nature, Memory, Childhood (abstracted), and other tropes as central. The poetry was read as, essentially, unimpeded by the politics or social movements of its own time (with some exceptions), and there was little troubling of the conventions derived from the poets' experience as inhabitants of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (see, for instance, de Man). The poetry, with its complex and layered forms and structures and its potent announcements of philosophical and imaginative innovations, was read on the terms it offered. Although this was not a seamless process, it



was by and large a consensual one: the Big Six were, by the late twentieth century, the established Romantics.

And yet, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, few scholars would accept the validity of restricting our understanding of the poetics of the period to this small, and after all not very homogeneous, group. In the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century, social movements within contemporary society changed completely how Romantic-period poetry was read. Most significantly, feminism and civil rights began to undo long-standing assumptions about who was qualified to write “real” poetry. The Big Six began to be supplemented by a group of significant female writers that is still growing, dwarfing such a little group; moreover, the impetus to read outside the canon that characterizes socially aware criticism meant that other male writers were reread, reviewed, and reconceived. Patriarchy, benevolent or not, came under question; readers began to query the very conventions within the poetry that had seemed to establish its authority (see especially Curran and Mellor). New Historicism mandated a critical awareness of historical context that complemented the expansion (even rejection) of a canon (see, for instance, the work of Levinson, McGann, and Alan Liu). The study and understanding of poetics turned outward; the poem was no longer the ultimate object of study but a correlative of historical experience. “Romanticism” came to mean less a coherent movement or poetic style than a short-hand term for a period of roughly sixty years (c.1770–1830). And before the poem could disappear altogether from the conversation, a new attention to form, deeply attuned to historical context, resulted in enhanced understandings of poems both familiar (Keats’s Odes, Coleridge’s conversation poems) and new to serious study (Smith’s sonnets, Landon’s romances). A new investment in the formal complexity of Romantic poetics, colored by a full and deeply historicized understanding of context, perhaps allows for understandings of Romantic-period poems as written by Romantic-period poets (see Curran, Rawes, Wolfson).

A poem like Barbauld’s “The Rights of Woman” would not have attracted much notice before feminism made the serious study of female writers more common. This poem, composed in the mid-1790s but not published until 1825, is politically ambiguous but poetically tight and conserved. In four-line stanzas of mainly iambic pentameter, rhyming *abab*, it conforms to poetic tradition in form. But in content it displays an ambivalence and anger that ally it with other radical poems of the 1790s. It offers a reading of the “rights of woman” that emphasizes women’s “empire o’er the breast” (4). Responding to Mary Wollstonecraft’s argument that women are dehumanized by the social emphasis on their sexual character, the poem asserts women’s ability to “awe the licentious and restrain the rude” (21): it seems quite firmly to prefer a social status quo in which women maintain a moral influence over society and in that way find their mission (leading one to suspect that Barbauld’s “Rights of Woman” did something to inform Victorian thoughts on the condition of women). However, just as the poem seems settled in its rejection of a Wollstonecraftian reimagining of the place of women, the last two stanzas complicate the picture:

But hope not, courted idol of mankind,  
 On this proud eminence secure to stay;  
 Subduing and subdued, thou soon shalt find  
 Thy coldness soften, and thy pride give way.  
 Then, then, abandon each ambitious thought,  
 Conquest or rule thy heart shall feebly move,  
 In Nature's school, by her soft maxims taught  
 That separate rights are lost in mutual love. (25–32)

These final eight lines shift the focus from women's vaunted feminine powers to a new understanding of "mutual" love and, presumably, mutual rights, but in order to get there Barbauld must argue Wollstonecraft's corner: that in "resum[ing her] native empire o'er the breast" (4), a woman constricts her identity, functions as little more than a coquette, and risks losing exactly the companionate love that animates *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Barbauld's poem is poetically transparent, yet thematically obscure. Her argument ducks behind a poetics that would not alarm Bysshe or any of his heirs, and is itself difficult to pin down, but with its trope of rights it participates in one of the significant political debates of the day, and with its reference to "Nature's school" it situates human relationships within a natural realm itself being humanized within the period (31).

The meaning of a poem such as "The Rights of Woman" is contestable and that itself is a marker of Romantic poetics. Although it would be going too far to suggest that all the poetry of the period is important, it is nonetheless the case that the decades we call Romantic feature a staggering number of writers for whom the art of poetry meant a deep and committed investment in poetry as an expression of selfhood, political persuasions, playful appropriations of voice and manner, social commentary, explorations on a number of levels, and an abiding interest in genre: both in the harness of the status quo and in exploring its varied innovative possibilities.

See AUTHOR; CLASS; GENDER AND SEXUALITY.

## Notes

- 1 Where specific editions are not cited, quotations of poetry are taken from Wu's *Romanticism*.

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# Narrative

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Narrative appeals to people at all levels, from the most primal pleasure centers to the most elevated intellectual and spiritual tiers, and we turn to it for a need as basic as nourishment and a connection as fundamental as love. For Roland Barthes, “narrative is present in every place, in every society”; it “is simply there, like life itself” (79). For Jameson, “*narrative* [is] the central function or *instance* of the human mind” (13). Barbara Hardy argues that narrative skills are “a primary act of mind transferred to art from life . . ., for we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative . . ., learn, hate, and love by narrative” (5). We hear urgency in these assertions, a tone I also want to strike here, for Romantic writers used narrative to investigate a constellation of ideas crucial to them: a writer’s complicity with or detachment from social customs, the dynamic impact stories have on individuals and nations, and the question of whether it is mere illusion to think that any narrative operates outside of those perpetuating influences. Moreover, their narratives explore the degree to which the stories we are told or the ones we tell ourselves help us understand that sweeping phenomenon we call history. Demanding more than recognition of themes, however, an exploration of Romantic narrative requires that we identify *how* those themes were embodied, how this era’s authors rethought eighteenth-century narrative conventions and how they experimented with narrative devices that put ideas into motion – how, in other words, authors transformed story into discourse. By that I mean we need to explore how this era’s narratives took themes, such as love, sacrifice, community, self-destruction, nation, and hope, and shaped them into coherence through the use of narrators, genres, and other strategies.

My goal is to show how the Romantics experimented with narrative strategies as they told the stories of history and of individual “self-summoning” (Brooks).

And, I will suggest, they mainly did so in open-ended and interrogatory ways, ways that invited readers to participate in determining narrative modes and meanings. For example, even though Maria Edgeworth offers *Belinda* “to the public as a Moral Tale – the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel,” which is associated with “folly, error [sic], and vice,” she transforms this process of determining narrative genre into an intellectually active investigation by empowering the reader to challenge her categorization: for, as she says in her “Advertisement” to *Belinda*, “every author has a right to give what appellation he may think proper to his works. The public have also a right to accept or refuse the classification that is presented” (3). The sense of intellectual movement in Edgeworth’s invitation to the reader to challenge narratives, narrators, and authors is one concept on which I will focus.

Indeed, throughout this essay I will be using the trope of movement both literally and metaphorically. Narratives put themes into action, as the plot and its characters figuratively walk, run, slide, backtrack, fall, or climb. There are historically grounded ways of exploring this idea during the Romantic period. For example, technologically the era was one of accelerating velocity given the new steam engines animating the presses that bore copies into the world; contemporaneously, many authors composed their narratives while moving – on horseback, in a carriage, on foot across a plain or continent, or climbing a mountain. Such material circumstances, however, are not my primary concern; instead I will concentrate on the formal means by which Romantics propelled their narratives and on the intellectual and emotive ways such narratives tried to move readers. Thus I have organized the essay by beginning with a short introduction to the unique historical circumstances which influenced these writers’ odysseys in narrative and a brief survey of the generic forms narrative took during this period. Then I move on to an analysis of four popular narrative strategies that the Romantics used to put narrative in motion: paradoxical narration, the *Bildungsroman*, the role of the narrator, and embedded narratives. To help make these ideas more concrete, I have included close readings of works by Burney, Austen, Hogg, Byron, Scott, and Radcliffe.

## Historical Circumstances and Narrative Genres

A minimalist list of raptures and traumas that invigorated narrative experimentation would include the French and American Revolutions, the dominance of Napoleon, as well as scientific discoveries, economic cataclysms, massive imperial ambition, the accelerated movement from country to city, and the cultural shift from the marriage of alliance to that of companionship – that is, whether to wed for money or love (or giddily for both) – and how in the world to choose if given that liberty. The entry too into the market (in Anna Letitia Barbauld’s words) of the “great proportion . . . of ladies who have distinguished themselves as writers of fiction” (Gamer 182; Barbauld 1: 59) had numerous consequences beyond just numbers, for, as Deidre Lynch points out, “it was women novelists who were in the forefront in writing to the period’s new techniques of reading,” such as “the free indirect discourse that seems to

voice the character's mental life" (151). Other factors influencing narrative experimentation include the sedition laws enacted to suppress and/or censor publications that might incite radical zeal, especially between 1790 and 1810 (St. Clair 311). These acts ironically did not eradicate radical literature, but instead pushed it underground by fostering the production of a kind of cipher narrative which probed Romantic-era issues in defamiliarized settings, such as Italy, the Renaissance, the fantastic, or other-worldly landscapes (Heydt-Stevenson and Sussman 7–8). Finally, the novel's popularity aggravated anxiety about the ancient question of censorship, leading to vilification of the new genre as not just immoral in itself but as an actual provocation to immorality in its readership.

These historical factors quickened the development of narrative forms during this period and expanded the limits of eighteenth-century formulations into a dizzying number of genres and other discourses. First, as hinted above, the novel proved to be the most popular (and visible) form of narrative during this period. From 1800 to 1830, as Peter Garside has shown, "output of fiction almost certainly overtook that of poetry, and the genre eventually gained new respectability," victoriously taking over the market; by the 1820s sales in poetry had severely declined (48). Out of the picaresque, the episodic, and epistolary rises the gothic, realism, comedies of manners, nascent works of detective fiction, historical novels, historical romances, the fairy-tale, science fiction, the romance, which could be philosophical or fantastic, and even more subtly defined forms: the antiquarian, Jacobin, and Anti-Jacobin novels and the oriental, sentimental, and the national tales. And this is only a superficial beginning, because not only are there many more examples that could be cited, but the ones mentioned here also overlap, dynamically forming new combinations. One factor that makes Romantic narrative so hard to categorize is just such generic mixing. Clara Reeve argued in 1785 that "The Romance is a heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. – the Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written" (1: 111) but, in actuality, many narratives combine these, including those by Scott, Edgeworth, and Radcliffe. As Michael Gamer has suggested, Barbauld comes closer to what was actually in print when she defines the novel so broadly that "'fictitious narrative,' 'romance,' and 'novel' function as interchangeable yet historically specific terms" (Gamer 144; Barbauld 1: 1–2). This is helpful for understanding a text such as *Things as They Are or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) with its two endings and layering of detective, gothic, and political modes.

Second, the travel narratives and the literature that includes travel as part of its plot dispatched readers not only into unknown lands but also into known ones, for the European wars (1793–1815), which rendered foreign excursions difficult, reintroduced the British to their own nation. The exuberance travelers and travel writers brought to shaping their experiences in print (even if only published for the local village) created a voluminous and popular body of work. Whether their stories sent voyagers inward into the self or outwards toward the empirical, tourism generated new narratives and new narrative techniques. Tourists, of course, make literal crossings (across the Alps, the equator), but these are pilgrimages that mirror

the intellectual locomotion inherent in travel narrative itself, which encourages explorers and readers to scrutinize such ideas as gender expectations, relationships to British imperial power, the discourse of heroism as male or as noble, the body in relationship to space (such as wilderness), and reactions to cultural “deviations,” such as religious difference. Tourism also allowed for narratives about things: stories of items bought, stolen, and imported. Sightseers often experienced a crisis in their sense of self, and such ruptures provided representations of that fractured vision, of the odd mismatch between the self who departed with the one who returned. These literal travels then journeyed into the genre of fiction itself, with far richer effects than the picaresque could have imagined, for narratives such as Sydney Owenson’s *The Missionary* (1811), Volney’s *The Ruins: or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires* (1791), and William Wordsworth’s *Prelude* (1805/1850) introduced ontological, epistemological, and psychological (among others) questions of how to assess oneself in the face of the “other.” These generic amalgamations of fiction and travel examine the process of *seeing* itself, challenging the protagonist–viewer to move beyond first impressions, to scrutinize nostalgic fantasies, and to interrogate the notion that there is no such thing as the unmediated gaze. The potential that travel offered for individual growth no doubt influenced the *Bildungsroman*, discussed below, and meant that fictional narratives during this era *without* physical excursions are quite rare.

Third, poetry, such as we find in Scott, in Wordsworth, in Southey, and especially in Byron, launched its own kind of narrative. We now tend to associate narrative with prose, and although poets have their own strategies for conveying “what happens” in verse form, poetry is a crucial aspect for any history of Romantic narrative. Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812–1818) puts travel literature into verse, juxtaposing the personal and historical via the character’s encounters with people and places across Europe. The narrative situates Harold’s world-weariness against the sheer force of historical circumstance that presses on the individual:

And Harold stands upon this place of skulls,  
The grave of France, the deadly Waterloo!  
How in an hour the power which gave annuls  
Its gifts, transferring fame as fleeting too!  
In “pride of place” here last the eagle flew,  
Then tore with bloody talon the rent plain,  
Pierced by the shaft of banded nations through;  
Ambition’s life and labors all were vain;

He wears the shatter’d links of the world’s broken chain. (III, st. 18)

In a volatile turn, the narrator is both observer and self-observed, reporting what he sees at a site of unimaginable carnage and connecting that sight to a rueful assessment of the typical fate of military ambition. As he imagines Harold standing upon these skulls, so does he seem to keep one eye firmly on himself, thereby mocking through the juxtaposition an ambition he can neither fully embrace nor disavow. Byron’s



remark in the aftermath of the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* – “I awoke and found myself famous” – exists as a kind of double of this stanza, implicitly linking renown to the fragility of a dream (“I awoke”), and deprecating a fame doomed by its uneasy existence in a world where, as this poem has it, “in an hour the power which gave annals / Its gifts.”

We should also turn to the term “lyrical ballad,” which collates space and time, personal epiphany and universal knowledge, isolation and community, suspension and action – summoning all of these simultaneously. Wordsworth’s spots of *time* are more than intense, extra-temporal moments, for the “short story” we call the “boat stealing episode” tells about events that occurred at a specific moment (childhood); in its sustaining influence this narrative continues to unfold in a back and forward swinging motion through the collective time of the poet’s history; and it functions to drive the action of the longer master narrative of *The Prelude*. Further, we could also consider the degree to which a narrative impulse informs the most purely lyrical productions, even if the story line is radically foreshortened, as in the enigmatic “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal” (1800). Among other things, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (1820) narrates our impulse to tell “what happens” while also highlighting the failure of narrative to grasp the ineffable moment. The poem exists within a gestural narrative framework (the poet tells the story of contemplating an object of art) but, more importantly, the poem interrogates our propensity to record the chronicle of events (why must we ask who is coming to the sacrifice, where the green altar is, what town they came from, whether the town is lonely with everyone gone, and why the heifer is mooing?). Keats suggests that the narrative process more often than not hurls our own story lines onto a person, place, or thing, obscuring not only “what happens” but also what that event means.

## Romantic Themes and Narrative Techniques

Writers drew on the elemental, primal appeal of narrative to produce a heterogeneous and complex body of narrative work that took on a dizzying number of themes: courtship, adventure, and travel; tragic loss; politics, both radical and conservative; the opening up and growth of the mind; the development of interiority; the artist’s gestation and travails; the wanderer’s sagacity; religion (from atheism to orthodoxy); the country and the city; and identity itself and its relationship to gender, to social constructions, and to the spirit. The techniques they used to convey these themes will be the subject of this section.

### 1. Paradoxical narration

At least from Aristotle, writers about narrative have tried to distinguish its elements. Certainly since the 1970s, narratologists have worked to give a vocabulary to these components and to differentiate, for example, between narrative levels, that is story

(the content, the “what,” the events unfolding in time) and discourse (the “telling,” that is how the story is told) (see Genette). One way to help us understand Romantic narrative is to distinguish “paradoxical” from non-paradoxical narration (Patrick 118). The latter provides us with some combination of the following: a clear-cut, chronological time sequence, a reliable narrator, a consistent story line and point of view, a flowing, non-disruptive plot that encourages the reader’s absorption in the events and an identification with protagonists who seem “real” – “real,” that is, in accordance with the reader’s sentiments and the convictions of her culture. “Paradoxical narration,” in contrast, offers narratives that allow for more volatility, more fission: they do not follow a clear chronological progression, their characters and narrators stray from their “stations,” and the levels of narrative intersect: Gérard Genette defines such movement as “the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation” (234). For example, metalepses, intrusions that produce “an effect of strangeness that is either comical . . . or fantastic,” occur, to use his example, when a character is murdered by a character in a novel he is reading (234–235) or when a narrator breaks boundaries and talks directly to the reader. These narrative “transgressions,” because of “the intensity of their effects, demonstrate the importance of the boundary they tax their ingenuity to overstep, in defiance of verisimilitude – a boundary that is precisely the narrating (or the performance) itself: a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells” (Genette 236).

Under the sail of romantic narrative we find both paradoxical and conventional fictions and within each of these a variety of ways to tell a story. Sometimes narratives seem formally to draw from what is often considered a signature Romantic impulse toward organic unity, that is, texts that in densely luxuriant ways connect symbols, images, and events. We also, however, see instances where narratives are pulling apart at the seams, calling attention (to make a pun) to what “seems”; we notice, in other words, not the presence, but the absence of orderly arrangement and clear relations between parts and the whole. These second kinds of narratives tend to employ some combination of techniques such as multiple plots, doublings, frame and embedded narratives, defamiliarization, disruptive temporal ordering, unreliable narrators, the use of free indirect discourse, narratives that relate to or subvert specific conventions, and a focus on subjectivity and point of view – methods that have come to be associated perhaps too exclusively with postmodern works. For example, Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800) frames the primary narrative with self-reflexive prefaces, prologues, and glossaries. *Rackrent* begins with a Preface by the novel’s “editor” (in fact just another character): he is the English amanuensis to whom the Irish narrator, Thady Quirk, has told his “Memoirs” (62). This would all be fairly straightforward except that the editor has appended “a few notes . . . for the information of the *ignorant* English reader” (63). These “few notes” amount to an extended glossary and a series of footnotes that destroy the novel’s fictional veracity by forcing us into the world of scholarship; simultaneously they offer another sort of plausibility – knowledge and analysis, both of which batter us back and forth across that “sacred frontier between . . . the world in which one tells, [and] the world of which

one tells” (Genette 236). These interrupting appendages, as well as the editor’s and Thady’s unreliability and their constant shifts in tone, create a narrative that requires readers’ (if they are to decipher in any way possible the texts’ meanings) constant intellectual intervention and suspension of emotional immersion in the story line.

We can look more specifically at the difference between paradoxical and non-paradoxical ways of telling by examining the difference between Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) and her later novel *The Wanderer* (1814). *Evelina* – given the ways its epistolary form manipulates point of view – is by no means lacking in complexity or energy; nevertheless, it progresses along charted territory from the heroine’s awkward “entrance into the world” to her eventual marriage; along the way, secrets are gradually revealed that allow the heroine’s father to acknowledge and thus rightfully restore her title and fortune. Backed up by an adamant and mostly ethical cultural foundation, these seals of identity carry a depth, a plentitude, that give a firm stillness to any character buttressed by them. Likewise, *The Wanderer* ends with the restoration of those same stable markers of identity (family, wealth, and marriage). Such stability does not occur, however, until the heroine, Juliet, has wandered almost endlessly through a narrative that refuses to share with readers her identity (even her name), until the plot, with its constant motility, has agitated readers by forestalling comprehension of events and characters, and until the complicated Chinese-box structure of embedded narratives has repetitively confirmed society as repulsively hypocritical. The happy and conventional ending cannot obliterate the narrative journey readers have traversed, a journey that has called into question whether or not a solid and enduring individual or social identity is even possible.

An even more charged example of paradoxical narration appears in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824): Hogg amps up the focus on narration itself as he disrupts the reading experience with characters who replicate each other, a fractured temporal line, multiple narrators competing for “truth,” the entry of the author as a character in the story, and contradictory generic forms – realism and fantasy, empirical research and magical causality. Such disruptions subvert mimesis, for we cannot think of Robert Wringhim or Gil-Martin as “real” people who might inhabit our “real” world. In refusing readers that connection, Hogg forces them out of the illusion of fictional verisimilitude and into an intellectual relationship with the process of narration itself, a process that renders the narrative glaringly artificial. Although Hogg’s novel seems a quite definitive case, most Romantic narratives do not generally fall conspicuously into one or the other of these categories. Thus, it is important to make an argument for subtlety here, which we can see when we turn to the *Bildungsroman* in the next section and to the ways that varying critics have defined and authors have engaged this genre.

## 2. *The Bildungsroman*

Mikhail Bakhtin defined a type of *Bildungsroman* as a narrative in which “man’s individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence” (qtd. in Boes 275;

Bakhtin 23). There is no doubt that Romantic narrative was indefatigably drawn to forging connections between the explorations of self-knowledge and historical identity. Hogg's *Justified Sinner* recounts the hallucinatory fracturing of one man's consciousness, but that personal upheaval is deeply woven into a narrative fabric suffused with the agonies of religious controversy as they had unfolded in England and Scotland since the Reformation. And to move from religion to science, Victor Frankenstein's inverted *Bildungsroman* charts an individual's Faustian battle with the limits of human knowledge, narrating a cautionary tale of one man's noxious relationship with the remarkable achievements of Romantic-era science – those, for example, of William Herschel, Humphry Davy, Michael Faraday, and many more. One could see something similar at work earlier in, for example, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), where the hero's journey to self-discovery brings him into contact with the national crises of the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion. But Fielding's novel lacks the intense introspective focus on self-knowledge that these Romantic narratives explore, nor is the self that is discovered there as complex or as deeply illuminated and shadowed by history and experience's chiaroscuristic fireworks.

The omnipresent question of identity formation during this era – whether of the individual, community, nation, or cosmos – put into motion debates enacted in narrative and about narrative: what tools, what knowledge systems are best suited for begetting deeper awareness: should one learn through the heart, the head, the body, the spirit, or some combination of these? Romantic narratives acknowledge that self-knowledge is best realized in action, in movement, in experience, and not in isolation. As we read this period's works, we can watch hundreds of characters, such as Elizabeth Bennet, Lady Delacour, Waverley, Werther, Ellena Rosalba, Hilarion, Beatrice Cenci, Thady, and Don Juan, rethink, reframe, and experiment in accelerated fashion with the adage “know thyself” – an awareness that is gained only by knowing their place in a larger social system.

The genre that focused almost exclusively on the narrative of self in relation to community was the *Bildungsroman*. Franco Moretti suggests that “a certain magnetism hovers around the term” and “even those novels that clearly are not *Bildungsroman* or novels of formation are perceived by us against this conceptual horizon” (*World* 15). Frank Palmeri notes that most scholars see the *Bildungsroman* arising from a “confluence of Pietist spiritual autobiography and the baroque adventure novel. . . . The spiritual autobiography turns outward to more varied and worldly encounters while the narrative of adventures develops an interest in the psychology and inner life of the hero” (167). Broadly defined, the *Bildungsroman* is a narrative depicting how the hero or heroine's growth through wider experiences and more profound self-awareness leads the protagonist from childhood to adulthood, from naïveté to maturity; we can also add the codicil that a text can be a *Bildungsroman* even if the individual's journey fails. Critics have of course tried to fine-tune their interpretations by creating schemas based on chronology or national literature or variations in plot. Moretti, for example, differentiates between “two principles of textual organization: the ‘classification’ principle and the ‘transformation’ principle. . . . When classification is strongest – as in the English

‘family romance’ and in the classical Bildungsroman” (7), what is most apparent is the presence of a “teleological rhetoric” – that is the significance of events are important for how they lead inexorably to the ending. And this, he says, offers “one of the most harmonious solutions ever offered to a dilemma conterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of socialization” (*World* 15). In contrast, he defines the *Bildungsroman* of transformation as less utopian and more militant, more dependent on process and not goals: value is placed on youth, not maturity; on instability, not a sturdy public edifice; on moral ambivalence as opposed to a transparent and redeeming message (*World* 7–8).

Although Moretti acknowledges that both of these principles are “always present in a narrative work, [they] usually carry an uneven weight, and are actually inversely proportional . . . imply[ing] very different value choices and even opposite attitudes to modernity” (*World* 7). Romantic narratives, even those falling in the category of the English family romance, often subtly interweave these principles. Courtship novels, for example, sometimes subvert or at least call attention to the “inevitability” of the teleological ending. Austen makes fun of the notion of a predictable resolution of social and individual needs when she closes *Northanger Abbey* (1818) by charging the reader to settle “whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience” (205). Keats, too, unbolts the ending of “The Eve of St. Agnes” (1820) and, though the lovers escape the castle-prison, they glide out “like phantoms” (361). The romance element of the poem – these lovers “gone: ay, ages long ago” (370) – renders the notion of the teleology of bourgeois paradise as fantastical as the castle they came from.

Above I suggested that we use caution when classifying texts as purely paradoxical or completely conventional. Analogously, although some narratives, like Eliza Fenwick’s *Secresy, Or, the Ruin on the Rock* (1795) or Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), do fall into Moretti’s *Bildungsroman* of transformation by deliberately eschewing the happy synthesis of individual desire and social conformity, most are mixed. For example, Phebe Gibbes ends *Hartly House, Calcutta* (1789) with succeeding paragraphs describing one woman’s rape and another’s marriage. Teleological fulfillment may thus arise from Sophia Goldborne’s marriage, but the narrative inclusions of the English officer’s violent attack on a native woman and his murder of her father opens up the question of the colonial project, which is purportedly also “fulfilled” by the newly wed heroine’s departure from India. Other writers may include metamorphoses but not to the extent that they “dismantle the very notion of personal identity” (*World* 8). Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1798), Mary Hays’s *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799) and *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), and Amelia Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray* (1804) fit into what Laura Mandell calls the “philosophical romance.” “The endings of these novels,” she argues, “and the domestic arrangements that they idealize, are queer as Michael Warner defines it, naming ‘relations of durability and care’ and involving ‘an astonishing range of intimacies’ that are sexually charged but also very complex because ‘the rules [for these relationships] have to be invented as we go along’” (35; Warner 116).

Angela Esterhammer further complicates and reinvigorates our understanding of the ways that the *Bildungsroman* can provide a narrative with nuances of both mobility and clarity. She shows how important is “the role of improvisation in the educative process of *Bildung*, and in the *Bildungsroman*”; she cites *Wilhelm Meister* (1795–1796), for example, wherein the protagonist and the Abbé “agree on the value of [improvisational] exercises for developing self-knowledge and expressive body language, not only in the actor, but in the human being” (138). She goes on to discover what she calls the “improviser novel,” a sub-genre of the *Bildungsroman* (160). Applying this concept, we can see that, in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Elizabeth Bennet uses improvisation as she roams through the process of “self-summoning,” that is of learning that “till this moment, I never knew myself” (137). In this process, she improvises various roles: the politic woman who can laugh off Darcy’s malicious criticisms; the cynic who can justify Wickham’s courtship of a woman whose “sudden acquisition of 10,000 pounds was . . . [her] most remarkable charm” (100); and the brave traveler who prefers mountains to men. This novel with the happiest of endings, though, closes with Elizabeth secretly sending money to Lydia – not a forecast of marital strife, of course, but one way in which Austen pierces the apparent inviolability of the teleological ending. In the next section, I want to stay with Austen, exploring in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) a more ambulatory, because more ambiguous, case of seeming narrative closure in the apparently organic fulfillment of Marianne’s marriage to Brandon.

### 3. Narration, point of view, and irony

While Romantic narrative tends to analyze the collision between social covenants and the protagonist’s individual growth and autonomy, writers also thought seriously about narrative’s leverage on readers themselves. Could Werther’s fictional suicide cause real ones (*Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1774)? Could readers of Elizabeth Inchbald’s *A Simple Story* (1791) allow themselves to be influenced by Lord Elmwood’s final forgiveness of his daughter, even if their wives too had been unfaithful? The inverse concern was there as well – what sway might the reader have on the artist and/or his work? Jane Stabler has argued persuasively that “networks of anticipated and actual reading responses affected Byron’s texts at the time of composition and publication” (9). But rather than turning to didactic impulses, Romantic narrative encouraged readers to think about their relationship to characters and to books; about how they might rethink and reframe rather than gullibly absorb what they read. Along these lines, *Sense and Sensibility* wages an indisputable war against naïve consumption of social codes. Marianne’s first grief-stricken episode after Willoughby leaves Barton exposes her desire to feel in a way consonant with social conventions that dictated how one should react if following the fashionable story line of sensibility. The disapproving narrator emphasizes how the cult of sensibility pressures her into a narrative in which Marianne “would have

been ashamed to look her family in the face the next morning, had she not risen from her bed in more need of repose than when she lay down in it. . . . Her sensibility was potent enough!" (63). Things get more complicated at the novel's end, however, which closes with Marianne's marriage to Brandon.

Some readers have found in this ending the fulfillment of the classical *Bildungsroman*, insofar as it seems to endorse parental wisdom and social order, to constitute Marianne's rational decision, to harmonize the personal and the social, and, to quote Moretti, dramatize how the "'free individual' . . . perceives the social norms as *one's own*" (*World* 16). Social good, in other words, could not be effected by a love match with Willoughby, a serial seducer. A closer look at this narration, however, reveals some anomalies. We are told that Marianne's marriage to Brandon was now *her mother's*

darling object. Precious as was the company of her daughter to her, she desired nothing so much as to give up its constant enjoyment to *her* valued friend; and to see Marianne settled at the mansion-house was equally the wish of Edward and Elinor. They each felt *his* sorrows, and *their* own obligations, and Marianne, by general consent, was to be the reward of *all*. With such a confederacy against her – with knowledge so intimate of his goodness – with a conviction of his fond attachment to herself, which at last, though long after it was observable to everybody else – burst on her – what could she do? . . . [S]he found herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village. (287–288; emphasis added)

This passage carries more notes of disequilibrium than we might expect. First of all, Austen's use of free indirect discourse necessarily distances us from Marianne as an agent thinking for herself. We do not hear her say "Elinor, marriage to Brandon is *my* darling object." But the narration not only *de-emphasizes* Marianne's agency, it also focuses exclusively on Mrs. Dashwood's "object" and Elinor and Edward's "wish" to make *Brandon* happy. The language suggests that for the almost economically strapped Dashwood-Ferrars – that "confederacy" against her – Marianne becomes the "reward" to pay back "*their* obligations" toward *him*. Their "general consent" does not include Marianne's full participation in the sovereign power her family represents. The narrator's use of the passive voice underscores Marianne's obedience, not her independence: she "*found herself* . . . submitting to new attachments"; she *was* "*placed* in a new home." Further, she is assigned a series of performative social roles: wife, mistress of a family, and village patroness. Fully gratifying the era's cultural expectations, Marianne "found her own happiness in forming [Brandon's]." The end of this story line, that "Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby" (288), puts the reader's mind somewhat at ease (Brandon isn't Mr. Collins, after all), but how can we know that the narrator is reliable? And further, such an ending sounds suspiciously like the "official" line – that women who submit to external authority are sumptuously remunerated.

Is Marianne, then, a “convinced citizen” or a manipulated one (Moretti)? Is this less an instance of finding a felicitous harmony than her internalization of social *discipline* – the novel’s? author’s? narrator’s? inevitable reinforcement of a narrowly and efficiently defined subject who conforms without even realizing it? Although both of these interpretations are plausible, neither the idea that Marianne is “convinced” nor the reading that she is “disciplined” takes into account the quality Austen is most famous for: irony. Irony exists as a perception of difference between an expectation and a result; by defamiliarizing our anticipations, it arouses a sometimes painful awareness about what we take for granted – it impressively disrupts certainty. Narrative irony activates our curiosity; it speeds up our intellectual gait as we wonder at the idea that our free-thinking heroine would be goaded into an arranged marriage, or that her family would put Brandon’s happiness above Marianne’s, or that the genius we know as Austen would create a narrator who would be a spokesperson for social conformity, one who tenders a predictable précis of conduct-book expectations. My goal here is not to take interpretative sides, but to emphasize how Austen’s complex use of narrative techniques – her use of free indirect discourse and irony – incites *questions* about whether Marianne develops: has she grown up and found a lucid balance between free will and sacrifice or is she merely obedient and lacking in the ability to summon her self and participate wholly in the free exercise of choice? Or do we really have no idea, given that the evidence before us might very well just be the narrator’s own fantasies – those projections Keats was so concerned about in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”? I would argue here that the answer is not clear and that that ambiguity expels us from absorption in the story and ferries us instead into an epistemological meta-discussion of narrative’s impact on how identity gets defined and how we can determine whether we act with agency or simply react to the story lines any given culture propagates. In the next section, I will move to the ways that textual frames, embedded texts, and other paratextual devices can expedite the transmission of ideas relating to individual and historical meaning in Romantic narrative. In this part, I will look closely at works by Scott, Radcliffe, and Edgeworth.

#### 4. Narrative frames, embedded texts, and other paratextual devices

In this section I will suggest that one of compelling reasons that Romantic narrative – whether in the *Bildungsroman*, the gothic, the historical novel, or travel accounts, in prose or poetry – employed framing devices, embedded texts, and other appendages such as glossaries or footnotes was because they were particularly effective for examining the interface between individuals and history. They forced the reader to think about context. These narrative strategies were useful since they could either render a highly compressed narrative congruity, a kind of crystalline structure where the smallest part relates to the larger whole, or they could narrate the fracturing of organic unity, the impossibility of meshing the personal and historical, the inability to summon the self and the age into any kind of coherent plot. As they work to explain, defer, subjugate, intensify, or detract from the primary narrative, embedded



narratives (stories within stories) put a text – and the reader’s relationship to that text – into constant relational movement.

These stories-within-stories propel readers themselves into motion, sending them into another galaxy of sorts. Thus they distract us from the primary narrative, pull us into the flux of a new series of actions, and then convey us back to the principal plot, one that is now infinitely more multi-faceted. For instance, in Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), the frame narrative of Corinne and Nelvil’s love affair competes with the embedded narrative that takes place in France, with the story lines unfolding in England, and with embedded texts describing art and architecture, such as Michelangelo’s statues of *Dawn* and *Night* or St. Peter’s cathedral. Each of these nested texts draws from a combination of narrative devices – Oswald tells of his French lover in first-person narration while sitting on top of an erupting volcano in Naples; toward the close of the novel Corinne’s desperate experiences in England are told mainly in indirect and free indirect discourse, as is Lucile’s rise and fall as desired idol to unloved wife. The art work takes us into another dimension entirely, even into a different genre – the guide book. Given that the novel was catalogued in the travel section at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France until the late nineteenth century, these “embedded” elements apparently succeeded in completely upstaging the Corinne and Nelvil love story. The novel’s competing plots and narrators all vie for prominence, just as their respective heroines (Corinne and Lucile) and nations (France, England, and Italy) fight to possess Nelvil. The end result is that, formally, the boundary crossings of narrative levels mirror the historical and cultural convulsions *Corinne* leaves in a state of unresolved tension.

Description is another kind of embedded text, and lush depictions of nature are of course typical of most Romantic narrative, often to the dismay of twenty-first-century readers. It has multiple purposes during this period, however, operating as “both narrative’s ‘other’ and an integral part of it” (Bal 39). Romantic-era description is often inseparable from “what happens” and often inseparable from thematic concerns, such as the role and nature of history in everyday life. For example, when the hero of Scott’s *Waverley* (1814) enters a “narrow glen” on his way to meet Flora, the landscape embodies the tenuousness of the link between Scotland and England and the gossamer quality of his own capacity to bridge Scottish and English politics, for “in another spot, the projecting rocks from the opposite side of the chasm had approached so near to each other, that two pine-trees laid across, and covered with the turf, formed a rustic bridge at the height of at least one hundred and fifty feet. It had no ledges, and was barely three feet in breadth” (175). Flora, who seems to be virtually dancing across “this pass of peril,” appears like an

inhabitan[t] of another region, propped as it were, in mid air, upon this trembling structure. She stopped upon observing him below, and with an air of graceful ease, which made him shudder, waved her handkerchief to him by way of signal. He was unable, from the sense of dizziness which her situation conveyed, to return the salute. (175)

Flora next “disappeared on the other side” (175) – a phrase that does double duty for her absorption in the Jacobite cause as well as her eventual immurement in a French

convent “on the other side” of the Channel. The landscape sums up Waverley’s relationships with Flora and with Scotland and anticipates the finale of both: in the end, she will be to him like a “fair apparition” who had “occup[ied]” a “precarious eminence” (175) not only in his heart but in her political stance. In this sense, description has become an embedded text, relating intimately to the narrative designs the novel has already established.

This next passage from *Waverley* offers a more extended descriptive “fragment” and focuses on (what could be called) a digression of 249 words, one which disrupts one’s immersion in the narrative. Here we find a realism based on objective empiricism:

Advancing a few yards, and passing under the bridge which he had viewed with so much terror, the path ascended rapidly from the edge of the brook, and the glen widened into a sylvan amphitheatre, waving with birch, young oaks, and hazels, with here and there a scattered yew-tree. The rocks now receded, but still showed their grey and shaggy crests rising among the copse-wood. Still higher, rose eminences and peaks, some bare, some clothed with wood, some round and purple with heath, and others splintered into rocks and crags. At a short turning, the path, which had for some furlongs lost sight of the brook, suddenly placed Waverley in front of a romantic waterfall. It was not so remarkable either for great height or quantity of water, as for the beautiful accompaniments which made the spot interesting. (175–176)

The specificity evacuates the phantasmagoric nature of the previous description; characteristic of Romantic narrative, several authoritative voices guide us through – rather than into – the “picture.” We are escorted through the passage by a travel guide offering measurements and directions, a naturalist telling us precisely what kinds of trees inhabit the landscape, a painter framing all for our eye – the sylvan amphitheatre, the distances of high “eminences and peaks,” and a landscape aesthetician squiring us among co-mingled and dramatic shifts of the sublime, picturesque, and the beautiful – from “splintered . . . rocks and crags” to a “romantic waterfall.” Even here, though, amid grandeur and beauty, the empirical focus neutralizes our immersion, as we hear the non-partisan observation that “beautiful accompaniments . . . made the spot interesting.” The previous passage narrates the exquisite fabrication of part to whole (the bridge as metaphor for the conduits among nation, history, and individual identity, and so forth) by seeming not to do so. This second description revels in empiricism, enjoying its obvious constructedness, as it introduces multiple authorities and specialized lexicons.

As part of a realist project, bringing to narrative heightened visual and multi-sensory stimulation, description also often functioned, however, to pause time, interrupting the telling of what is happening so as to offer an ekphrastic recess. Most generally speaking, ekphrasis occurs in literature when a writer describes any kind of object (often an actual painting) in such detail that the reader feels he is traveling into a picture, into an extratemporal, synesthetic moment. In Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797), known of course for its heady use of ekphrasis, we find a different kind of

embedding device that pilots us not into landscape but into the world of an art object, a miniature portrait that the heroine wears as a necklace. The priest, Schedoni, poised to stab Ellena, must “turn her robe aside,” but upon doing so “a new cause of horror . . . seize[d] all his frame” (271), for when he sees the portrait he sees an image of himself. The heroine subsequently (and mistakenly) tells Schedoni that the portrait depicts the father she never met, which causes him, not unsurprisingly, to retract the knife. But this is not the end of the story, for the portrait, doubly framed (by the jewelry setting and by Ellena’s neck), lodges in embryo Ellena’s genetic, social, familial, and moral history. In doing so, it carries the ancestral chronicles of the history of political subjugation that Radcliffe consistently calls attention to in the novel: this priest (in reality her uncle and her father’s assassin) is, in miniature, every tyrant: whether English, Italian, religious, and even biblical (Cain killing Abel). At a micro-level, the buried narrative tells the macro-story of deathless themes.

Further, the thing itself – the material object with its own history – carries extra nuance. That these miniatures were generally painted in a life-like, naturalistic style so as to render the image as an emblem of authenticity and irreproducibility further underscores the irony that the daughter cannot differentiate between uncle and father. The embedded narrative undermines the anagnoristic moment – when a character makes a critical discovery and alters the primary narrative. Given that the miniature functions literally as a mirror to the observer, the embedded text becomes a kind of *mise en abyme* capable of infinite regression and nearly limitless interpretation. The portrait and its multiple narratives change the course of the plot and generate suspense, but also disrupt our faith in the illusion of narrative as truth. This lying piece of jewelry underscores the irony that the daughter–niece has been secretly gazing at and in constant physical contact *not* with her father, but with his murderer and her mother’s rapist. The miniature thus allows for a kind of narrative psycho-drama: it functions as the theatrical stage on which is played out the family tragedy, and it powerfully offers the assassin a reminder that in actually committing fratricide and in almost murdering Ellena he has essentially committed genetic and spiritual suicide – insofar as his brother and niece share his bloodline but also because he is a Roman Catholic priest. Mirroring the thematic quandaries in the novel as a whole, the hidden narrative reminds us that one must suspect the narratives offered that presumably dictate identity (parentage and class) and that one must sparingly trust even those closest (mothers and fathers) or those who uphold virtue (priests and abbesses).

## Conclusion

There was a time, not so long ago, when the very phrase “Romantic narrative” would have produced a quizzical or perhaps scornful reaction. Romanticism, after all, was a lyric phenomenon, its essence defined by the canon of six, or perhaps five, male poets; and its decisive moments were those extra-temporal, epiphanic episodes in which the light of sense came on or went out, whether crossing the Alps or swooning to the nightingale’s song. That understanding of the period and its aesthetic ignored,

however, the multiplicity and richness of Romantic narrative. A more historically accurate and comprehensive look at this era might lead us to assert that narrative, not lyric, is the characteristic form of Romantic writing. That may be an over-correction, but certainly narrative was the form that the era's most popular publications took.

I have argued throughout this essay that Romantic writers of narrative committed themselves to experimenting creatively with techniques that would encourage both the reader's intellectual analysis and emotional absorption. This was accomplished in part by the fact that Romantic narrative both tries to "hide its fictionality behind verisimilitude" while also "inventing fictionality as an ontological ground and placing severe constraints upon it" (Gallagher 337).<sup>1</sup> As Romantic narratives make themes move by telling "what happened" they take their characters and readers on a voyage that looks seriously at the transformative and deleterious impact of story lines and the need to think through the tales a culture or nation tells its people. Regardless of how disruptive or how paradoxical, how radical or how conservative – whether Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819) or Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809) – Romantic narrative reveals a fascination with the pedagogical, or at least the intellectually stimulating, capacity stories have to transport us into thinking about historical upheavals, scientific innovations, human psychology, and global interactions.

Romantic writers as a group debate what undergirds their narratives: that might be a belief that nations can exist in a cosmopolitanism kinesis (one that allows for the preservation of the local within the synergy of global interaction), that women deserve to be vindicated as rational beings, that spiritual power can be made to work for the good of institutions, that the wandering outlaw can provide insights into the world that exiles him, that nature deserves to be revered and preserved, that slaves need to be freed, or that to thrive communities require stability or reform or revolution. Certainly the *Bildungsroman* held that developing self-knowledge involved having "a story of one's own"; this is not to say though that self-summoning necessarily delivers a narrative that is without ideological influence or, at the extreme end, self-delusion. Romantic writers very often demanded – whether playfully or gravely – that their narratives take into account the possible consequences they might levy when put into motion: how they might stimulate both a reader's self-awareness and grasp of history, how they might tease us into, or, as Keats writes in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "out of thought."

See HISTORIOGRAPHY; READER.

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## Notes

- 1 Catherine Gallagher is actually making this point about the novel, but in my opinion it is relevant for Romantic narrative in general (337).

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# Drama

*David Worrall*

Romantic-period British drama still remains largely sidelined into what are arguably various critical cul-de-sacs whose parameters might include closet-drama (that is, drama – such as Joanna Baillie’s – largely written to be read rather than performed), the spillage of the canonical Romantic poets (for example, John Keats’s unperformed *Otho the Great* [1819], Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Osorio* [1797], William Wordsworth’s *The Borderers* [1797], Robert Southey’s *Wat Tyler* [1794]), and the *belles critique* of William Hazlitt.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, to most intents and purposes, there is probably no such thing as a corpus of actually staged or performed “Romantic” drama in the sense of texts embodying a poetic of the solitary heroic. Paradoxically, much modern critical interest has largely been geared toward widening our knowledge of the key Romantic writers’ dramatic writing as part of a process of widening the canon of British high Romanticism. On the face of it, this is a somewhat counter-intuitive direction for academic studies to have taken. Given that British drama during the long eighteenth century dealt directly with issues arising from war, race, gender, and empire – and embodied all of those things in staged representations by living actors and actresses in public theaters – it is surprising that interest in performance has been so slow to gather momentum. This essay will chart the current state of scholarly work in this field. In short, there are four main components which will be examined. The first is the oddity of the apparent consensus view that the major Romantic poets are worthwhile starting points or have anything much to tell us about theater’s hugely dynamic cultural role. The second area will be to lay out some of the material structural conditions of Romantic-period drama and the theoretical models which might best be applied to it. A third section will examine a range of the dramas and the recent scholarship engaged with these issues, with particular

reference to the theoretical options available. It will also suggest how four main dramatic topics – war, race, gender, and empire – might be studied.

A preliminary starting point, however, must be some appreciation of the scale of Georgian theatricality. There was far more live drama available in Georgian Britain (c.1714–1830) than is the case today, particularly with reference to the provinces and national regions, although with the implications for Irish and Scottish theater history still remaining relatively sparsely researched (see Morash, Burke, and Finlay and Scullion). Apart from regular provincial theaters in places such as Bath or, later, Brighton, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain was crisscrossed by networks of established theatrical circuits touring well-defined routes. For example, the Worcester and Welsh Marches region was covered by a company headed by Roger Kemble (1722–1802), who toured there with his gifted actor children, John Philip Kemble (later manager of both Drury Lane and Covent Garden) and Sarah Siddons, possibly the age's single most famous actress (and newly emerging "celebrity") of the period. The northeast of England (actually up to Edinburgh) was covered by the manager Tate Wilkinson. His memoir, *The Wandering Patentee; or, a History of the Yorkshire Theatres, from 1770 to the present time* (1795), has left one of the most vivid, usually highly personalized, records of such acting nurseries which, if the opportunities came, produced the later stars of the London stage. However, these histories give very little sense of the distribution of Georgian theatricality. At the moment, the best guide is the modern facsimile of James Winston's *Theatric Tourist* (1805), which served as a kind of actors' manual of provincial theaters (with illustrations), their management, history, and procedures. Modern readers will be surprised at the distribution of four- to eight-week seasons (usually three nights a week) into now-tiny market towns such as Spalding, Stamford, or Wisbech, as well as the extremely modest buildings deployed as theaters, which ranged from converted barns to converted fruit shops, and which can rarely have held more than 300 people. In the metropolis, things were on a much vaster scale. On any one winter's night in London (taking a datum point of around 1810) there were around ten thousand people converging on the theaters for their 6 p.m. opening, the bulk of whose capacity was taken up by Covent Garden and Drury Lane theaters, which held about six thousand people between them (today's Covent Garden is smaller, seating about 2,250). The sheer scale of Georgian theatricality, with its actors, theaters, texts, and professional practices, stands in stark contrast both to its current critical reception and to one's sense of a Romantic period still largely characterized by the study of poets inclined toward various types of solitude.

The availability to scholars of comprehensive biographical dictionaries of actors or plays (especially when used in conjunction with the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*) is probably of greater importance in this field than in others precisely because of the enormous numbers of personnel involved in the business of creating so much theater. Important groundwork was done in Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans's *Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & other stage personnel in London, 1660–1800*, a 16-volume compendium considerably assisting the identification of performers,



an issue which is a particular difficulty because, for example, actresses were billed as “Miss Jackson” or (upon marriage – or simply aging) “Mrs. Jackson,” and their maiden names and first names professionally abandoned. This resource should be used in conjunction with David Erskine Baker and Isaac Reed’s *Biographia Dramatica; or, A Companion To The Playhouse* (1812) which lists plays in title order with brief comments. This type of approach reflects the persistence of a mainly localized, even micro, focus on the materiality of theater history with the noting of the lives of individual performers or theater venues rather than the offering of critical routes into broader concerns connected to issues such as gender, empire, or race, for example.

In order to gain some overall perspective on this vast cultural field, perhaps the most significant recent contribution to the whole area has been Jane Moody’s *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770–1840*. Moody’s study presents the textual, legal, social, and dramatic basis of theater and its dramaturgy, complete with accurate and useful snapshots of leading issues and personalities. To a large extent, the breadth and depth of Moody’s analysis, the brilliant brevity of her capturing of important issues and moments, has not always been followed up by more recent scholars (*Illegitimate’s* sparse index perhaps impeding this process). This is now supplemented by Moody and Daniel O’Quinn’s *Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730–1830*, which provides an excellent collection of essays on topics such as private theatricals, Irish theater, actresses, and female playwrights, as well as scenery and British drama’s global topography. The complexity of historical live performance – admirably set out in Moody’s research – seems to have often wrong-footed most modern Romantic scholars while the presence of “dud” Romantic plays by the great poets has cluttered the field and diverted scholarship into marginal activities. Nevertheless, the chief characteristics of the Romantic canonical writers and their relationship to drama may be easily stated. Viewed from the perspective of London’s contemporary theatrical culture, the ambitions of the Romantic poets must have looked naïve and confused. A fair amount of modern scholarship has evaded tackling the sheer complexity of theatrical performance as a discursive system, one which was embodied by actors and actresses performing in public spaces.

The bare facts are that Keats’s *Otho* (co-written with Charles Brown) was abandoned, and Coleridge’s *Osorio* (1797) had to be substantially rewritten prior to performance (retitled *Remorse*) in 1813, by which time Coleridge’s total role in the text as rewritten (that is, the final text as performed) had been considerably diminished (for the most detailed account of differences between *Osorio* and *Remorse*, see Banerjee 144–162). Wordsworth’s *Borderers* was rejected by Covent Garden theater in 1797 (he never heard back from them), actually a common fate for an unsolicited five-act tragedy submitted to a licensed theater which had little interest in promoting new tragic writing. Percy Bysshe Shelley’s tragedy, *The Cenci* (1819), remained unperformed, while Byron’s *Marino Faliero* (1821) was only performed at Drury Lane in the face of his publisher’s – unsuccessful – legal injunctions, and then more as an opportunistic piece of curio programming reflecting public interest in Byron’s private life. Curiously, Joanna Baillie (the majority of whose output was unperformed) has recently attracted an unusually large amount of critical attention

perhaps precisely because her *Plays on the Passions* (published in stages between 1798 and 1806) present a playwriting practice appended to her analytical essays on the emotions she had dramatized. Baillie's long title sums this up: *A Series of Plays: In Which it is Attempted to Delineate The Stronger Passions of the Mind. Each Passion Being the Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy*. Arguably, the modern urge to recover Baillie as a female dramatist is only a later incarnation of an earlier desire to find a respectable playwright, someone writing tragedy in an era where most writing suitable for the stage was burletta or pantomime, as set out below (see Burroughs and Crochunis). Only her *De Montfort* (1798) had more than one production, with *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* typical in exclaiming, "What fine dramatic powers are possessed by Joanna Baillie!" and the journal praising her work in contrast to the "degradation, of that once noblest portion of our national literature, the Acted Drama," accelerated by "a disease caught from Kotzebue" ("Notices" 444, 443, 444). Augustus von Kotzebue, of course, was the author of *Lover's Vows*, the Elizabeth Inchbald translation of the drama at the center of the private theatrical episode in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) (see Bode).

Despite the huge public interest in drama as measured by attendance figures, the condemnation of Kotzebue exemplifies the continuing presence of a recurrent discourse of anti-theatricality which had run pretty unabated since Jeremy Collier's much reprinted, excerpted, and pastiched *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698). The subsequent struggle for respectability has dogged theater studies, distorting the awkward truth that, even within the patent system (described below), these were intensely commercial theaters. The memoir of actor-manager Thomas John Dibdin, *Reminiscences* (1837), is typical in being an attempt to enhance his own reputation as manager of the "illegitimate" Surrey Theater. But his 1817 production of an adaptation of Baillie's late tragedy, *Constantine Palaeologus*, into a melodramatic burletta, *Constantine and Valeria*, can similarly be seen as part of an attempt to impart respectability to his enterprises. Romantic theater studies' awkward positioning in twenty-first-century academe has compounded and distorted perceptions of its place in contemporary British cultural life. William St. Clair's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* demonstrated that, with a few notable exceptions such as Scott and Byron, the print runs of the Romantic poets and novelists rarely exceeded 500 copies and their readership, even allowing for enhanced distribution via the circulating libraries system, remained exceedingly small. Unfortunately, St. Clair's strategic decision to ignore the publication of play texts (apart from Shakespeare) has distorted his picture of the reading nation (quite apart from the problem of accurately estimating the theatergoing nation as a distinctive facet of literary consumption). Moderately successful plays, such as James Townley's *High Life Below Stairs* (1759), which reached ten editions by 1788, often continued reprinting. The Georgian repertoire is filled with many such instances. Covent Garden and Drury Lane, and even lesser London venues such as the Royalty Theatre and Sadler's Wells, set up their own printing or sales arrangements for the new writing produced at their theaters, producing verbal sketches of pantomime scenes and, if not always complete play texts, almost invariably separate

song books. Popular theater songs continued into second and third lives of dissemination in pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall or Marylebone, eventually reaching deep into Georgian family life when scored for domestic instruments such as the harpsichord or newly emerging pianoforte.

The attraction of contemporary theater to the canonical Romantic authors was not only publicity (Keats hoped to persuade the brilliant but unstable Edmund Kean – thought to be the greatest actor of his age – to perform in *Otho*) but also financial, because theaters were known to be highly cash generative. By contrast, publishing a book sometimes required the author to pay production expenses. Given the total audience capacities of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, and with entrance fees paid directly at the door or via nearby ticketing agents at the usual rate of around three to five shillings in the box, two shillings in the pit, and one shilling in the gallery, the theaters gathered huge amounts of daily cash yet were otherwise administratively crude, making it common sense to pay authors and actors immediately. Depending on the individual arrangements, the theater paid out fees to writers after their plays reached their third and ninth nights. To give two examples, for providing the slender portions of dialogue pieced into the highly successful Covent Garden “Bastille” pantomime of *The Picture of Paris taken in July 1790*, the ex-Della Cruscan radical poet, Robert Merry, received £100 two months after its first night. The more established author, John O’Keeffe, received £130 within two weeks of the first night for his averagely successful two-act farce *Modern Antiques or, The Merry Mourners* (1791).<sup>2</sup> With even Shakespeare normally cut to about one and a half hours’ acting time, authors required dramatic skills at importing conflict, resolution, and short, sharp dialogue rather than expounding a gradually rounded tragic development of character.

The crowded audiences (and steady cash-flows) at the two big playhouses were not accidental phenomena but the by-product of theatrical monopoly. With London (in this case definable as Westminster) restricted since the time of Charles II to just two royal patents to perform spoken drama, this monopoly (or, more accurately, *duopoly*) ensured that the ability of citizens to access Britain’s rich heritage of drama meant going to either Covent Garden or Drury Lane. Keats’s inability to find a seat one night at Drury Lane in 1818 took him to The Minor, Catherine Street, one of the fugitive new urban private theaters aimed at mopping up would-be theatergoers and amateur actors, with his January 23, 1818 letter to George and Thomas Keats remaining one of the few reliable contemporary documents to record impressions of such transient venues. Or, to look at it the other way round, the Romantic poets attempted to crowd themselves into favor with the two patent house theaters (and spurned the others) precisely because of the benefits afforded by their stranglehold on the market. Indeed, the role of legality and privilege comprises one of the primary subsets of structural cultural architecture underlying the place of theater in the eighteenth century. In London, which was the originating location of most new writing for the stage, the perquisite of producing spoken drama (from Shakespeare to R.B. Sheridan) lay confined within the issuing of the two royal patents for spoken performance in London (which could theoretically be re-auctioned on the death of

the patentee), actually inevitably vested with the Covent Garden and Drury Lane playhouse managements. What this means is that, within the boundaries of Westminster (but reaching beyond if the patentees could enforce their privileges by threat of legal injunction), on any one winter's night c.1800 there were never more than about eight speaking actresses employed on the London stage (double that number for male actors, on account of the usual ratio of gendered parts devised by the authors). Attempts to introduce into London what was sometimes referred to as a "Third Theatre" were persistent but only gradually produced a widening of the range of performance venues within the capital. By the late 1810s or early 1820s, the principal alternative theaters were Sadler's Wells, the Royal Coburg (now the Old Vic), the Olympic Theatre (demolished but sited beneath the present-day Aldwych), the Adelphi in the Strand, the Surrey Theatre in Blackfriars Road, and a changing range of open-air arenas (such as Astley's and the Royal Amphitheatre), where summer season horse dramas were presented often adapted from theatrical origins (by 1800, for example, most London theatrical venues – including Astley's – offered a version of Sheridan's *Pizzaro*). In addition to these spaces, there was the anomalous exception of the Haymarket, during the Romantic period largely managed by George Colman the Younger. The Haymarket had a special (but highly unofficial) status since it could – and did – apply for licenses to perform the spoken word as well as producing musicalized drama. Musical dramas (burletta), along with pantomime were, by default, the prescribed diet for all the playhouses in London except for Covent Garden and Drury Lane. This was an absolute and invariable practice with, conversely, the patent houses unrestricted as to the generic forms they chose.

The structural effects of these conditions had been reinforced by the 1737 Licensing Act which coincided with, and accelerated, escalations in systematic attempts to censor the texts of staged drama. Noticeably, this material structure ran contrary to the professed ideals of Romanticism's canonical authors. Although Wordsworth seems to have realized censorship existed when he submitted *The Borderers*, the ideals of liberty and free expression otherwise normally championed by the Romantic poets seem to have dissolved when they contemplated the possibility of a hit patent house tragedy (although, when diligently rewritten by an anonymous Drury Lane production team, Coleridge's *Remorse* did not provoke censorship or the playhouse wasting its licensing fee) (Larpent 1753).<sup>3</sup> The role of censor was undertaken by the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays, from 1778 to 1824 carried out by John Larpent, and from 1824 until 1836 by George Colman the Younger, the poacher-turned-gamekeeper ex-manager of the Haymarket and prolific playwright. The survival of virtually all of the licensing manuscripts for the period 1737–1824, representing some 2,500 separate playscripts, epilogues, prologues, and songs, now deposited at the Huntington Library, California, together with another corpus of texts from 1824 onwards in the British Library Manuscripts collection in London, means that a considerable body of evidence for the processes of censorship has survived. Although there were various government interventions from time to time to control the publication of print and verbal seditious utterance,

Georgian stage censorship remains the only regularized and systematic intervention into literary culture run by the state.

If at the micro-level censorship was muddled and haphazard, quite apart from new play texts requiring scrutiny prior to performance, technically (and actually) every new song or new epilogue introduced into an old play had also to be licensed (at the rate of two guineas per license). However, within these conditions, a practice arose whereby new writing emanating from provincial or national regional centers was not always censored, although the position of provincial royal theaters was less straightforward. For example, Archibald Maclaren's abolitionist play, *The Negro Slaves* (1799), was performed at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, apparently without being licensed from London although the same theater's *St. Kilda in Edinburgh; or, News from Camperdown* (1798) by Robert Heron – a somewhat risqué play teasingly presenting local consternation at Admiral Duncan's victory in the North Sea – was diligently submitted to the Lord Chamberlain (Larpent 1196).

At the extremes, plays could be stopped dead by censorship. For example, in 1794, O'Keeffe's farce, *Jenny's Whim Or The Roasted Emperor*, intended for the Haymarket was interdicted as "a low Ridicule or Sarcasm upon the Emperor of Morocco," who was then in town along with the new ambassador from the Ottoman empire (Larpent 1037). Or, in the case of the successful society portrait painter and later President of the Royal Academy, Martin Archer Schee, his *Alasco* (1824), a tragedy perceived to be based upon the Irish rebellion of 1798 (although set in medieval Poland), was so heavily cut by Colman that the author withdrew it before its first performance (whereupon it found a venue in Lord Chamberlain-free New York), before publishing the complete text together with the markings revealing the Examiner's cuts and prefaced by Schee's outraged response. As Colman put it in a letter at first only privately circulated in manuscript to lobby members of Parliament, "Produce, constantly, before Spectators nothing but fascinating Debauchees, and heroick Conspirators, and the weak part of the multitude, (which is the majority,) would, in time, turn Profligates, and Rebels" (Colman 2). The disparity between the freedom to print play texts (as Schee did) contrasted with the absolute (if indirectly exerted) government control over their staging is a good indicator of the continuing official nervousness with which spoken drama was regarded.

Despite the presence of a healthy appetite for new ballad operas and ballad farces sung to traditional tunes (as demonstrated by the continuing popularity of John Gay's revolutionary *The Beggars Opera* [1728]), the London duopoly on speech gave dramatists slim chance of success unless they were prepared to produce copious amounts of song. If popular ballad operas did not attract the authors of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), the presence of songs in plays pretty much converted dramas into burlettas and it was burletta which was the only permissible form (apart from pantomime) which could be played in the non-patent playhouses. Not only was this particular genre also very poorly defined, but it was also open to abuse. When Colman took over as Examiner in 1824, he immediately wrote to the Lord Chamberlain to request a definition of "burletta." The reply he received was baffling: "I think I may fairly say, that it is easy sometimes to say what is not a

Burletta, tho' it may be difficult to define what a Burletta is, according to the legal acceptation [*sic*] of the Term."<sup>4</sup> Of course, Colman had been a playwright and theater manager for nearly forty years by this time, and so there must be some element of posturing but, nevertheless, the exact amount of song combined with music was a variable (if permanent) measure of a burletta's differentiation from the spoken drama. Modern attempts to distinguish a secondary category of musical drama, melodrama, are hopelessly confusing. Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery* (1802) is usually cited as the first British-produced "melodrama," where spoken action is supported by expressive music, but the form had been long present on the London stage, reaching at least as far back as Edward Jerningham's *Margaret of Anjou: An Historical Interlude* (1777), a piece inspired by J. J. Rousseau's contemporary experimentation with musically expressive theater. *Margaret of Anjou* was regularly performed as a benefit night piece by Elizabeth Pope (née Younge), the highest paid Covent Garden actress of the early 1790s. Indeed, "melodrama" is best understood as a category subsumed under burletta since only burletta was recognized by the Lord Chamberlain as permissible by the non-patent theaters. Although some non-patent playhouses allegedly did attempt to produce spoken drama with the speeches interspersed with occasional chords played on the harpsichord, this was a dangerous direction to take and risked (with remote pressure exerted by the patentees) forfeiture of the local magistrates' license for those venues beyond the confines of Westminster. With burletta and pantomime the sole vehicles guaranteed to remain legal within London, playwrights obviously tended to write works in these genres in order to increase their chances of their work being produced. The squeezing effect of dramatic monopoly on artistic form also undoubtedly led to the age's preoccupation with closet drama, a genre where the authors fully envisaged no performance would ever take place on a public stage. Arguably, it is licensing restrictions such as these which have resulted in the frequent perception by modern critics that no worthwhile or serious dramatic tragedy was ever produced in this period.

Conversely, there was also a degree to which such generic restrictions could be creatively exploited. Probably taking umbrage at his earlier mistreatment by the Drury Lane committee of management, in 1821 the Surrey Theatre manager, Thomas John Dibdin, produced Horace Walpole's previously unperformed five-act tragedy, *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), at his playhouse under the title of *Narbonne Castle: Or, The Mysterious Mother*.<sup>5</sup> With Walpole's play dealing unabashedly with the theme of a mother's conscious incest with her son, Dibdin had no alternative but to bill his play as "a new Serious Melodramatic Romance, in 3 Acts," by which he meant that it would be a burletta, although appropriating the cachet of the so-called "melodramas" (in fact, largely burlettas) performing at the patent theaters. Given the nature of the subject material of Walpole's *Mysterious Mother* (which every modern printed edition assumes never to have been performed in public before 2001), the Surrey's redacted musicalization of Walpole's conventionally structured five-act original was not an aesthetically driven choice but an imposition of the licensing system.

The monopolistic squeeze on the spoken word had other profound structural implications for the role of drama in Georgian society. Again, one of the primary issues in any study of Romantic drama in performance is the provision of a sufficiently robust critical and theoretical methodology able to cope with the scale of contemporary society's engagement with the theatrical. For example, the private theatricals episode in Austen's *Mansfield Park* is a fascinating indicator of an almost completely lost culture of domestic amateur performance. Austen's plotting of a proposed country-house theatrical, with its illicit opportunities to undress, put on costumes, rehearse in private, and pretend heterosexual desire (in Inchbald's play based around a story line of youthful indiscretion), was both immensely attractive and socially disruptive. The reactions of contemporary culture – as is clear from Austen's own record of avid theatergoing – can be highly misleading. *The Theatrical Rod! A Weekly Journal of The Stage, Literature, and General Amusement* (1831), full of innuendo in its title, was run by the Duncombes, a family of ex-seditious scandal-mongers, who claimed that the journal was “not averse to private theatricals, when they keep within the sphere of respectability,” but feigned horror at “behold[ing] them degraded to the level of the lowest taprooms, and see[ing] our best authors mangled by beardless boys” (1: 7). The boys without beards, as *The Theatrical Rod* quite knew, would have been cross-dressed women or, indeed, underage boys. Remarkably, this was a society in which amateur acting was as common as drawing, painting, or the playing of any of the normal domestic musical instruments. Although largely unrecoverable in any detail, productions of private theatricals in country houses considerably extended the dissemination of play texts into society. *Mansfield Park* remains a rather sheltered guide to some of its manifestations. At a private theatrical in 1787 at the Earl of Sandwich's Hinchingsbrooke House, Cambridgeshire, “Major Arabin, in failure of a Lady, played Mrs. Cheshire, in a style that drew forth the incessant laughter and applause of the house. In a rich crimson silk, a pair of double ruffles, and diamond ear-rings – he presented one of the most Agreeable Surprises that could be witnessed” (unidentified newspaper clipping, November 17, 1787). During Sandwich's season of plays, the amateurs performed Samuel Foote's *The Lyar* (1762), Charles Coffey's, *The Devil to Pay; or, The Wives Metamorphos'd* (1732), James Townley's *High Life Below Stairs* (1759), George Colman the Younger's *Inkle and Yarico* (1787) and – with Major Arabin playing Mrs. Cheshire – O'Keeffe's *Agreeable Surprise* (1784).

Although one can assume this was a fashionable gathering of Britain's highest elite, a moment's glance is sufficient to register the sheer modern unfamiliarity of the repertoire being performed, quite apart from the variant social attitudes it contained. Most of these plays are largely – or even completely – unstudied. The recent resurfacing of the radical activist John Thelwall's original manuscript of a play entitled *Inkle and Yarico*, and its almost certain silent purloining by Colman (the poacher poaching, as it were, because Thelwall had sent him the manuscript in the hopes of finding a performance), may generate further interest in this important abolitionist drama (see Thelwall). The ability of Georgian drama to consume vast amounts of production material for its two-plays-nightly scheduling gives some idea

of the scale of their enterprise, in this instance probably signaling the pressures on Colman as a manager to produce new programs. Colman's huge success with his own *Inkle and Yarico* exemplifies much about contemporary theaters' rapacious appetite for material. Unabating modern critical interest in blackface performance, coupled with Thelwall's celebrity status as an associate of Wordsworth and William Godwin, may propel further interest in this field. In any event, the cross-dressed William John Arabin was untroubled by appearing in earrings and double ruffles at the private theatricals when Colman's purloined version was performed. Arabin's career prospered and he eventually became an army general, notably caricatured by James Gillray in 1802.

However, private theatricals also reached far down into middle-class and plebeian life and appear to correspond with the role of the circulating libraries in disseminating literature. The Georgian period's most extensive diarist, the Chichester musician John Marsh, recorded going with his wife in 1785 to the house of a Dover banker, Peter Fector, to see "the Play of the Orphan of China, to be performed at his private Theatre," that is, Arthur Murphy's 1759 adaptation of a Voltaire play (April 1785; see Liu and Ou).<sup>6</sup> Scarcely a month later, Marsh was recruited to perform music at a somewhat more upmarket private theatrical put on by "ye Gentry of Sandwich" in Kent, where they performed *The Merchant of Venice*, with Marsh staying on "After ye Performance, w<sup>ch</sup> went off very well I supp'd with the Actors, Performers at ye New Inn (where y<sup>e</sup> Theater was, & I slept) & on y<sup>e</sup> next Morning return'd home" (April 1785). As Shakespeare was performed along with William O'Brien's farce, *Cross-Purposes* (1772), this was obviously a large-scale undertaking with Marsh organizing an elaborate musical accompaniment and, when taken together with his account of the names of the musicians and actors concerned (whose identities and status can be pieced together from entries in this journal), it is clear that even this actually non-aristocratic but highly provincial private theatrical evening was elaborately organized. With Marsh himself a diligent serving officer of the local militia over many years, his account furnishes a remarkable picture of convivial sociability, providing some suggestive indicators of the scale of the provincial consumption of theater during this period.

Not only do these important records of performance give rare glimpses of provincial life, but they also materialize information about the contemporary consumption of theatrical literature by fixing it to specific places and times. Again, Austen's fears about the presence of both sexes, their learning of parts and even the care with which roles were allocated, are all relevant here and implicitly present in the banker Fector's, or the Sandwich gentry's, social planning. In other words, there existed along one continuum, if on a steep gradient, a direct connection between the two giant patent theaters with their audiences numbered together as several thousand, with the further audiences of the regular provincial theaters, the productions of the touring circuits, and the provincial amateurs. This raises a number of theoretical issues. The starting point for most literary studies is the role of individual texts and, secondarily, the role of the author in the production of those texts. Texts then tend to be read either to gain a better understanding of the author's



meaning or else to extrapolate from the texts something about their social or cultural context. With all types of drama, and perhaps particularly with reference to Georgian drama suffering from relative critical neglect in comparison to the historical record of the proliferation of contemporary performance, the result has been that much of this general pattern of following analytical sequences of author/text/context appears much less suitable. For example, in the area of genre, what looks like marvelously (or odd) experimental generic hybridity was, upon closer analysis, a process of development driven by restrictions inherent in monopoly and the intervention of direct state censorship. The Georgian practice (noticeably carried out even in Sandwich) of performing two plays per evening also compounds – during their same moments of reception – their individual cultural meanings in ways which are now difficult to recover. In other words, drama of this period presents the paradox of a highly distributed model of reception (metropolitan, provincial, touring) on a scale unfamiliar to us today, coupled with an extraordinary degree of specificity about the temporal locations of those receptions.

In short, the “Romantic” model of the solitary artist or exponent seems not to work so well. In its place, one probably needs to arrive at a more distributed model of theatricality that gives greater weight to the basic condition of dramatic texts in performance, a model bearing under consideration that it requires multiple actors to convene, collaborate, and act out texts in specific performance venues. As it is, the reconstruction of contemporary acting practices also remains relatively sparsely studied. A starting point is Henry Siddons’s *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action . . . Embellished with Numerous Engravings, Expressive of the Various Passions, and Representing The Modern Costume of the London Theatres* (1807), an adaptation of a German text but which newly included illustrations of his sister, Sarah. A key later Georgian text which discusses theatrical expression, along with advice about costuming and makeup (including blackface), is Leman Thomas Rede’s *The Road to the Stage; Or, The Performer’s Preceptor* (1827).<sup>7</sup>

The celebrity actress Sarah Siddons has been the focus of some important studies, yet it is clear that her much commented on capacity to reduce parts of audiences to bouts of hysterics and emotional passion seems not to have been uncommon.<sup>8</sup> The evidence of Siddons’s performance is abundant. In October 1783 the 16-year-old future American President, John Quincy Adams (1767–1848), saw Siddons at Drury Lane playing the title role in David Garrick’s *Isabella; or, The Fatal Marriage* (1757), adapted from Southerne. Adams noted in his diary, “Mrs Siddons supposed to be the first Tragick performer in Europe play’d the part of Isabella A young lady, in the next Box to where we were, was so much affected by it as to be near fainting and was carried out. I was told that every night Mrs Siddons performs, this happens” (October 31, 1783). However, in Dover, two years later, the banker Peter Fector’s amateur acting, which John Marsh attended, caused much the same effect during their private theatrical of Murphy’s *Orphan of China*:

As an instance of Mr Fector’s good Acting, as he represented in y<sup>e</sup> last Act a person dying in consequence of having been tortur’d, his Sister was so affected as to go into fits,

on w<sup>ch</sup> the Play was suddenly stopt & he arose & leap'd from the Stage into ye Box wherein she was, & was forc'd to continue for sometime assuring her he was very well & that nothing was really the matter with him, before she c<sup>ld</sup> be pacified enough to be had out [of the box]. (Marsh, March 1785)

Whatever the true stature of Siddons as an actress, it is characteristic of the theater of the age that it is the performer in performance, rather than the characteristics of the drama texts, which appears to have created this effect. There could hardly be more different plays than the ex-Southerne Garrick *Isabella* at Drury Lane and the Voltaire-derived Murphy *Orphan* at a banker's house in Dover, yet both plays, presumably located at vastly different levels of performer ability, produced much the same emotional effect on (female) audience members.

The inclusion of the responses of female audience members, as in the above examples, together with the presence of several important actresses has impelled a whole series of studies. In response to considering the personal challenges inevitably arising from the public exposure afforded by the large metropolitan theaters, much valuable recent work has been done on actresses' struggle for success, independence, and moral privacy, most recently in Felicity Nussbaum's *Rival Queens*, which studies six actresses preceding Siddons. Gill Perry's volume, *Spectacular Flirtations*, works in an analogous line, with both Nussbaum and Perry examining actresses' negotiation of public theatrical culture although, in Perry's study at least, the coquette remains something of a visual expression in paintings rather than an altogether recognizable aspect of contemporary acting styles. Perry's book is not the only one to concentrate on cross-dressed roles. For the eighteenth century, the issue of male effeminacy was a very real one, something as much to do with anxieties about growing an empire based upon principles of militarily protected commerce as it was to do with domestic gender relationships. In some ways, its theatrical founding moment might be judged to be the actress Pegg Woffington's two appearances (recorded in a broadside print) at Drury Lane in 1746 cross-dressed as a female militia volunteer and speaking a punning epilogue in "an Attempt to make our Men STAND."

The more general recovery of Romantic-period women as dramatists, actresses, and even theater managers has been one of the major achievements of the last thirty years. It would be impossible to list all of this research, but some idea of the range covered is given here. Sarah Baker (1736/7–1816), for example, ran a string of theaters in Kent, owning five at her death. Being virtually a one-woman enterprise, she sometimes acted as her own prompter and, upon being refused a license at Margate, dismantled her theater there and moved it to Faversham by ship (see Hodgson and, for a more recent examination, Bratton). Similarly, Jane Margaret Scott (c.1739–1839) managed, wrote for, and directed the Sans Pareil (later Adelphi) theater in the Strand until 1819, her theater spied on by the patentees who sent to the playhouse two policemen witnesses to report on suspected infringements of their privileges in her production of *The Sportsman and Shepherd! or, Where's My Wig?*<sup>9</sup> Consistent with the emphasis in this essay on aspects of material theatrical culture,

women such as Baker and Scott are important because they demonstrate the inroads women made, both in the metropolis and in the provinces, into the control of the national theatrical infrastructure, thereby following in the footsteps of earlier actresses such as Elizabeth Barry (1656/8–1713) and Anne Bracegirdle (c.1671–1748) who were co-owners of the Lincoln's Inn theater in the late seventeenth century. Within this context, work on leading female dramatists has led to some fine recent studies, particularly with respect to Elizabeth Inchbald, with further research now importantly supported by the publication of her diaries by Ben P. Robertson (see Green; O'Quinn, "Bread"; and Garnai). Whatever the current critical status of Inchbald as a dramatist, it is also important to realize that both her *Every One Has His Fault* (1793) and Hannah Cowley's *A Bold Stroke for a Husband* (1783) were playing in Boston and New York by 1794 (Wansey 59, 153). In other words, along with the work of the playwright and radical activist Thomas Holcroft, their plays enjoyed considerable success across the eastern seaboard of the United States of America by the early 1790s. British Georgian dramatic writing was probably much more rapidly exported and disseminated into America than any other form of literary writing. The full implications of this theatrical globalization is a phenomenon now receiving greater critical attention, perhaps most importantly by Kathleen Wilson's groundbreaking essay on Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1703), in which she traces its production in British colonies in Jamaica, Calcutta, and New South Wales. Similarly, Jason Shaffer has convincingly demonstrated the surprising degree to which Joseph Addison's Drury Lane tragedy *Cato* (1713) was formative not only of General Washington's personal republican construction of public virtue, but also how it came to be deeply embedded as an defining elocutionary and oratorical text in colonial and early republican America (on the British context, see Walker).

In some respects there was two-way transatlantic traffic and it is the infiltration of the detail of gradually accelerating new research, often overturning the suppositions of the past, which is gradually transforming our knowledge of the drama of this period. Perhaps the most significant new information about transatlantic connections comes in Bernth Lindfors's discovery that the American black actor Ira Aldridge made his debut not, as previously thought, at the Royal Coburg but a few months before that at the Royalty Theatre in London's Tower Hamlets in March 1825, where he played (as the license required) the title role in a "Melo Drama" (that is, a burletta) version of *Othello*, as well as appearing in Thomas Morton's *The Slave* (1816). Lindfors's sleuthing of Aldridge, tracing him back to one of the most radical of London theaters (opened in 1787 amid much controversy from the patentees and the subject of attempts by the Society for the Suppression of Vice to seek its closure in 1803), provides important information confirming our sense that the non-patent theaters were much more progressive in their social and political attitudes than the royal theaters. Of equal significance has been George A. Thompson Jr.'s discovery that the solo comedian Charles Mathews recorded that James Hewlett, Aldridge's African-American associate in the New York African Theater, had given a (now presently untraceable) performance in Liverpool in January 1825 (Document 67). If the Hewlett sighting is corroborated, this would change much about what we know

about the emergence of black actors on the English stage and, not least, the changes wrought in their careers by the forcible closure of their African Theater off Wall Street. Again, the documentary historicism of Lindfors (who found the “right” newspaper billing) and Thompson has clarified much about an important cultural field.

The return in this essay to showcase documentary based historicism is meant to indicate, as argued in the opening paragraph, the importance of addressing persisting gaps in knowledge. It is difficult to imagine any other generic field within the much-turned-over academic patch of long eighteenth-century studies where the existence of exiled black American cultural agents crossing over to Britain would have remained overlooked for so long. However, perhaps precisely because theater history during this period is so vast and under-researched (even taking into account the research already cited), the need to correlate archival studies with other investigative methods remains clear. One promising divergent path is demonstrated in Gillian Russell’s *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London*, a study which follows her equally groundbreaking *Theatres of War* which had examined amateur and professional engagements with theater within wartime British culture. Although sometimes only obliquely related to staged drama rather than to the other types of social assemblies which are her principal focus, Russell’s comprehensive account of London’s female-led institutions of entertainment, such as Carlisle House and the Pantheon, offers a fascinating model for understanding how the capital’s cultural economy existed on a framework of the types of sociability and astute marketing mirrored in the theaters. Of similar potential, but rather more directed toward theatrical performance, is O’Quinn’s *Staging Governance*. By using a refined proto-Foucauldian approach, O’Quinn’s methodology facilitates convincing connections between oratory, legal practice, caricature prints, and the stage, branching out into particularly important discussions of Britain’s engagement with its Indian empire. In a process analogous to Russell’s approach, O’Quinn conjures up London’s theatrically centered metropolis as a living cultural field, in his case moving between Burke’s speeches at the trial of Warren Hastings to representations of the Orient in plays such as Samuel Foote’s *The Nabob* (1772) and Inchbald’s *A Mogul Tale; or, The Descent of the Balloon* (1784). Both of these studies, which are otherwise very different in their focus, together open up the intricate complexity of a metropolitan society which could, quite literally, move – over only a few hundred meters – between the Royal Academy exhibitions in Somerset House and the royal patent theaters at Covent Garden and Drury Lane.

For a subject area such as Romanticism, which has recently been so much preoccupied with empire, the role of theater in disseminating knowledge about Britain’s global contacts has only recently begun. Sir Joshua Reynolds’s full-length portrait of the Tahitian Omai was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1776. In 1785 Covent Garden staged O’Keeffe and the painter and scenographer Philippe de Loutherbourg’s spectacular pantomime of *Omai; or, A Trip round the World* (1785). A few years later, probably using scenery recycled from *Omai*, Covent Garden staged an adaptation of the Parisian Jean-François Arnould-Musset’s serious pantomime

of *The Death of Captain Cook* (1789), a relatively unusual diversification into this non-Commedia dell Arte derived form. Assuming two-thirds-full houses, *The Death of Captain Cook*'s 28 Covent Garden performances in its first season alone implies an audience size of around 60,000 people. Moreover, without contemporary legal restrictions on the pirating of texts or productions, this pantomime was not only played for several more Covent Garden seasons but was also quickly taken up on the provincial English circuits and rapidly crossed to America. It was probably performed, in variously adapted versions, to about one million people in the decade from 1789. What *The Death of Captain Cook* primarily showed, with the immense (and musicalized) pathos of its closing tableaux of Cook's funeral cortege (an event which never actually happened), was that European contact with aboriginal populations ended with the death of Westerners. In the North American context, just as to the Londoners taking part in Britain's global expansion, this was an explosive cultural message. Its theatricalization is important, particularly as produced into pantomime's silent form, because it was a message endlessly repeated in all kinds of playhouse venues and to all kinds of different people, even if the audience did not understand English.

Even taken on its own, *The Death of Captain Cook* had the capacity to create, reinforce, or further project enormously provocative and embodied images of cross-cultural antagonism and to do this before audiences vast in number. It is axiomatic of theatrical texts in performance that the received cultural meaning of drama changes with every change in the location of the performance venue across its two temporal axes (geographic and in time). Oddly, the underlying cultural dynamics implicit in these types of process are encompassed – with explicit reference to the role of theater – in the historian Kathleen Wilson's important formulation, in reference to de Louthembourg and O'Keefe's *Omai*, that "the English [Georgian] stage [w]as the leading site for the enactment of superior national virtue and character," where "theater was able to transform historical idealizations into historical 'realities' that helped structure and confirm English beliefs about their own distinctiveness and destiny" (63, 70). As proposed by Wilson, the basic reiterative capacity of drama to repeat the same basic messages over and over again, for example, about the distinctiveness of British culture and its ideals of native resilience, liberty, martial valor, domestic integrity, and destiny, was part of the foundation of the imperial project as it unfolded during the Romantic period. This is probably quite a good point of departure for future theatrical studies.

See CLASS; GENDER AND SEXUALITY; NATION AND EMPIRE; RACE; VISUAL CULTURE.

## Notes

- 1 On *Otho*, see Mulrooney. Southey's play was not published until 1817 and not performed during the poet's lifetime. William Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817) and A

- View of the English Stage* (1818) were based upon witnessing plays in performance, almost exclusively at Covent Garden and Drury Lane.
- 2 Covent Garden ledger book, BL Egerton Ms. 2,291.
  - 3 This licensing copy shows no Lord Chamberlain deletions.
  - 4 BL Add Ms 42865.fol 24, March 1824.
  - 5 Playbill, Surrey Theatre, May 10, 1821.
  - 6 Marsh's journals up to 1802 are excerpted in Robins.
  - 7 Rede, but not Henry Siddons, is included in Zunshine.
  - 8 Good starting points are Asleson's studies and McPherson. Studies of Siddons's role in helping create the theatricalizing style of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1791) are abundant, but begin with Reid. For a recent view, and summary of the critical context, see Mallory.
  - 9 National Archives, Kew, Home Office 119/4, March 5, 1818.

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# Gothic

*Jerrold E. Hogle*

In chapter XIV of his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge recalls how he and Wordsworth worked out the rationale for their 1798 and 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*—one of the texts that announced the onset of English “Romantic” literature—by striving to balance “two cardinal points”: “exciting the sympathy of the reader” by an “adherence to the truth of nature” and “giving the interest of novelty” that can be added “by the modifying colours of imagination” (168). To that paradoxical end, Coleridge remembers, he agreed to write ballads “supernatural, or at least romantic,” directed at “interesting” readers’ “affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real”; Wordsworth by contrast, as his co-author reconstructs him, set out to “excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention” to the “wonders of the world before us,” but only insofar as the “film of familiarity” in our customary perceptions is lifted by an imaginative heightening that turns all perceived entities into “inexhaustible treasure[s]” (168–169). Here Coleridge, to be sure, echoes a revision of the 1800 *Ballads* Preface where the “object” of “these Poems,” in Wordsworth’s view, is to “throw over” their “common . . . situations” a “certain colouring of imagination” by which the “ordinary” acquires an “unusual aspect” due to “the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement” (*Prose* 281–282). But *Biographia* XIV also refers back to the aspirations declared by Horace Walpole when the unexpected success of his novella *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 led him to release a second edition the following year with the generic subtitle *A Gothic Story*, the first time that label had been attached to a work of fiction. Walpole’s 1765 Preface, it turns out, defines this new “species” of “romance” as a realm where all “witnesses to the most stupendous phenomena” (Coleridge’s “supernatural”) “never lose sight of their human character” and so behave like “the mortal agents in [a] drama

[fashioned] according to the rules of probability,” just as Coleridge will want in his “romantic” poems. Yet there is not such a “strict adherence to common life,” though there is some, that “the great resources of fancy” are “dammed up”; instead the “powers of fancy” are “given liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention” (a free association of ideas in a Wordsworthian “state of excitement”) so long as “Nature” is not so “excluded” as to allow complete “improbability” (Walpole 9–10). Of course, Walpole is mainly trying to justify the internal debates of the characters in his “Story,” all nearly as realistic and “modern” as those in the middle-class novels of Richardson, Fielding, or Smollett in the 1740s–1750s, even as his people encounter gigantic armored fragments resembling a statue on the tomb of the Castle’s original owner (Walpole 19–21), a ghost walking out of a portrait of the current owner’s (Manfred’s) grandfather (26), and the animated skeleton of a dead hermit who knows secrets about the distant past (106–107), ingredients of “ancient romance” from the Middle Ages now transmogrified several centuries later (9). Yet the fundamentals of the “Gothic Story’s” stated aims – the theories about, as well as the practice of, them from the very beginning of that literary mode – clearly forecast the similar interplay of realism and the supernatural, the immediate perceptions of nature versus the “colourings” of imaginative associations, blended both theoretically and poetically by Wordsworth and Coleridge, two of the founding authors of English Romanticism. The “Gothic” as Walpole defines it is therefore among the basic ingredients of the English Romantic movement, one of several fundamental dimensions within it *and* theories behind it that this volume exists to explain.

Indeed, the roots of “the Romantic” in “Gothic Story” elements go back even further than Walpole. Such roots include “old romance” itself, the source of the movement’s name, particularly the kind focused on chivalric quests as much as unrequited love. Greg Kucich has reminded us that “medieval” as much as Walpolean “romance” was internally pulled between “nostalgia for a fading feudalistic society,” including its assumptions about spiritual interventions into earthly events, and “the pressing realities of a new social order moving towards a secular, economic modernity” (464–467). Those tensions have appeared as far back as Chretien des Troyes’ *Lancelot* and *Perceval* (1160–1185), Thomas Malory’s *King Arthur* (1485), and Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1595), and as late as Walpole’s time in Richard Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) or Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), major symptoms of the nationalistic ballad revival and the many kinds of medieval nostalgia that flourished in England for over a century afterwards. Then, too, there is the link noticed by John and Anna Letitia Aikin (later Barbauld) in “On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror” (1773): they suggest that *The Castle of Otranto* is a “modern attempt” to arouse the “delight” that can come from “dwell[ing] upon objects of pure terror,” a “paradox” attainable in the arts only “by a sublime and vigorous imagination” (127–129). Here the Aikins make explicit the link between the “Gothic Story” and *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) by Edmund Burke. This treatise redefines the “sublime” (the loftiest level of writing since the ancient Greeks) as “the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling” because it is really based on

“terror,” an “apprehension” of possible “pain or death” aroused by “immense distances,” dark “obscurity,” incipient violence, towering or ruined old buildings, and intimations of God-like “power . . . to a degree far exceeding the bounds of our comprehension” as these are perceived and interpreted by the subjectivity of an author or audience (Burke 36, 53–55, 113, 62). Such threats can be pleasurable for Burke, as the Aikins realize, only if they are rendered “at certain distances” or “with certain modifications” in aesthetic productions (Burke 36–37) – the way Walpole balances the terrors in *Otranto* with devices akin to the “beauties” and “eloquence” of his chief model, Shakespeare (Walpole 11). Those adjustments are possible in Burke’s eyes because mental effects such as the sublime and beautiful can be produced by the “primary” sensations of “perception” being transformed and expanded “by the secondary pleasures of the imagination” that adds in associations of ideas formed out of previous impressions (Burke 22). This infusion of new sensations by the conglomerations known to a reflective imagination, of course, is what Wordsworth and Coleridge greatly depend on for their “colourings” that make the supernatural impinge on the natural and vice versa. Wordsworth, writing in 1811–1812, finds that a “sensation of personal fear” aroused by “a precipice” or “torrent” cannot become truly “sublime” unless the imaginative “thoughts” applied to the scene “are not chained down by anguish” alone. They must be felt as “free and tolerate neither limit nor circumscription,” much like Walpole’s “boundless realms of invention,” so much so as to project “inherent dignity” from the “fallen” observer into the vastness and hence to raise the psyche from the sensible to the supersensible (*Prose* 268–269). Even while they inherit and transform Walpole’s attempted interplay of “ancient” and “modern,” which also exacerbates a tension basic to “old romance,” Wordsworth, Coleridge, and other Romantics continue and modify Burke’s “terrific sublime” and its way of aestheticizing fear to produce something like the imaginative “expatiation” promulgated in the first “Gothic Story.”

Surprisingly, however, scholarly attention to Romantic poetry and aesthetic theory has, until recently, included only sporadic attention to the deep connection between the Romantic and the “Gothic.” By the time Western academia became mostly agreed on what “Romanticism” included at the dawn of the twentieth century, Gothic fictions had already been consigned to the “low culture” of what came to be called “pulp fiction.” Such labels revealed a distaste in the academy “for a genre at once too visceral” in its lurid hyperboles “and too popular” to be considered “high” art worthy of serious study (Bloom 157). This dissociation of the Gothic from the Romantic became even greater during the prominence of the “New Criticism” in the United States and England from the early 1930s through the later 1960s. In most of its variations, this movement’s conception of the artful text valued organic coalescence, an “interaction” among “symbols” with “conflicting overtones” that ultimately achieved “a unity built out of the contradictions” (Hogle, “Theorizing” 29). Gothic works, with their “ancient” and “modern romance” features conspicuously at odds from the start, have a generic instability unsuited to this ideal and thus became “inferior” writings only rarely worthy of attention in an academy dominated by new-critical teachings. Though there were occasional rebellions against this

hegemony, particularly from the perspective of the “old historicism” that saw the rise of the Walpolean Gothic as reflective of the “period mentality” of the late Enlightenment (see Varma; Hogle, “Theorizing” 30–31), it has taken the revolutionary emergence by the mid-to-late 1960s of mostly quite different critical strains, and then some of their recent offshoots, for the Gothic to be recovered from its “low-class” status in literature (and by now in film and other media). After incursions of French structuralism and existentialism only slightly challenged the formalism of the New Critics, a Freudian psychoanalysis newly combined with poststructural linguistics (following Jacques Lacan), a poststructuralism revealing all unities as deconstructed by their own “undecidable” relations among differences (after Jacques Derrida), and a resurgent Marxism that showed ideological concords barely concealing social divisions between waning and rising class-systems and economies: all of these permanently destroyed the separation of aesthetic organicism from the discordances that made them possible and so paved the way for a need in Romantic studies to re-confront the self-divided Gothicism that was one of its many foundations. Soon after these tendencies rose to greater prominence, they became accompanied by a feminist criticism – which eventually fueled more broad-based studies of gender constructs and of cultural restrictions on same-sex orientations – and these new lenses provided the means for displaying the Gothic’s struggles, even in Walpole, with the subjugation of women, the constructed nature of gender distinctions, and the necessity of articulating homosexuality in disguise, all of which are major issues by the 1790s in the Gothic romances of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis among others (see Williams; Hogle, “Ghost”). By the 1980s, too, all of these explosive tendencies were swept up into the rising wave of “new historicist” criticism that links all works to the dis-unified disagreements of many non-literary texts of their own moments (as opposed to the single-minded “spirits of the time” in “old” historicism) and into the many forms of “cultural studies,” from exposures of “lower” cultures being subjugated by “higher” ones and explanations of the battles between classes and races in Western cities to analyses of the imperialistic conquests of whole cultures by others around the world and the ethnocentrism *and* counter-voices that have arisen for two centuries as the unsettling consequences of such colonial settlements (for more details, see Hogle, “Theorizing” 31–43). The result, fueled by all of these approaches, has been an explosion in Gothic studies over the last three decades, instigated most by David Punter’s psychoanalytic–Marxist *Literature of Terror* (1980) and leading to such volumes, among many others, as Robert Miles’s poststructuralist *Gothic Writing* (1993), heavily influenced by Michel Foucault; Anne Williams’s feminist *Art of Darkness* (1995), informed by an even wider range of gender theory; Michael Gamer’s new-historicist *Romanticism and the Gothic* (2000), steeped in newly historicized genre theory; and essay collections ranging from Robert Martin and Eric Savoy’s *American Gothic* (1998), rooted strongly in critical race studies, to *Empire and the Gothic* (2003) and *Queering the Gothic* (2009), both co-edited by William Hughes and Andrew Smith. By now the Gothic’s many dimensions, long suppressed, have been vividly exposed for what they are by all of these post-new-critical approaches, and more and more employments of these

perspectives – including most of the examples just noted – have seen the necessity of linking all these Gothic elements with the Romantic writing to which they led and which made so much of them from the 1790s to the 1830s.

As it happens, though, this history of Gothic criticism filled with contentions and changes actually echoes the struggles over the Gothic that occurred within English Romanticism itself. Despite all their actual grounding of the newly “Romantic” in the “Gothic” and the terrific sublime, English Romantic writers frequently disparage the best-known manifestations of what they often called the “terrorist school” by the late 1790s (Anon.). Wordsworth’s revised Preface distinguishes even Coleridge’s poems in the *Ballads* from the “frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges” of “extravagant stories in verse” that have sadly matched the stormy “national events” of the late eighteenth century (*Prose* 284). Coleridge himself in 1797 castigates the most flagrantly Gothic novel of that time – *The Monk* (1796) by Lewis – as appealing to a “low and vulgar taste” with an eroticized blend of what is “most awfully true in religion with all that is most ridiculously absurd in superstition” (Coleridge, “Review” 187–188). Michael Gamer thus argues rightly that “gothic writing” from the 1790s into the early 1800s becomes “blamed” in British “periodical[s]” and “essay[s]” for all the inconsistencies “in literary production and consumption” that came with increased urbanization and fervid ideological debates in the wake of the American Revolution of 1775–1783 and the French Revolution begun in 1789 (67). What explains the profound Romantic debts to the Gothic, on the one hand, coexisting so closely with these Romantic condemnations of its increasing visibility, on the other? One reason is readily apparent: Wordsworth and Coleridge seek a higher cultural standing for their works by comparison to what the latter terms “the multitude of the manufacturers” that have by 1797 overwhelmed English readers with “fiends, incomprehensible characters . . . and subterraneous dungeons” (“Review” 185). Particularly after the first appearance of Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and the importation of such *German Gothic* texts as the plays and *Schauerromane* of Friedrich Schiller and poems recasting supernatural folklore, such as G. W. Burger’s “Lenore” (translated in 1790), “Terrorist” writings in multiple forms, based on Walpole’s theory and example, accelerated to a “market dominance” in literature that lasted from 1794 to 1807 at a time of unprecedented increases in the many kinds of printed writing (Miles, “The 1790s” 42). The result, as Coleridge suggests, was an inundation of audiences by the most common features of Gothic storytelling: an antiquated space, dark and decaying; a secret (usually a hidden crime) buried within the subterranean levels of that space or the fading memories of people; specters or monstrosities (supernatural or imaginary) that haunt the main characters because of that secret; heroes and heroines caught, externally and internally, between Catholic/aristocratic and Protestant/bourgeois aspirations; women particularly trapped between multiple forms of oppression by controlling patriarchs and thereby forced to decide how much or how little “sensibility” to act out; and a style of narration, description, and dialogue that fashions an extreme *hyperreality*, theatrical even in narrative fiction and more like “romance” than a “novel,” that is also harboring suggestions about the “actual”

world (of, say, “national events” or urban “accumulation”) not directly visible but disguised and intimated in “the Gothic . . . of sublimity and imagination” (Drake 157). For the Romantic aspiring to a “high culture” positioned above such descendants from Walpole, now “lower culture,” these conventions, when combined, appear dangerous because they “blunt the discriminating powers of the mind” in their proliferation (Wordsworth, *Prose* 284) and “level” classes of people, different belief-systems, and distinct generic styles “into one common mass” that allows the “order of nature” to be “changed” from one norm to another “whenever the author’s purposes demand it” (Coleridge, “Review” 186).

Yet this revulsion at a popular mixture of once-separate elements is not the only reason that makes the Gothic a problem for its Romantic inheritors. There is also the fact that such authors use its ingredients in their own works, acknowledging their roots in Gothic, even as some of the same writers condemn it in their critical prose. By the standards of the above conventions, Wordsworth waxes visibly Gothic in his verse “Fragment of a ‘Gothic’ Tale” (1796), portions of “The Thorn” in the *Ballads*, and “Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle” (1807), while Coleridge more explicitly does so in “The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere,” also in the *Ballads*, and in “Christabel,” published in 1816 after Wordsworth rejected it for the second *Ballads* edition (Wordsworth and Coleridge 30–31). Mary Robinson, already a “terror” novelist, scatters Gothic echoes liberally through her *Lyrical Tales* (1800), written often in direct answer to the *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as the competing poems of Robert Southey (1798; see Curran); Lord Byron, after aping the “Oriental Gothic” of William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786) in quasi-Eastern poems such as “The Giaour” (1813), returns directly to the Walpolean tradition in the closet drama *Manfred* (1816) and the half-satirical hauntings in Cantos XV and XVI of *Don Juan* (1824); Percy Bysshe Shelley, once he has imitated the Gothic directly in his early novels *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* (1810–1811), calls up its features throughout his remaining career in “Alastor” (1815) and his tragedy *The Cenci* (1819) to such a degree that his involvement in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) has become more understandable than it used to seem; and John Keats, unabashedly fond of Radcliffe’s romances while also seeking admission to the pantheon of the classical poets, reinvokes the Gothic poems collected by “Monk” Lewis in *Tales of Terror and Wonder* (1801) in the very pieces named in the title of his collection of 1820: *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (see Hogle, “Gothic–Romantic” 206–207). In such cases, the Gothic is a thread made of conflicted and multicolored fibers that keeps being woven in and out of Romantic writing even when the writers of the latter claim to rise above it and to cast it down to a lower level. What really, then, besides what we have noted, best explains the deep-seated, yet obviously troubled, relationship between the Gothic and the Romantic? In what ways and to what ends does the theory and practice of the Gothic keep informing English Romanticism as a rejected ancestor that nevertheless keeps haunting it?

These are the questions that I now propose answering here. The start of my answer lies in two suggestions that Coleridge advances in his review of *The Monk*: that the Gothic, as Walpole said, combines different symbolic orders (such as official

Christianity and folk superstitions) in ways that call attention to the incompatibilities, just as New Critics later feared, *and* that this mode forces divergent styles together so much that it points up its own constructed (or “manufactured”) quality, the exaggerated surfaces of its words and images (its figures), rather than leading the reader transparently through them to clear ideas or objects. The result for Coleridge is the absence of a unified “order of nature” in Gothic works. When they theorize what “high” Romanticism comes to be, by contrast, Coleridge and Wordsworth insist, as the New Critics would later, on an organic unity as *the* aesthetic ideal both at the level of a well-wrought coherence of style, the “co-presence of something regular” that smoothes out the discord between different types of signs and the feelings attached to them (Wordsworth, *Prose* 296), and at the level of mind that “harmonizes the natural and the artificial” by the “synthetic . . . power” of “imagination”; that power, after all, joins the sensible to the supersensible so that “art” seems “subordinate” to the “nature” it depicts and the reader can thus be guided to the author’s “natural” vision by words that render it in a “spirit of unity” (Coleridge, *Biographia* 174). A major problem that such authors have with the Gothic, therefore, despite their debts to it, is that it foregrounds the discrepancies between registers, “ancient” versus “modern,” that Romantic writing claims to newly coalesce. The Gothic reinforces the distance between its figures and their possible points of reference to the point that the “depth” or associations behind any surface recede behind the immediate sign rather than being unified with it, as in a Coleridgean Romantic symbol. The specters in Walpole’s *Castle*, as we have seen, are figures of figures rather than bodies or entities, the ghosts of a marble effigy *or* of a full-length portrait *or* of a skeleton warning sinners in the *danses macabres* of medieval art. Walpole’s 1764 first Preface, where he pretends to be a Protestant translator of a Catholic text, flatly says that these and other shades of the past in *Otranto* recall “ancient errors and superstitions . . . exploded now even from romances” (39–40). He empties in advance the tale’s most “Gothic” symbols of any believable foundations and allows these hollowed vestiges, now open to newer ranges of reference, to become the repositories of more recent and “enlightened” assumptions, such those that here invest *The Castle*’s ghosts with an admitted *un-reality*.

This tendency remains essential to the Gothic throughout its effulgence in the 1790s that Wordsworth and Coleridge knew all too well. Even the “romances” of Radcliffe that most raised the Gothic’s profile, as well as its female readership, insist on a distancing of the artificial from the natural and an anti-Catholic emptying of older constructs, however much her volumes are pre-“Romantic” in explaining all hints of the supernatural as psychological projections. In her *Romance of the Forest*, for instance, the ruined Abbey of St. Claire in seventeenth-century France is first seen backed by “dark hills, whose outline appeared distinct upon the vivid glow of the horizon” and thereby “closed the perspective” (16) – far more the description of a *painting* than any immediate encounter with the place, like the sense of nature in William Gilpin’s and Uvedale Price’s theories of the picturesque in the 1780s–1790s. Consequently, the ruin’s topless “pillars, which had once supported the roof, remained the proud effigies of a sinking greatness” that the Protestant narrator

now reads into the structure instead of the theology and hierarchies it once advanced (369–370). No wonder Terry Castle has found the figures and scenes in Radcliffe's Gothic to be "spectralizations" where all perceptions begin as "ghost-like," as *memories* of initial sensations in the pre-Walpolean empiricism of John Locke, David Hume, and Burke. They are signifiers without clearly known meanings that await the retroactive significations provided by their observers while holding back their own hidden secrets from immediate observation, given that "obscurity" is a key ingredient of the Burkean "sublime" (see Castle).

What frightens "high" Romanticism about the Gothic, we can therefore conclude, is the latter's uprooted "grounding" in "floating signifiers" that can be moved quite easily from one locus of meaning to another even as they remain hints of an older ground that remains vaguely desirable, albeit irrecoverable. The very label "Gothic" has just that combination of qualities by the time Walpole employs it as a name for a cross-generic mode of writing. By 1764–1765, "Gothic" has drifted from being one name for the "barbarous" Germanic tribes that brought down ancient Rome and a label *inaccurately* applied to the pointed-arch cathedrals of the much later Middle Ages (a way of raising the value of Greco-Roman classicism, as well as Protestantism, back in the sixteenth century) – "medieval" in a pejorative sense – to being a word for the supposedly "native" English independence of a mythic past, dimly connected to English Anglo-Saxons standing up to the continental Normans in the Magna Carta of 1215. In this sense, "Gothic" evokes that imagined era's greater freedom of imagination and more glorious spiritual aspirations – "medieval" in a positive sense – even though the passing of that "old Britain" and eighteenth-century efforts to recapture its ballads and buildings (a "Gothic revival") could also mean that emerging modernity might be doomed to an undercurrent of nostalgia for a better, but now lost, civilization (see Punter and Byron 3–12). Walpole's adoption of the term then adds another shift in meaning while leaving all of these conflicting references active. His 1765 Preface, especially when joined to his first one, makes medieval times simultaneously *less* civilized in their tyrannies and exploded beliefs while also attractive in the imaginative freedom allowed by their mythologies, and here this multiplicity is further displaced into some conventions from "modern" romance as well, making the "Gothic Story" a designation hovering over points of reference from several time periods and ideologies, older and newer. This extreme "floating" of the "Gothic" signifier even helps make such fictions "sublime" by Burke's standards. In Burke's *Enquiry* the most sublime form of art is usually one fashioned in "words" because words, being signifiers not inherently connected to ideas or objects, can arouse "affections in the soul" without a definite "representation raised in the mind of the things for which they stand"; "their business" is more to "display" the "effect of things on the mind of the speaker" and hence to convey these to the reader "than to present a clear idea of things in themselves" (150, 152, 157). The "obscurity" that most arouses sublime responses, in other words, including the threats in it of dissolution or death, is most promoted by the inherent distance of words from their referents, even though words can be referential too. After all, what words describe can shift in Burke's thinking between what initial perceptions



“spectralize,” what an author’s associations can project back into them, and what the imagination can make out of that interplay – ultimately the essence of what aesthetic activity is for the “high” Romantic poem as well as for the Gothic romance.

The Romantic relationship to the Gothic, then, connects the effort of imagination to close all gaps between figures and objects through imaginative syntheses with the underlying awareness descending from Walpole and Burke – a kind of collective unconscious among Romantic authors writing in the Gothic’s wake – that those gaps are wide and that signifiers, like “Gothic” itself, can drift across multiple reference points. They can suggest meanings tied to past realities yet obscure, or even intimate the death of, them in favor of more recent perceptions and associations that those same figures may come to represent. The more “organic” of these assumptions cannot make their claims unless their repressed, inorganic, Gothic roots are incorporated and employed as well as resisted. At the same time, though, our earlier questions are still not entirely answered, since there remains the problem of exactly how Romanticism’s repression of the “meaningless” Gothic uses that subtext at times to provide a locus for some kinds of symbolization that can help Romantic works assert their “higher” syntheses. A helpful avenue for addressing that question comes from Walpole’s use of Shakespeare as a model (as he was for many Romantics too), particularly in the way *The Castle of Otranto* refers back to *Hamlet* (1600–1601), as the 1765 Preface admits (10–11). In Shakespeare’s early-modern recasting of medieval Denmark, Hamlet castigates his mother for transferring her affections from his dead father (*King Hamlet*) to the Prince’s uncle Claudius, now King after old Hamlet’s suspicious death, by facing her with two portraits: the “counterfeit presentiment of two brothers” (3.4.54), in which one “counterfeit” truly shows the royal office matching its occupant exactly (a “grace . . . seated on this brow” just right for his “station”; 3.4.55–58) and the other one points to “a cutpurse of the empire” whereby the visage of the person and the role of monarch are at odds with each other (3.4.99), a counterfeit in the sense of a fake who “from a shelf the precious diadem stole” much as Hamlet thinks Claudius has usurped his father’s crown (3.4.100). This double meaning of “counterfeit” in 1600, as it happens, has been well explained by Jean Baudrillard, who has traced the changing assumptions in the West about how signifiers have been thought to be related to ideas or objects. “The counterfeit” is Baudrillard’s name for the set of assumptions about reference tacitly prevalent when Shakespeare wrote, and that set grants signs around 1600 a Janus-faced doubleness that *Hamlet* exemplifies. On the one hand, the counterfeit of that time hearkens back, as in the portrait of old Hamlet, to the medieval belief in a symbolic match between a person, a concept (such as monarchy), and the accoutrements of that concept viewed as endemic to the person and his/her class (the medieval “bound sign” for Baudrillard), assuming that a person’s class is preordained in the Catholic ideology of God’s Chain of Being. On the other hand, the later, usually Protestant, Renaissance counterfeit by 1600 includes the emergent possibility that signifiers of the highest class can be shifted over, falsely but persuasively, as with Claudius, to successful class-climbers, such as Shakespeare, the haberdasher’s son, who earned enough money to purchase a Coat of Arms (Baudrillard 50–53). In the “Gothic Story” of Walpole 165

years later, this simultaneous longing for “bound” medieval references and the transferring of their signifiers at a time of increasing class fluidity, all of which makes up “the counterfeit” for Baudrillard, has become the even more floating specter of this earlier duplicity – the “ghost of the counterfeit,” as I choose to call it, exemplified in such *Otranto* allusions to the Ghost of Hamlet’s father as the enlarged armored fragments of a statue and the shade of a former class-climber walking forth from its portrait. Since his “Gothic” is already a looking-backwards and transfer-forwards, Walpole’s *Castle* and the literary mode it initiates make reference retroactively to what is already a counterfeit doubleness of signification in Shakespeare, a vision of the Middle Ages reconstructed by early-modern thinking. They then transfer that nostalgic faking of the already half-accurate into re-creative and “expatiating” representations that address the concerns of the increasingly middle-class English readership of the 1760s and after.

Such is what the English Romantics knew as the Gothic aesthetic in writing – a fissured and “fissiparous discursive field” filled with the “tensions” engendered by “cultural dislocation” (Miles, *Gothic Writing* 48, 38, 34) – and that aesthetic does not simply leave its hollowed-out signifiers from earlier periods as empty vessels. It has them refer back to a Janus-faced paradox (the counterfeit) that simultaneously evokes a more distanced past and the uprooting of its symbols from their original foundations in a scheme that allows both the obscurity of reference and the filling of it with later imaginings that together form the terrifying and aestheticized Burkean sublime. It is this symbolic dis-order, a definite precursor of the supposedly organic Romantic symbol, that makes possible what the French theorist Julia Kristeva has found in recent versions of the Gothic: a process she calls “abjection,” whereby the individual in quest of a coherent sense of identity, yet dimly aware of a pre-conscious fore-language of vague sensations across the body and amorphous memories in the psyche, “throws off” and “casts under an [internalized] authoritative gaze” (the literal meanings of *ab-ject*) all those confused anomalies at the base of the self, familial and social as well as visceral. These cast-offs then appear in a seemingly external monster or ghost such as the vampire Dracula or Dr. Jekyll’s Mr. Hyde or Frankenstein’s creature or their *Otranto* forebears, the outsized and fragmented revenant of an effigy, the shade of an immobile portrait set in motion, and the specter of a *danse macabre* skeleton. The abjected anomalies that Kristeva herself most emphasizes as prototypes, the dim memories of being half-inside/half-outside the mother and being half-dead/half-alive at the moment of birth (1–10), are but personal indicators of all the possible inconsistencies – of class, race, gender norms, economic positioning, systems of belief – from which people try to emerge with an “identity” by throwing off into an “other” all the blurrings-together of differences deep in themselves or their contexts that seem incongruous with it. The “ghost of the counterfeit” in the Gothic aesthetic is an especially apt repository for a process of abjection defined this way. Abjection looks back dimly, yet with a longing for its origins, to tendencies that both pull the psyche back toward the mother or non-existence and yet try to escape from that pull as well. Likewise, the ghost of the counterfeit refers, with the suggestion that its “depths” may or may not harbor

threats (Burke's sublime), to a receding past locus of anomalies, the counterfeit in Baudrillard's sense. The counterfeit itself refers equally backwards and forwards and is thus as inclined toward a dissolving past of bound reference, which could also be death and dissolution, as it is to escape from it into new, emerging contexts that almost, but not quite, supersede it completely. The divided core of the Gothic aesthetic, then, hesitating between the ancient and the modern, is the best literary space for symbolizing the major anomalies that a culture, author, or reader want to abject or find abjected. By making this space a site for every such element in need of repression, they can construct their desired coherences or "identities" over against that "other" by making its "obscurity," as Burke did, a "terror" or horror in an antiquated space that a newer symbolic order uses as its point of departure, even as it remains dependent on what it would move beyond.

Animated and unsettled by this aesthetic, the eighteenth-century Gothic texts that most lead into Romanticism are thus always about symbolic abjection. They use their ghosts of counterfeits to both harbor and disguise the deepest contradictions underpinning each author and his/her cultural contexts as though those contradictions might be resolved in the text when they really cannot be in life. As E. J. Clery has shown, *The Castle of Otranto* really transfigures the profound conflict in Walpole and his audience "between two versions of economic 'personality'" conceivable in the 1760s: "the traditional claims of landed property and the new claims of the private family," the latter of which offers the financial and personal self-determination that Walpole himself tries to achieve, even as he does so behind the mask of a traditional "Gothic" pedigree (76–77). His "ghosts" consequently act out the fragmented power of older inheritance norms, since remnants of such "bound signs" are still desired, but they also show these counterfeits of counterfeits being used by essentially Protestant entrepreneurs more as cultural capital for their persuasive effect than as grounds of being – all of which is symbolic of, while it also obscures, "a specific crisis in the experience of [the Gothic's] eighteenth-century audience" (Clery 79). This layering of multiple tugs-of-war continues for modified purposes in Radcliffe's "romances" of the 1790s, particularly as they deal with that decade's ideological conflicts over how independent *or* dependent educated middle-class women should be after the French Revolution first proclaimed and then withdrew equality of rights for females (see Caine). Radcliffe's "painted nature" allows the threats of natural vastness, overlaid with old-style *and* nouveaux-riches patriarchal dominance of the land, to be domesticated via mere pictures while the great Obscurity remains attractive as the locus of a deistic ultimate Presence on which female hopes still depend; concurrently the decay of old Catholic structures like the Abbey of St. Claire promises new freedoms from outdated systems of power while still urging the spectator to hope for a restored ground of Truth buried deep inside, usually in the form of the somehow *benevolent* father's written legacy without which the heroine cannot gain a workable selfhood in past centuries or the 1790s (see Mellor 85–96). Now the ghosts of the counterfeit are used to half-reveal/half-conceal, and so abject, the still-tangled morass of social paradoxes in which women can approach equality with men only by way of masculine traditions based on Burke and

Walpole. Lewis's *The Monk*, in turn, is notoriously explosive about attempted sexual freedom (with its main priest, Ambrosio, lusting first after a boy-novice, Rosario, and then after the succubus Matilda who Rosario turns out to be) and about the eruption of religiously repressed emotion in violent social revolution (as when a Madrid mob tears a tyrannical Prioress limb from limb [Lewis 302] in a scene alluding to, while displacing, the French "reign of terror" in 1792–1794). Yet, in drawing on Catholic icons, long attacked by Protestants as too sensuous, to discredit those signs even more than Walpole and Radcliffe have, Lewis makes his middle-to-upper-class questors for self-empowerment, from Ambrosio to the Prioress to the people who attack her for Catholic reasons, pursue their objectives through ghost-of-counterfeit symbols that contain what the gay Lewis knew that he and his readers had to abject: the anomaly of having to be articulated by and judged within the most backward-looking dictates of those empty codes at the very moments those counterfeits suggest, by being spectralized and outdated, that their insistent-but-fading limits can – and some day should – be overcome (Hogle, "Ghost").

"In Gothic," then, as Punter has put it, "the middle class displaces the hidden violence of present social structures, conjures them up again as past, and falls promptly under their spell" (418). The Gothic takes the "contradictions and falsities" out of which the Western bourgeoisie rises from the mid-eighteenth century on and abjects all those "anomalous areas of life" into othered "dream-figures" of them (409, 425). There the anomalies reappear as "darker forces," often from distant times and places, in aged objects, spaces, or undergrounds, monsters or ghosts, sequestered "structures of the mind" (forebears of the Freudian unconscious), or symbolic works of art and their systems of belief transported forward from previous eras in a tug-of-war with emergent ways of thinking (409–410). For English Romantic writers, who have gained some of their impetus from this mode inherently divided against itself, such a Gothic aesthetic must be incorporated as part of what makes them possible, but it must also be turned by them, through the ghosts of the counterfeit that the Gothic provides, into a castigated, monster-ized site of abjection out of and against which the Romantic imagination asserts its supposedly unifying and transcendent visions. Now we can more fully see the answers to our earlier questions. The Gothic in itself and in Romantic works enables, even as it destabilizes, a positive construction of imaginative transformation by conveniently abjecting, and thus suggesting while obscuring, the unresolved cultural and personal contradictions that could most disable that vision. The "Gothic," as an aesthetic mode already replete with oxymorons (from "ancient and modern" to the "ghost" of the Janus-faced counterfeit), inherently blurs opposed constructions. Hence, if it is "othered" in Romantic writing by the same abjective process it helped create, it can seem to make a more coherent and aspirational worldview appear as a sharp contrast to such "otherness," provided that view acknowledges that it remains haunted by that locus of abjections on which it is founded. Virtually every Romantic writer and most of their readers, after all, are as bedeviled as the Gothic has always been by conflicting assumptions tangled together in their own thinking as well as the contexts impinging upon them. The 1780s to the 1830s was an era of unusually rapid and widespread social change

where age-old beliefs, systems of exchange, and methods of self-construction exerted strong regressive pulls while they were being fragmented by revolution, progressively for some but tragically for others. At the same time, desirable new freedoms and occupational possibilities faced the threats of rising capitalism and the displacement of agrarian by industrial dominance, including the latter's new inequalities and alienations of people in a surging "multitude of manufacturers"; it was therefore this fearsome prospect that Coleridge and Wordsworth consigned to the Gothic along with the mixture of orthodox faith and "superstition" that simultaneously manifested wide-ranging quarrels between older and newer explanations for the basis of the world (see Webb). In aesthetic works, as a result, there almost had to be a point of departure filled with unreconciled opposites, a blurring together of incompatible "realities" as perceived through conflicting ideological lenses, with Gothic elements (including Burke's terrifying sublimity) being the frequent locus. Otherwise there could not be the ideal dramatic-poetic-narrative structure that Coleridge regards as the most Romantically sublime and imaginative: "like two rapid streams that, at their first meeting . . . mutually strive to repel each other, and intermix reluctantly and in tumult, but soon find . . . a wider channel and more yielding shores, blend and dilate, and flow on in one current and with one voice" (Coleridge, *Biographia* 180).

There are, consequently, numerous examples in Romantic poetry, drama, and narratives of this Gothic *and* counter-Gothic dynamic, whether in verses ranging from Wordsworth's to Keats' (see Hogle, "Gothic-Romantic"), plays by Joanna Baillie or C. R. Maturin or Byron or Percy Bysshe Shelley (Gamer 127-162), or prose romances and autobiographies from those of Walter Scott to Thomas De Quincey (see again Gamer 163-200) very much alongside *Frankenstein* itself and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (both published in 1818). In the limited space I have, I can only invite my readers to attempt the interpretations of Romantic abjection-through-the-Gothic that I would advocate for all such works, those I have not mentioned as much as those I have, by offering two readings now as examples from which more analyses might be developed, one of which explicates a poem just at the emergence of English Romanticism and the other of which draws us back to where I began: a prose work of theory and autobiography that attempts to define what a mature Romanticism ought to assume most of all. The poem is Wordsworth's "The Thorn" from the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*. This is one of several pieces there that versify the tragic abandonment and emotional debasement of rural people because of war, a changing economy, and a class structure now in question. At the same time, this poem turns that morass into the object of a sublime act of sympathy that may, at least aesthetically, redeem the speaker, the reader, and even the object of their gazes. The plant of the title, as the poem begins, is forcefully made a Gothic figure deepened by the Burkean sublime. Almost dead yet barely alive, it "is a mass of knotted joints" nearly petrified into a "stone / With lichens overgrown" as if it were an ancient building or a long-standing grave-marker (8-11). A ghost of a counterfeit in that it looks back to an "aged" pile that it does and does not resemble (6) while transmogrifying that referent into a plant that is a shade of its former self, this "old and grey" growth (4) is perched "High on a mountain's

highest ridge” between a vastness below and above it (23–26), and, as a point of entry into a deep obscurity (its own dark tangle as well as the distances around it), it is juxtaposed with a “fresh and lovely . . . hill of moss” nearby that recalls the small, contained, and feminized “beautiful” of Burke, making it “a beauteous heap” placed next to a form of his more masculine “sublime” (35–36; see Burke 102–106). Those contrasted things are, we soon discover, as Walpole’s castle was for the fears and guilt of its inhabitants, the objective correlatives of the feelings and memories of the miserable “woman” (63), “Martha Ray” (116), who comes to visit these objects often as though there are no other counterparts from which the meaning of her life can be reflected back onto her emptiness. The small mound may be the unmarked grave of the illegitimate infant that Martha may have buried at this site after she was left pregnant by the higher-class “Stephen Hill,” who jilted her to marry “another maid” in “church” twenty-two years ago, as far as the speaker knows (115–124). But the sublime Gothic thorn, however stoutly masculine, is a more complex and obscure figure, particularly as a layering of different moments in time and as a cryptic depth from which, “I’ve heard many swear,” both “plainly living voices” and “voices of the dead” may have been “heard” in the valleys below (170–174). Hence it is onto that haunting figure that both Martha and the male speaker have projected the mysterious, still tangled-up, unresolved horrors of her possible motives, history, and conflicted feelings of guilt and desire. After all, “There’s none that ever knew . . . if a child was born or no” (158–159) or if, as “some say,” she “drowned it in the pond” that is situated, like Martha, between the “thorn” and the “hill of moss so fair” (216–220).

The use of the Gothic as a site of abjection here is remarkably thorough, even though the thrust of this poem finally turns away from facing the thorn’s morass. Martha as poeticized, on closer inspection, is herself a ghost of the counterfeit. As some of Wordsworth’s readers came to know, she recalls a “real-life counterpart” of the same name who was once “the mistress” of the “Earl of Sandwich,” “was murdered” in 1779 “by a rejected suitor,” and left an “illegitimate son” fathered by “the Earl” who became a friend of Wordsworth himself (note to line 116). The poem’s Martha Ray, by being still alive and connected to a similar but quite altered history (including a possibly murdered infant), is thus a spectral continuation of a figure who has already been counterfeited compared to what she naturally was to the point of being recast to resemble the abandoned women of dead-or-absent knights in some of the medieval ballads in Percy’s *Reliques*, as well as the women of other poems in the *Ballads* who have been thrown into extreme poverty because of estate enclosures and other upheavals. Martha and the “thorn” in Wordsworth’s piece are thus distortion-mirrors of each other in both being figures for a tangled “knotting” of older *and* newer figures now co-located together. The “thorn,” as a consequence, becomes the “uncanny” sublime-Gothic monstrosity that grotesquely (as initially un-familiar) externalizes much that is too deeply familiar in the buried memories and history of Martha herself along with the intermeshed “branches” of all that has been rumored about her, within which definite truth can never be disentangled from supposition and superstition. The “thorn,” in other words, into

which Martha's history is already thrown, is a symbol upon which the speaker cathects one woman's sorrows and self-doubts plus a larger cultural array of ideological interpretations and value judgments at odds with each other, making it a repository of questions still left unanswered when the poem ends: To what extent are the rural poor the victims of official neglect, including aristocratic exploitation, or willfully responsible for their own tragedies? Are women the objects of unfair, male-dominated, and class-driven inequality or irrational and fallen Eves who have tempted men into sin and deliberately violated their motherly instincts by trying to cover up the consequences (a debate similar to the one that overarches Radcliffe's female Gothic)? Should such people be judged by others according to traits entirely internal to them, given that the contents of that depth are still being debated *and* that internality leaves all motives too hidden from others, or are people rightly or wrongly subject to external and social contextualization that turns individuals, at a time of growing market economies and proliferating discourses, into the statements about them that "market" them more than the desired "essences" that they claim within themselves? In "The Thorn," these questions haunt the text, speaker, and readers, intermingled as they are, even more in the Gothic labyrinth (or "knotted joints") of the aged plant than in the specter Martha ultimately remains. All of these are unresolved paradoxes, "ancient and modern," that harbor unresolved ideological debates both culturally in play *and* abjected in 1798 and since. As those questions both haunt the text and become disguised and obscured by the "thorn," however, the speaker and his reader-interlocutor – who is allowed to ask questions in lines of the poem surrounded by quotation marks (see 78–88, 100–104, and 210–213) – gradually work out a balance between sympathy for and interpretative distance from Martha and her surroundings, so much so as to turn them all into tragic tableaux like Radcliffean scene-paintings, more transcendent aesthetic achievements evoking Aristotelian pity and fear, the aesthetic coexistence of emotions that are opposites in the practical world, than evidence of the historical struggles that still remain murky (and Gothic) in this text. With the actual history behind all this fragmented and speculative and the conflicting ideas about it still unresolved (and thorn-y), the speaker leaves us with the "baby's face" spectrally reflected back by the pond (225–231) and the image of Martha, like a speaking statue, eternally crying, "Oh misery! Oh misery! / O woe is me! Oh misery!" (252–253). If anything, this quintessentially Romantic poem increases the distancing "modifications" that Burke demands if the "terrible," a "knotted" complex lying deep in what is "obscure" (the "thorn" in this piece), is to seem pleasurably "sublime" and imaginatively unified by the end of the work.

As I have suggested earlier, I strongly recommend that such a reading of the Gothic in the Romantic be applied to hundreds of texts in which the Romantic aesthetic asserts itself out of and against some form of the Gothic. Should anyone doubt this connection by overemphasizing Wordsworth's second *Ballads* Preface or Coleridge's review of *The Monk*, there is a powerful answer in the example from prose with which I now want to close: Chapter XIII of Coleridge's *Biographia*, the very place where he most influentially defines the "primary" and "secondary"

Romantic “imagination,” “*vital*” and organic, as opposed to the more mechanical “fancy” in which “fixed and dead” figures are simply “associated” in a “mode of memory” (167). It is not just that the Gothic as Coleridge has described it in 1797 is the sort of disjunctive “manufacture” that he connects with “fancy,” against which the imagination for him now arises as more unifying and more divinely (though internally) inspired. It is that he cannot write his definition of the two imaginations – one the “finite mind[s]” unwilling “repetition” of the “I AM[’s]” capacity to “create” and the other the “conscious will” to “re-create” as newly organic what were once associated fragments (167) – unless he follows his accounts in chapters X–XII of the English and German philosophy that has led into his sense of imagination by abruptly leaving them unfinished and inserting an italicized “letter” instead (actually written by himself, as he told his publisher). Here the “other” writer likens the steps leading from XII into XIII to his wandering from darkness to light in a “*Gothic cathedral . . . often in palpable darkness and not without a chilly sensation of terror . . . [where] what I had supposed substances were thinned away into shadows . . . [and I seemed to make a journey up] the fragments of the winding steps of an old ruined tower*” (165–166). The very starting point of an important theory essential to Romanticism turns out to be the tracings of a Gothic counterfeit, a document by the author as if he were “other.” It also invokes the established Gothic tradition and carries it back to its basic features from Walpole and Burke, even to the point of suggesting how once-valued reference points can and do become “shadows,” ghosts of what now seems counterfeit within an italicized ghost of a counterfeit (the “letter”). Why make this seemingly digressive interruption by inserting Gothic fiction-making and stagecraft into a sequence of philosophical abstractions? While it is likely that Coleridge’s “letter” is something of an allegory of his passage from the associationism of David Hartley (now a “shadow”) to the epistemological idealism of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schlegel (now more “substances” to him), Tim Milnes has thoroughly exposed much of what I also find in this curious interruption: that Coleridge is using the Gothic to work through, but also to abject and disguise, the reality that “his thought pulls against itself under the influence of [several] conflicting theoretical imperatives” including but also beyond Hartley’s, Kant’s, and Schlegel’s (127). This revelation calls certainly for the deeper study of Coleridge and all his major contemporaries as they negotiate a Gothic–Romantic relationship that is complex and conflicted, since the Gothic is as manifestly crucial to understanding the bases of Romanticism as any collection of theories and writings could possibly be. Surely *Biographia* XIII, along with the entire history just recounted, proves conclusively that English Romanticism, despite the many differences and quarrels within it, consistently uses the Gothic as a place through which to face *and* abject these very conflicts, the most persistent tugs-of-war between fading and emerging ideas on a great many subjects, from which have arisen the astonishing range of contributions made to Western culture by the Romantic movement in England.

See IMAGINATION; SUBLIME.



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## Satire

*Steven E. Jones*

By the later Victorian period, it is still commonly assumed, satire was tamed into the gentlemanly absurdities associated with *Punch*, the popular magazine which first appeared in 1841 and was famous for its cartoons but also published satiric prose and verse. One anonymous poem from its pages, “Stanzas to Pale Ale,” sums up the house tone: “How sweet thou art – yet bitter, too / And sparkling, like satiric fun.” The editorial policy of the magazine was Liberal or Radical–Reformist early on and became more conservative after the 1840s, and it did publish topical and political satires. But a lighter, relatively apolitical “satiric fun” was an important element in *Punch* and became for many people in the decades it first flourished a way of characterizing late nineteenth-century satire as a whole: “sparkling.”

But this narrative, the story of the lightening of satire over the course of the nineteenth century, is far too neat, too good to be true. It is the narrative itself that is revealing – of how cultural eras and literary periods get constructed, in part by association with (or disassociation from) certain dominant genres, modes, general tones. The story of nineteenth-century satire’s domestication is actually about the making of the idea of Victorian stability, and it is a political story. Indeed, at almost the same moment that *Punch* was being founded, an anonymous poem appeared by none other than Charles Dickens: “The Fine Old English Gentleman. New Version. To be Said or Sung at All Conservative Dinners” (1841). Written on the occasion of the coming in of a new Tory government under Robert Peel, it mocks the accompanying wave of nostalgia for the good old days of the Regency:

I’ll sing you a new ballad, and I’ll warrant it first-rate,  
Of the days of that old gentleman who had that old estate;  
When they spent the public money at a bountiful old rate

On ev'ry mistress, pimp, and scamp, at ev'ry noble gate,  
 In the fine old English Tory times;  
 Soon may they come again!

...

Those were the days for taxes, and for war's infernal din,  
 For scarcity of bread, that fine old dowagers might win;  
 For shutting men of letters up, through iron bars to grin,  
 Because they didn't think the Prince was altogether thin,  
 In the fine old English Tory times;  
 Soon may they come again!

Clearly Dickens mocks revisionist tendencies and selective memory in general, here, but he also targets a specific kind of political revisionism at work in the 1840s. The phrase "shutting men of letters up" alludes to Leigh Hunt's imprisonment in 1809 for seditious libel when he called the Prince Regent "corpulent" – in a satiric passage. The image of the fat prince (the future George IV) is actually by now a familiar symbol of Regency excess, especially as seen in contemporary graphical satires. But for the new Tories of 1841, who are trying to revive (and revise) a past they can use, such images must be varnished over and rendered pleasantly blurry, comic rather than satiric. Their program is to sentimentalize the past for their own political gain, but their motives are more broadly cultural and ideological. It is significant that they seek to erase both the causes – war, poverty, aristocratic and royal immorality – and the expressions of satire (including Hunt's original libel). The Tories must revise not just the content but also the *tone* of cultural memories, replacing vituperative class and party conflict with pious nostalgia and sentimental sincerity, replacing vitriol with "sparkle," burying the threat of revolt under a narrative of progress – above all shifting the dominant tone of cultural discourse from satiric to nostalgic. It is this act of tonal or generic forgetting that Dickens's satire exposes. Another word for this particular kind of tonal shift and generic forgetting is Romanticism. The Victorian politicians' desire for a mellower Regency on which to build their own stable regime is ultimately part of a larger tendency to romanticize early nineteenth-century culture – the same tendency that gave us English Romanticism itself. English Romanticism was defined as subjective, sympathetic, otherworldly, transcendent, and above all, sincere – all the things satire was *not*. As part of this process of defining a literary movement, the actual satiric works of the Romantic period were necessarily downplayed, ignored, forgotten, treated as holdovers from the Augustan era or as merely popular diversions.

The truth is that satire, in many forms and across multiple media, flourished during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Only a massively leveraged shift in cultural capital (the English canon as it was formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) could have produced a "movement" culminating in Keats's odes out of an era actually dominated by the short arc of Byron's career (from "romaunt" in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to the "epic satire" of *Don Juan*), Tom Moore's urbane epistles, Cruikshank's and Gillray's ubiquitous and often

scurrilous cartoons on the *ton* and Napoleon and Pitt, William Gifford's edition of Juvenal and his polemical journalism, Hone's radical pamphlets and his trials, raucous anti-French or anti-war poems in every newspaper, and Grimaldi appearing in a puff of flash powder on the pantomime stage. The Regency in particular, and the Romantic period in general, was steeped in satire, and historically minded scholars have always known this. Critics such as Carl Woodring, David Erdman, Jerome McGann, and Marilyn Butler, for example, have paid attention to individual satiric works and voices within canonical Romanticism, or, even more often, have focused on such works and voices as part of Romanticism's broader contexts. As Butler once observed (indulging in a bit of satire of her own), "the so-called Romantics did not know at the time that they were supposed to do without satire" (209), and critics over the past twenty-five years have demonstrated repeatedly that in fact the Romantics did not do without it.

Political and social satires in the form of prints, for example, were everywhere at the time and have remained part of a tradition of graphical satire in British culture, from Hogarth in the eighteenth century to underground comics and caricature puppets in the twentieth century. An exhibit at the Tate Britain in London (June 9 – September 5, 2010), *Rude Britannia*, makes the point graphically – by allowing a contemporary satirical comic book, *Viz*, to in effect curate two rooms of social and political satire, with special panels containing the obnoxious television presenter Roger Mellie drawn to comment directly on each of the nineteenth-century prints by Hogarth, Gillray, Dawe, or Cruikshank that are hung alongside them. Elsewhere in the exhibition is a famous Gillray print from 1808, *Very Slippery Weather*, which shows a London shop window in which prints (the miniature images are copies of actual prints) have been posted, so that they are illuminated from behind, while a group of passersby of mixed gender and class stand and view them. The working-class "clown" at the edge of the group is just as intrigued as the fashionable types, making the point that the images can be "read" even by the illiterate and the satire appeals to all. In the foreground an elderly man slips on the sidewalk and is ignored by the members of the crowd, who are entranced by the illuminated form of this new medium as much as by the news the prints contain.

Shop windows represent only one channel of distribution for graphical satires, which were printed cheaply in pamphlets or more expensively in hand-colored versions for collectors, and were ubiquitous in the culture of the Romantic period. Their verbal and visual texts and images have continued to be read by some historians and historicist literary critics alongside poems, plays, and novels of the era, either as contextual evidence or as visual analogues for literary themes. Such readings imply that the satiric perspective itself adds something of value to "thick descriptions" of Romantic-period cultural expressions, including even the apparently least satirical expressions of Romantic poetry. Woodring's 1970 study, *Politics in English Romantic Poetry*, for example, which went on to influence new-historicist treatments of Romanticism in the 1980s and 1990s, incorporates a number of popular prints among its illustrations, including a George Cruikshank satire on the Peterloo Massacre on its dust jacket. Woodring's approach is historical and he

treats these prints as more than mere illustrations; they are visual representations of a shared satiric language, a popular semiotic discourse potentially available to poets as well as printmakers, and to diverse audiences at the time. For example, he suggestively remarks that Shelley's radical satire on the Queen Caroline Affair, *Oedipus Tyrannus; or, Swellfoot the Tyrant*, in effect "verbalizes caricatures" by Gillray, Cruikshank, and others, thus implying a circulation of representational energies between image and text, cartoons and poetry, popular culture and emergent Romanticism (270).<sup>1</sup>

Marilyn Butler's influential *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1982) also reads graphic satires as part of the background of English Romantic literature. The chapter entitled "Art for the People in a Revolutionary Decade" juxtaposes Blake, Wordsworth, and Gillray, under the assumption that the print satirist provides "a parallel to Blake's career, which is also a commentary upon it" (53). As the parallel unfolds, however, it becomes clear that Gillray also offers an example of a popular form of verbal-visual composite art, with an audience and effects to which Blake's art also aspired:

Gillray was capable of the sophisticated cross-reference, the allusiveness or intertextuality which was the by-product of the Neoclassical period's belief in imitation. He could construct large allegorical prints in the grandest Renaissance manner . . . [or] mimic an actual painting by Fuseli. But these effects, though enhanced by his public's familiarity with established art, did not absolutely depend on it. The aim was not burlesque but redeployment, the harnessing of the older work, with many of its characteristic effects intact, to a new purpose. (54)

There was a good deal of redeployment and harnessing of this kind going on at the time, a significant traffic between literature and graphical prints, between what have since been sorted into high and low forms, Romantic and satiric modes. But the historical process of establishing the Romantic canon and the very definition of "Romantic" during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved – among other moves – toggling background and foreground, shifting the crowded landscape of topical and instrumental satire, for example, to the back in order to foreground selected definitive examples of Romantic symbolism and transcendent expressivity. The spirit of the age, if there was to be such a thing, could hardly encompass both *The Black Dwarf* (1817–1824) and "Mont Blanc" (1817).

Or so it was long assumed. Actually, P. B. Shelley is an interesting case in point, since his own oeuvre includes topical and would-be popular satiric works as well as sublime Romantic lyrics. One could even argue that the skeptical, atheist epistemology of "Mont Blanc" – its desire to "repeal / Large codes of fraud and woe" (80–81) – does share something with Thomas Wooler's radical satirical journal *The Black Dwarf*, for which its editor faced prosecution under those codes. The difference is that, in this work at least, Shelley wishes to harness the "voice" of sublimity while Wooler aims to speak in the voice of the people – what Shelley figures in *Prometheus Unbound* as Demogorgon. Elsewhere I have argued that

Shelley's satires are driven by a kind of downward mobility on his part, a desire to imitate radical discourse like Wooler's that could be heard in speeches at debating clubs (like the one at Covent Garden that we know Shelley attended) as well as read in pamphlets at the time (*Shelley's Satire 4*). But even Shelley's most Romantic works contain seeds of this kind of instrumental satirical rhetoric – even when they explicitly resist its appeals to violence. He composed but did not complete or publish a fragmentary “Satire upon Satire” that targets his erstwhile mentor Robert Southey while also disavowing the very satiric weapons it displays, imaged as both public instruments of torture and inquisition (“gibbets, axes, confiscations, chains”) and the “small knives” of assassins, the hidden daggers Shelley associated with the subtlest practitioners of the mode (like his friend Thomas Love Peacock). The “Satire upon Satire” fragment is in one sense another version of the dynamic of renunciation (if not quite forgiveness) at the heart of *Prometheus Unbound*. Shelley may not have published this attack on Southey, but he did publish or try to publish other satires, such as *The Devil's Walk* (on the Peninsular Campaign and various topics), *Peter Bell The Third* (on Wordsworth), *Oedipus Tyrannus; or, Swellfoot the Tyrant* (on the Queen Caroline Affair), and the powerful *Mask of Anarchy* (on the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester). The violence of satire is Shelley's focus; he first deploys it before renouncing it, and for him it seemed at the time an unavoidable conflict that had to be confronted directly, in forms a broad audience would understand. It is worth remembering that this quintessentially Romantic poet threw pamphlets out his coach windows and once likely set his own type in order to produce a libelous broadside satire (*The Devil's Walk*) to be posted anonymously on walls and fences.

Once we look outside the artificial enclosure of literary Romanticism, satiric works suddenly appear everywhere, scattered around the cultural landscape like so many broadsides or prints in shop windows. So in studies of the period that have focused on popular or radical culture, for example, or on working-class writers and publishers in general, satire has perforce figured prominently. Kevin Binfield, Gary Dyer, Kevin Gilmartin, Jon Klancher, Iain McCalman, Marcus Wood, David Kent and D. R. Ewen, Graeme Stones, John Strachan, and others, including myself, have explored the works of satirical writers, publishers, journalists, and cultural performers such as T. J. Wooler, William Cobbett, William Hone, Thomas Spence, and Samuel Waddington. Marcus Wood in particular focuses on the protean forms in which radical satire expressed itself, from shop signs and advertisements, to commemorative coinage, to etchings, engravings, prose, and verse. In this context, Wood aptly refers to Thomas Spence as a “multimedia satirist” (76), one who was

prepared to look at any available means of reproduction as a vehicle for his ideas. Conventional aesthetic notions involving hierarchy and quality, or distinctions between beauty and ugliness or literature and pulp, are difficult to apply to his works. His work showed that in popular political satire anything might be joined with anything else. (67)

This kind of promiscuous opportunism regarding medium and form is especially characteristic of radical satire, but to some degree it describes satire in general, literary and otherwise, a reflection perhaps of the ongoing influence among satirists of the ancient etymology connecting the form to *satūra*, or a “mixed feast” of styles and modes. Those interested in the formal qualities of Romantic writing could benefit from an attention to satire’s dialectical complications, starting with its tendency to corrode easy unities and coherences in the acid of its rhetorical effects and the promiscuity of its aims.

At least since Jerome McGann’s *The Romantic Ideology*, criticism of Romantic literature has been understood as too often absorbed in Romanticism’s own self-representations. In response, historicist criticism called for self-conscious attention to the dialectical relationship between Romanticism and the criticism of Romanticism. Satire offers criticism unromantic rhetorical and aesthetic positions from within the historical milieu out of which Romanticism was later constructed. Oppositional construction can be discerned in many areas of Romanticism, including ideas of the “feminine” and the “oriental,” for example. But satire is the dominant *generic* construct, the modal anvil on (and against) which early nineteenth-century literature gets hammered out, formed and hardened into a recognizable poetic “movement,” to be ensconced in literary history as representative of the spirit of the age. Romantic-era satirists, like emergent Romantic poets, were of course mostly unaware of this larger process. But various active frictions and influences, between on the one hand satiric and on the other hand sentimental or sincere modes, rearranged reputations, aesthetic assumptions, standards of taste, and the distribution of symbolic and cultural capital in ways that paved the way for, and eventually made possible, the later Victorian- and modern-era construction of the “movement” posthumously labeled “Romanticism,” a movement seen as deeply unsatiric. By the mid nineteenth century a new set of modern poets – Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Byron, along with Hunt, Shelley, and Keats – had displaced Augustan writers in most measures of canonical status. These authors were increasingly associated with sentimental, sincere, sublime, and imaginative modes, with nature and feeling – often defined in direct opposition to the aesthetic regime of the Augustans. Already back in 1756 Joseph Warton, in his *Essay on Pope*, had neatly defined the balanced terms of the opposition, though it would take most of the next century before his views would come to dominate taste: “For WIT and SATIRE are transitory and perishable, but NATURE and PASSION are eternal” (1: 344). By the mid to late nineteenth century, those latter qualities were considered the heart of Romantic literature, the basis on which it deserved immortality in the English canon, and by the 1880s the term “Romantic” had come to cover a number of schools, modes, generic conventions, and thematic preoccupations, so long as they could be subsumed in that larger program. Canon is consensus. Eventually being recognized as Romantic in just this sense, with its attendant inclusions and exclusions, its modal valuations, came to serve as a measure of a work’s canonical status, but also as a powerful interpretative category for the teaching and reading of literature: nature and passion (feeling) over wit and satire.



The first public attacks on emergent poetry that would later be labeled Romantic came from the reviews. Historically, literary reviews of almost any school or movement are abusive and hostile. It is the nature of reviewing. But in the case of Romantic writing, something additional was going on. A good deal of the nastiness of nineteenth-century reviews was personal and much of it was stridently political, in an era when the parties literally controlled the journals. The field at the time was defined by the anonymous vitriol of *Blackwood's* and by the polarized division of the kingdom between the Tory *Quarterly Review* and the Whig *Edinburgh Review*. These party conflicts, however, were also part of broader culture wars, and they often took the form of battles over taste. Taste was at the time defined as a moral and a national issue, not just an aesthetic one, and when it comes to taste the reviews were satirical and violent in their attacks because the poetry they were targeting – sentimental, Della Cruscan, Cockney, Lake School, Satanic School – appeared to represent a dangerous new epidemic. Satire had always been called on to scourge such bad newness (or new badness) in verse. But note that the new poetries of this particular era, it was assumed, were a hydra-headed species that abhorred satire as much as they were abhorred by it. It is easy to underestimate the significance of that basic assumption: that satire and the new poetry were antithetical, even hostile species. It is remarkable how often Romantic and sentimental modes come, over time, to be defined negatively, as unsatiric. Their opposite is satire, conventionally defined as “manly,” public, worldly, instrumental – all terms that define by their absence or their refusal of the emerging modes of Romanticism: feminized, personal, transcendent, imaginative. Satire is Romanticism’s generic other. So the study of satire, in both Romantic and un-Romantic writing of the time, offers a point of leverage, a dialectical perspective on Romanticism’s own assumptions and its construction by writers, readers, critics, and literary historians.

Even the relatively well-known (and often funny) parodies of Lake School simplicity and rusticity published in *The Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* helped to establish by mockery, which was later converted to or supplanted by critical acclaim, what mattered most about Wordsworth or Coleridge’s poetry. Similarly, Shelley’s High Romantic elegy for John Keats, *Adonais* (1821) – with its famous sublime ending, sweeping both poet and reader up into the “intense inane” – provoked satirical responses that can highlight Shelley’s scaffolding in useful ways. One such satirical review by William Maginn includes a poetic parody that exposes some of the most characteristically Romantic qualities of Shelley’s (and Hunt’s and Keats’s) verse. In the process Maginn helps to define as new the Hunt school’s mixture of the homely and the exotically transcendent, along with its appeals to nature made from inner London:

O weep for *Wontner*, for his leg is broke,  
 O weep for *Wontner*, though our pearly tear  
 Can never cure him. Dark and dimly broke  
 The thunder cloud o’er Paul’s enameled sphere. (698)

An anonymous reviewer in *Blackwood's* was in 1829 still carrying on the class war in these same terms ("Oh he was great in Cockney Land, the monarch of his kind"; qtd. Jones, *Satire and Romanticism* 120), and by then such satires inevitably participated, by way of negative or oppositional definition, in the emergence of Romanticism. Shelley's elegy ends with one of the most soaring examples of Romantic lyricism in the canon, and one of the most vivid representations of and performances of poetic transcendence in literary history:

my spirit's bark is driven  
 Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng  
 Whose sails were never to the tempest given;  
 The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!  
 I am borne darkly fearfully afar:  
 Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,  
 The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
 Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are. (*Adonais* 487–495)

When this most Romantic of poems works its rhetorical magic on readers, they often forget that the poem contains a number of stanzas that can best be understood as satire, in the context of the high indignation of the Juvenalian mode. These are counterattacks on Adonais's/Keats's attackers, the "herded wolves," "obscene ravens," "vultures," "reptiles," and "insects," his (mostly Tory) critics (stanzas 28–29):

36

Our Adonais has drunk poison – oh!  
 What deaf and viperous murderer could crown  
 Life's early cup with such a draught of woe?  
 The nameless worm would now itself disown:  
 It felt, yet could escape, the magic tone  
 Whose prelude held all envy, hate, and wrong,  
 But what was howling in one breast alone,  
 Silent with expectation of the song,  
 Whose master's hand is cold, whose silver lyre unstrung.

37

Live thou, whose infamy is not thy fame!  
 Live! fear no heavier chastisement from me,  
 Thou noteless blot on a remember'd name!  
 But be thyself, and know thyself to be!  
 And ever at thy season be thou free  
 To spill the venom when thy fangs o'erflow;  
 Remorse and Self-contempt shall cling to thee;  
 Hot Shame shall burn upon thy secret brow,  
 And like a beaten hound tremble thou shalt – as now. (316–333)

The invective, the public denunciation, the beast imagery, the moral judgment, all mark this as satire in the lofty style, and Shelley characteristically gives it a deeper

tinge by literalizing the notion that satire is a kind of curse, a rhetorical damnation, like the self-torment visited upon Milton's Satan. Unlike his unpublished "Satire upon Satire" fragment, this passage does not name names – in fact it makes a point of the namelessness of its targets. We now require footnotes to tell us that Southey and others are the real-life literary and political combatants figured here as vipers and hounds. As a whole, Shelley's poem enacts a renunciation of its own rhetorical violence, bearing its readers "afar," *performing* transcendence as it rises above its own satirical gestures in the sublime conclusion, leaving topical, political struggles behind for the white light of eternity among the English poets. But of course, like the "Satire upon Satire," the poem gets in its satiric shots before it rises above satire. Every time it is reread, the dialectical drama is reenacted. The poem as a whole remains *both* a satiric attack and a performance of Romantic transcendence. Unlike what would seem to be the case in the "Satire upon Satire" fragment, Shelley did not cancel or discard these angry satiric lines. They remain part of the mix. As such, *Adonais*, like other canonical Romantic poems, contains within itself the traces of the process by which the satiric was made to give way to the triumph of the Romantic – or was made to appear to give way.

A similar process is apparent, once we know to look for it, within the poetry of a good deal of emergent Romanticism, as I have already indicated. For example, Byron's frequent anti-Romantic satires of the Lake School, the most important satire of the era, *Don Juan*, as well as its precursor, *Beppo*, and other satires, such as "The Vision of Judgement," set the tone for much that was positive as well as negative in later critical views. When he said of Coleridge, "I wish he would explain his explanation" (*Don Juan*, Dedication, line 16), he was reinforcing the reputation of the Sage of Highgate for abstruse metaphysics, poetic symbolism, and mysticism. By the end of the nineteenth century, these very traits would come to be transvalued, representative of all that was sublime in Romanticism as a whole. All of them are set against the qualities inherent in Byron's satiric stance: sharpness, urbane wit, topical reference, worldliness. Shelley satirized Wordsworth (especially in *Peter Bell the Third*) in deeply ambivalent terms that would later come to be part of literary history's construction of Romanticism, including the solipsism that was the extreme version of Romantic subjectivity: "He had a mind which was somehow / At once circumference and centre / Of all he might or feel or know" (293–295). Keats drafted a satire, *The Jealousies*, that often reads like a parody of his own and Hunt's "Cockney" excesses, as well as Byron's and the Prince Regent's.

But, as the logic of relational construction would lead us to expect, the unsatiric blade cuts both ways in Romantic poetry. Satire is both rejected and sublimated within a larger Romantic aesthetic, and yet it remains a defining boundary of that aesthetic. Take Shelley's Peterloo ballad, *The Mask of Anarchy*, for example. It begins with yet another verbalization of visual satire, a parade or masque of allegorical cartoons, Murder, Fraud, and other Destructions, that are merely the masks worn by government ministers and "Bishops, lawyers, peers, or spies" (29). This is satiric imagery of the most demotic kind, a triumph of caricatures straight out of the print-shop

window, found in the most widely read works in the genre, such as Hone's and Cruikshank's *The Political House That Jack Built* (1819):

I met Murder on the way –  
 He had a mask like Castlereagh –  
 Very smooth he looked, yet grim;  
 Seven bloodhounds followed him:  
  
 All were fat; and well they might  
 Be in admirable plight,  
 For one by one, and two by two,  
 He tossed them human hearts to chew  
 Which from his wide cloak he drew. (*Mask* 5–13)

This procession of Destructions in thrall to Anarchy reaches a frenzied peak and then is itself destroyed, displaced by a long hortative oration on the alienation of labor and the need for collective action to combat tyranny – and, infamously, on the probable necessity of bloodshed as part of the process. “Rise like lions after slumber / In unvanquishable number – ” (378–379) ends the rousing chorus that, though the poem remained unpublished until the year of the Reform Bill in 1832, echoed through Chartist pamphlets, to Marx and Engels, and Bertolt Brecht (who imitated Shelley's *Mask* in a strange satiric ballad of his own in 1947). But the transition from the first part, the jangly satiric parade, to the final part, the solemn exhortation to the people, is made possible by the intervention of other figures: first Hope (who looks like Despair) and then the elusive and luminous Shape, which rises up like a mist at first between Hope and her enemies (the cartoons) and becomes something more like a Romantic symbol than an allegory (in Coleridge's terms):

a Shape arrayed in mail  
 Brighter than the Viper's scale,  
 And upborne on wings whose grain  
 Was as the light of sunny rain.  
  
 On its helm, seen far away,  
 A planet, like the Morning's, lay;  
 And those plumes its light rained through  
 Like a shower of crimson dew.  
  
 With step as soft as wind it passed  
 O'er the heads of men – so fast  
 That they knew the presence there,  
 And looked, – but all was empty air. (110–121)

It is difficult *not* to read this passage, which depicts one of Shelley's famous feminized, translucent figures of light, as representing the displacement of the satirical with the Romantic, the grotesque with the sublime, cartoonish violence with ethereal imagination. Between the opening of the poem and the exhortation, satire gives way to Romanticism. The assertion of “presence” in conjunction with airy

emptiness is about as Romantic as a political and poetic ideal can get. The presence of the indeterminate sublime Shape gives rise to “thoughts” and is itself a symbol of idealism as the antidote to the harsh realities of England in 1819.

And yet, the Shape, like its close relations throughout Shelley’s poetry – from Intellectual Beauty, to the “Glorious Phantom” at the end of “England in 1819” (wr. 1819), to the starlike soul of Adonais, to the Shape all Light of the late, dark *Triumph of Life* (wr. 1822) – is not unfamiliar in the very popular satires from which Shelley borrowed. In fact, Shelley’s Shape with “wings whose grain / Was as the light of sunny rain” (112–113) may well remind print collectors of a popular novelty of the time, the “transparent print” or “transparency.” A print with portions varnished to render them transparent (or translucent, really), this was a kind of new-media optical trick that could heighten the drama of an image for sublime effect. But such transparencies – in typically promiscuous fashion – were often combined with satirical imagery.

One especially well-known transparent print by George Cruikshank was exhibited in 1820 during the general illumination of London in honor of Queen Caroline, as a “show-cloth” or theatrical curtain that reveals the goddess Liberty, backlit by the glow of the free press, holding a pike and liberty cap in one hand and a portrait of the maligned Queen in the other (British Museum no. 14150). The image is startlingly Shelleyan, and all the more so if we are aware of the poet’s own satire on the Queen Caroline Affair written and suppressed that same year. The radiance surrounding the goddess, depicted with etched light-lines as well as actual translucence, disperses clouds of murk that would conceal a swarm of vermin with recognizable human heads, the accusers of the Queen and figures very much like Shelley’s *Destructions*. The show-cloth transparency was also published in a pamphlet form, where it served to frame a longer Hone and Cruikshank satire, a sequential medley that bears a striking resemblance to *The Mask of Anarchy*, *The POLITICAL SHOWMAN – AT HOME!* (British Museum no. 14148). The satire includes an emblematic bestiary of creatures, among them close analogues to Shelley’s figures, such as a weeping crocodile and a Bishop’s mask (“an Incrustation – a Relique”). A procession of these satirical caricatures culminates in a plate showing the EYE of the Press shining down on the vermin, revealing their human forms and scattering them in a confused rout.

The parallels with Shelley’s ballad, written over a year earlier, suggest a broader context of shared symbols and generic devices. And they remind us that satire in the Romantic period *included* in its promiscuous medleys images of the sentimental or of a Juvenalian sublimity that we now recognize as part of the emergent Romantic aesthetic. Reading Shelley’s satires and other Romantic works alongside such popular satires, and in light of satire in general, affords glimpses of the dialectical process by which satiric forms were Romanticized and Romanticism itself was constructed. If we read closely, it may also remind us that the opposition of the satiric and the Romantic is itself a kind of optical illusion, one which has helped to make literary history and one which more recent literary history has begun to expose.

See PERIODICALS; VISUAL CULTURE.

## Note

- 1 All references to Shelley's writings, except "Satire upon Satire," are taken from *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*.

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## Part 3

# Ideologies and Institutions





# Historiography

*Ted Underwood*

Fifty years ago, one of the first things a student would have learned about the Romantic era was that its historical mode of inquiry had supplanted the abstract universalism of the Enlightenment, proving instead that different standards of beauty or justice could apply to different historical moments (Berlin 21–45). Mid-twentieth-century scholars embraced this premise with strong tacit approval, characterizing it as an indispensable precondition for the emergence of the human sciences. Toward the end of the twentieth century the theme of historicism seemed to become less central to literary scholars' conception of the Romantic period. Romantic historicism was certainly displaced by the prestige of linguistic and figurative criticism in the 1970s, but it may also have been displaced, paradoxically, by growing self-consciousness about historical methodology in the 1980s and 1990s. In an era preoccupied with its own "new historicism," the word "historicism" came to evoke a specifically materialist perspective on history, and frequently implied the restoration of a context that Romantic writers had suppressed. Romantic insistence on the irreducible diversity of social life (once seen as a mode of historicism) was classified instead as a symptom of nationalism, or linked to what David Simpson calls a "revolt against theory." In the first decade of the present century, the character and consequences of Romantic historiography have once again become central topics of inquiry among students of Romantic culture, but it is far from clear that the implicitly approving judgment mid-twentieth-century scholars once passed on Romantic historiography has also revived.

This chapter surveys the historiography of the Romantic era along several different axes. It strives to give an account of the period's principal historians, and of important formal changes in historical writing itself. At the same time it highlights the social and intellectual transformations that allowed historical modes of analysis to reshape other discourses and practices – from biblical interpretation, to the

science of language, to the construction of museums. The chapter is organized around a series of important themes that shaped Romantic historiography, and strives to present those themes in a sequence that roughly parallels the order of their emergence in the Romantic period itself.

### **What is History? Who Reads It?**

The word “history” famously refers at once to a representation and to the thing represented: it names both a kind of writing that describes past events, and the past events themselves. These two senses of the word can rarely be divided crisply, but the sense that describes a mode of representation (history as an inquiry into facts, or narrative of events) is older, and it still dominated early eighteenth-century usage. So when the English politician and philosopher Viscount Bolingbroke writes, for instance, “that history is philosophy teaching by examples,” he is referring to a particular discourse (323). Of course the content of historical discourse is also implied, but only because a discourse is always metonymically bound up with its own content. Toward the end of the eighteenth century philosophers began to use the objective sense of “history” more often as a free-floating absolute. When Immanuel Kant writes that “the history of the human race as a whole can be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature,” he can hardly be invoking a body of writing, since the history of the human race as a whole is not yet embodied in writing, and perhaps never can be (50). Here Kant uses “history” as a synonym for an objective causal process that extends from the past into a hypothetical future.

In English, a rather fuzzy boundary separates this conception of history-as-process from older invocations of history-as-discourse, but the shift can be traced more easily in German, since (as Reinhard Koselleck has argued) it involved the coining of a collective singular (*die Geschichte*) to displace a word that had more commonly been plural (*Geschichten*). Koselleck traces the emergence of this singular noun, and the unitary process that it named, to the period between 1760 and 1780, and links it to a changing conception of history’s educational utility. In the past, history had been *magistra vitae* (life’s teacher) because history contained a storehouse of instructive individual examples that could be imitated or avoided. But in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Koselleck argues, writers lost faith in the repeatability of historical models, and thus in their exemplary value. Instead, the utility of history was increasingly located in its systematic universality, which oriented readers in a vast expanse of time, and revealed vectors of change within that temporal field.

In Britain, changes in the rationale for studying history went hand-in-hand with attempts to reach a broader audience of historical readers. The approach to history that had treated it as a collection of stories about exemplary public virtue had also tended to imply an audience of noble young men who could model their own public lives on the characters they were studying. The actual audience of readers was no doubt larger, but when women and tradesmen read history, they did not find their

reasons for reading it sanctified in introductions or in formal reflections “On the Study and Use of History,” such as Bolingbroke’s often-reprinted letters. In the course of the eighteenth century this began to change, although Joseph Priestley still seems to anticipate resistance when he proposes that history “is calculated for the use of persons of both sexes, and of men of all ranks, and all professions in life” (26). Priestley in fact did a great deal to bring historical knowledge to a popular audience, both through his lectures on history, and through his enormously successful *Charts*—poster-sized historical timelines—of history and biography. Although Priestley was not the first person to make use of timelines, they were a relatively recent graphic invention, which Daniel Rosenberg has dated to the 1750s. As Rosenberg also stresses, Priestley’s *Chart of Biography* (1765) and *New Chart of History* (1769) were “the most influential timelines of the eighteenth century,” going through twenty editions and spawning imitations in England, Germany, and France. Indeed, “in the 1766 statement of the Royal Society of London marking Priestley’s induction, it is his *Chart of Biography* rather than his scientific work that is mentioned” (57, 59). By compressing world chronology into a single image, Priestley’s charts defined a newly ambitious goal of synoptic and immediate historical comprehension. His charts do not ask the (possibly plebeian) reader to imitate the public virtue of a Cato or an Alexander, but they do expect the reader to grasp the large outlines of history, and draw comparative conclusions by contrasting, for instance, the relative duration of the Roman, Persian, and English empires. A similar kind of cultivation was fostered by the manuals of chronology, systems of universal history, and popular introductions to the study of history that proliferated between 1780 and 1840.

### Enlarging the Scope of History

The new visibility of middle-class men and women as readers of history was accompanied by an expansion of historical narrative to cover a new range of subjects. Histories written before the eighteenth century had focused heavily on the military and political history of states. Eighteenth-century historians—especially from the middle of the century forward—paid new attention to social, economic, and cultural life. Britons were conscious of this shift, and saw it as consonant with the values of a commercial republic, as the *Monthly Review*, for instance, makes plain in reviewing John Sinclair’s *History of the Public Revenue* (1790):

Readers now expect to find, not only the *warlike* exploits, but the *civil* transactions, of princes, recorded in the historic volume. The *people* claim their share of attention; the progress of arts is considered as an object of importance; industry, agriculture, manufactures, commerce, population, and personal security, are now viewed as objects that deserve a particular degree of investigation. (Cited in Phillips 14–15)

In a thorough discussion of the rise of social history, Mark Salber Phillips catalogues the different strategies eighteenth-century historians used to combine political and

social narrative. David Hume discussed literature and manners in his *History of England* (1754–1762) as an appendix to the political history of each reign. William Russell tried to integrate social topics more smoothly into the main narrative of his *History of Modern Europe* (1779). Robert Henry's *History of Great Britain* (1771–1793) took the radical step of dividing each phase of history into seven parallel narratives, each of which discussed the period from a different thematic perspective, so that readers could find political/military, religious, legal, and learned history, as well as the history of arts, commerce, and manners (Phillips 152–153, 3).

In addition to reflecting growing respect for commerce, the new emphasis on social, cultural, and economic history responded to readers' interest in private life, and in the customs that distinguished one age or nation from another. Eighteenth-century fascination with progress also gave social history added significance, since steady progress was more easily traced in the refinements of social life and artistic practice than in the vicissitudes of diplomacy and war. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, respect for this more "philosophical" history ran high enough to permit some writers to dispense with military/political narrative altogether. New historical genres emerged. William Alexander wrote a *History of Women* (1779–1782) that emphasized the "influence of female society" (1: 475) on other forms of social refinement; Adam Anderson wrote histories of commerce; and Joseph Strutt wrote several histories of manners, as well as an account of the *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (1801). Literary history, in the meantime, was developing beyond anecdotal accounts of individual writers. In works like Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1757, 1782), and Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry* (1774–1781), literary history fuses with a history of manners and ideas (Phillips 161–173). Perhaps the most ambitious genre of late eighteenth-century social history was "conjectural" or "philosophical" history, which sought to deduce the natural laws of social existence, and extrapolate them backwards to reconstruct an unrecorded past. This genre had an illustrious history in eighteenth-century France, represented most famously by Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality* (1755). British conjectural history flourished notably in Scotland; examples might include Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) and John Millar's *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1771). The genre also exerted a strong influence on late eighteenth-century "progress poems" – such as R. P. Knight's *Progress of Civil Society* (1796).

### **The Remoteness of Antiquity**

The accelerating pace of European contact with distant lands suggested to seventeenth-century writers that human nature was far less constant than previously imagined. "See how much the face of nature changes from here to China," Bernard de Fontenelle commented: "different faces, different shapes, almost different principles of reasoning" (34). By the early eighteenth century, it was clear that the radical changes experienced by a world traveler could be expected as well by a reader

traveling through time. History recorded not just famous deeds, but profound and pervasive social changes – “those great changes,” according to Montesquieu, “that have made some ages so unlike others, and the world so unlike itself” (205). A sharpened consciousness of historical difference is particularly visible when eighteenth-century historians describe classical antiquity. As the adjective “classical” implies, ancient Greece and Rome had been thought to provide unchanging and universal models of civilization. “Nature and Homer,” as Alexander Pope put it, were “the same” (73). A significantly different approach to antiquity is already perceptible in 1735, when Thomas Blackwell defends Homer’s seemingly coarse description of Menelaos as “loud-voic’d” (*βοην αγαθος* or *boēn agathos*) by arguing that strong lungs made up a large part of leadership “before the Invention of Trumpets or Drums” (Blackwell 317). Blackwell’s *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735) divests Homer of his timelessness, acknowledges a certain provinciality in his notions, and explains his excellence as the consequence of his birth at a particular moment in Greek history when “Arms” and “Force” were contending with a new spirit of “Liberty” and “Trade” (23).

By the latter part of the eighteenth century, Blackwell’s willingness to contextualize Homer had developed into a full-blown neoclassical exoticism. Late eighteenth-century scholars labored, as contemporary historians have put it, “to knock Homer off his Ionic pedestal, to strip him of his austere classic robes, and to deck him out with the rough staff and furry cloak appropriate to a storyteller at a tribal campfire” (Zetzel, Most, and Grafton 11). William Mitford’s five-volume *History of Greece* (1784–1810), which remained the dominant treatment of its subject throughout the Romantic period, adopted a similar approach, depicting a land that venerated hospitality precisely because it was still emerging from an age of piracy and rape – a land where robbery had not long ago been viewed as an honorable exploit. Of course, emphasis on the rougher side of Greece had something in common with emerging eighteenth-century enthusiasm for northern antiquity – for Ossian, for Druids, and for rude Gothic chivalry. Mitford in fact compares early Greek heroes to “the knights errant of the Gothic kingdoms” (56). The analogy reveals how profoundly assumptions about the past had been transformed. It was not a question of valuing original northern savages over polite classic civilization, or vice versa. The allure of antiquity, in all its forms, had come to depend on distance from modern manners.

Several explanations have been offered for the eighteenth century’s growing interest in historical difference. Perhaps the oldest solution is to characterize the new interest in historical alterity as “primitivism,” and to link it with other modes of Romantic feeling that seem to represent a reaction against Enlightenment, or rationality, or civilization. Romantic neoclassicism represents a difficult test for this hypothesis because the growing tendency to emphasize the distance between modern and ancient life by no means prevented writers and artists from invoking the ancients as emblems of order and civilization. Another explanation for the growing emphasis on cultural difference, which has often appealed to historians, is to conclude that late eighteenth-century writers simply began to recognize the true diversity of human experience. Instead of organizing different places and times along

a single evaluative axis, they learned to consider different social forms as organic wholes, governed by their own specific standards and ways of viewing the world. Friedrich Meinecke's *Historism* (1972) offered an early version of this argument, tracing the emergence of modern historical relativism to late eighteenth-century works by Herder and Goethe; similar arguments were later advanced by Isaiah Berlin. This interpretation of Romantic historiography may fit German sources somewhat better than it fits Britain; for while Herder was celebrating the diversity of the human past, Scottish historians were still trying to compress different times and places into a single developmental narrative marked off into hunting, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial stages – what has come to be known as a “four stages” or “stadial” model of history. Interpretations of Romantic historiography that emphasize the discovery of modern historicism are also vulnerable to the usual range of questions about presentism that trouble any account of the discovery of present-day assumptions. Truths are discovered by societies that are for some reason ready to believe them.

An alternative approach to late eighteenth-century historicism is implied by Trevor Ross's recent study of eighteenth-century canon formation. Several late eighteenth-century critics argued that poetry could only achieve its purest and loftiest heights by avoiding allusion to contemporary social life. Joseph Warton, for instance, notes that Pope “stuck to describing *modern manners*; but those *manners* because they are *familiar, uniform, artificial, and polished*, are, in their very nature, unfit for any lofty effort of the Muse” (2: 402). Drawing on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, Ross argues that statements of this kind were motivated less by a “primitivist” rejection of civilization than by efforts to separate cultural distinction from other forms of social competition (196–206). If poetic taste was to confer its own distinct form of status, judgments about poetry could not be governed by the same standards of urbanity, breeding, and polish that governed the rest of social life. The point of rejecting “modern manners” as a poetic subject, then, was less to reject modernity itself than to dramatize the distance that separated poetic taste from servile refinement of “manner.” It is possible that historians' growing emphasis on the distance separating ancient and modern manners served a similar social purpose, identifying the study of history as a sign of “genius” rather than merely another form of social polish.

### **Sacred History, Secular History**

In Romantic-era Britain, secular history was not yet crisply separated from biblical interpretation and millennial eschatology. Philosophers like Joseph Priestley read newspapers with one eye on the Book of Revelation, looking for correspondences between prophecy and current events. As late as 1831, Thomas Arnold explained that the end of every historical epoch was “marked by the same concurrence of calamities, wars, tumults, pestilences, earthquakes, &c., all marking the time of one of God's peculiar seasons of visitation” (Stanley 266). Ten years later he was appointed Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford. There can be no doubt that history did often

come into direct conflict with religious belief in this period. Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1788) was fiercely attacked for describing the emergence of Christianity as a phenomenon of secular history. Auguste Comte transformed history into a Religion of Humanity, explicitly designed to displace the Catholic Church. In German universities, as Thomas A. Howard has observed, theology and history struggled for institutional pre-eminence throughout this period; many notable German historians (Ranke, Droysen, Burckhardt) began their academic studies as theologians only to switch, one after another, to history (5).

But scholars have rarely concluded that historical discourse simply displaced religion in the Romantic era. Instead, observing the intimate connection that subsisted between these discourses throughout the period, Romanticists have preferred to trace the functions and preoccupations of religion as they were transposed onto secular history. This so-called “transposition thesis” was advanced influentially in Carl Becker's *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (1932), which presented the concepts of posterity and progress as secular versions of the Christian millennium. In *Meaning in History* (1949), Karl Löwith argued more broadly that modern philosophies of history have always been produced “by secularizing theological principles” (19). In literary studies, the best-known version of the transposition thesis is still M. H. Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), which shows how the theme of redemptive apocalypse was first naturalized in Romantic politics (as revolution) and then internalized in Romantic literature (as imagination) – retaining all the while the structure of a “circuitous journey through alienation to reintegration” (197). Abrams argues that the dialectical philosophy of history implicit in Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), and made more explicit in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), offers yet another version of this “circuitous journey.” Although the transposition thesis explicitly stresses continuities between religion and historical discourse, one could argue that it still understates the degree to which the two were fused. Abrams of course emphasized that the historical character of the Christian religion made it easy to convert its central myth into a template for secular narrative. As a historical religion, however, Christianity included not just a static narrative template but a living tradition of historical interpretation, which continued to evolve in the Romantic era. Changing exegetical practices, and models of sacred history, deserve to be considered as central parts of Romantic historiography in their own right.

Historians have given particular attention to the emergence of “the higher criticism” – an exegetical movement that considered biblical texts as historical sources, and critically examined the history of their composition and transmission. This movement is frequently identified with German scholars – notably, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and David Friedrich Strauss. But the explicitly critical approach to biblical sources that developed in late eighteenth-century Germany can be viewed as a continuation of a broader trend, attested in Britain as well as in Germany, simply to acknowledge the historical diversity of the canon. For instance, instead of postulating at the outset that biblical texts should be

read in order to produce a coherent and symbolically unified narrative, eighteenth-century critics began to assume, as Hans Frei has shown, that reading should begin with “grammatical and lexical exactness in estimating what the original sense of a text was to its original audience” (7). The Song of Solomon, for instance, could no longer be treated purely as an allegory of Christ’s love for his church, factoring out its Hebrew audience as a circumstantial accident (McKelvy 75–77). By making historical context an essential part of the meaning of sacred texts, these exegetical assumptions gave new urgency to the tension between the historical particularity of Scripture and the universality claimed by the Church.

Many of the innovations of early nineteenth-century religious thought can be understood as responses to this tension. S. T. Coleridge responded by revising the traditional scale of judgment that elevated universals over particulars. Scriptural emphasis on the history of individuals in a particular time and place, which might have seemed less “philosophic” than a history of abstract principles, actually permitted Scripture to reveal “the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal” (28). In defending this view of Scripture in *The Statesman’s Manual* (1816), Coleridge incidentally articulated his famous distinction between “symbol” and “allegory,” using the distinction to explain how the events of sacred history could assume universal (symbolic) significance without ceasing to be defined by the idiosyncrasies of a single place and time (28–30). Thomas Arnold responded to historical criticism of the Bible in a slightly different way, by emphasizing that divine revelation had always been “accommodated” to the limited understanding of human authors living in different eras. A modern interpreter should therefore seek to uncover the Bible’s underlying moral principles, rather than taking its archaic prohibitions and promises at face value.

It has long been recognized that historical criticism led Broad Church Anglicans (like Arnold) toward a less literal interpretation of Scripture. And as Elinor S. Shaffer showed in *“Kubla Khan” and the Fall of Jerusalem* (1975), the higher criticism also shaped nineteenth-century writers’ aspiration to construct a modern, syncretic mythology out of historical fragments. Historical criticism may thus appear to have exerted a secularizing influence in the nineteenth century – emphasizing the human dimension of religious experience, and weakening the claim that every word of the Bible should be taken as inspired truth. But in fact, historical criticism of Scripture produced several different versions of sacred history, some of which don’t fit easily into narratives of secularization (Underwood). Dispensational fundamentalism is now best known because of its prominence in the United States, where it disseminated the doctrine of a pre-tribulational Rapture. But the movement’s origins lie in Britain, and its leaders were distinguished by a radically historical approach to the Bible. The preacher Edward Irving, for instance, discussed historical criticism with his friends Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle, insisted on a contextual interpretation of Scripture, and agreed that the Bible seemed to have a different message for different historical eras. But instead of allowing historical change to undermine his commitment to the literal truth of Scripture, Irving concluded that distinct, permanently valid covenants had been established with different eras or “dispensations.”



This premise led him to conclude, among other things, that the Christian Church would itself be displaced on Earth by a restored Davidic Kingdom.

### Recent British History, and Histories of the Present

Histories of the recent British past had a distinctly partisan character in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. David Hume's *History of England* (1754–1762) – which was regularly reprinted well into the nineteenth century – was regarded as favoring a Tory perspective. Whigs welcomed Catharine Macaulay's *History of England* (1763–1783) as a more acceptable alternative. And although Henry Hallam strove for balance in his *Constitutional History of England* (1827), Robert Southey still dismissed it as the “production of a decided partisan” – or in other words (since Southey was writing in the *Quarterly Review*) the production of a Whig (195). For their part, authors of course disavowed party spirit; Hume wrote “I have the impudence to pretend that I am of no party, and have no bias” (cited in Hill 29). But in describing the recent Civil War, and assessing the figures involved in that great national upheaval, it was difficult to avoid partisan implications.

Partisan assumptions also became visible in accounts of the origin of the English constitution. Echoing a well-established Whig tradition, Catharine Macaulay traced liberty back to “the Saxon institutions, on which the common law of England is grounded” (1: 371n). Absolute monarchical power was not native, it was an alien imposition. By contrast, Hume saw liberty as a gradual accretion, which owed something to the Magna Carta, something to the Puritans, and much to economic change and the rise of “the middling rank” (Okie 197). On this topic partisan differences shaded into broader philosophical disagreements about the nature of history, because the Whig historians of the Romantic era were also “whiggish historians” in the modern sense of the term, borrowed from Herbert Butterfield's 1931 essay, *The Whig Interpretation of History*. The whig interpretation, as Butterfield defines it, mines the past for “anticipations” of the present, in order to produce “a scheme of general history . . . demonstrating throughout the ages the workings of an obvious principle of progress” (12). Although debates about “whiggish” history are often associated with the twentieth century, Annabel Patterson has argued that partisan debates among eighteenth-century historians were already engaging many of the same issues. Hume's critique of Whig writers, for instance, was precisely that they had antedated their own assumptions by mining the past for anticipations of the present – for instance, by claiming that ancient Saxon customs foreshadowed the settlement of 1688 (Patterson 6–9). In our own time, the debate about whig history has become one-sided; to characterize a work as “whiggish” is effectively to indict it for a presentist teleology. It is worth noting that Patterson returns to the eighteenth-century version of this debate in order to call for a more nuanced understanding of the topic; one, for instance, that can separate the issue of presentism from observations about progress that she sees as potentially justifiable (16–17).

If attacks on Whig history were in a sense a critique of presentism, an even more pervasive critique can be found in the habits of mind that allowed Romantic artists and writers to distance themselves from the present and view it as “history.” This is one of the functions of the literary convention of the “future tourist”: a visitor from abroad who will someday visit Britain in decay and reflect back on its imperial greatness. The development of this convention can be traced in Horace Walpole, Edward Gibbon, and Anna Letitia Barbauld (Skilton 96–106), but the most famous version of the device is surely the New Zealander inserted by Thomas Macaulay in a review of Ranke (and later drawn by Gustave Doré) – a tourist who “shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul’s” (2: 466). Macaulay’s New Zealander was invoked so often by other authors that in 1865 *Punch* was forced to include him in a list of “used up, exhausted, threadbare, stale, and hackneyed” literary devices. “The retirement of this veteran is indispensable. He can no longer be suffered to impede the traffic over London Bridge. Much wanted at the present time in his own country. May return when London is in ruins” (“A Proclamation”).

The idea that present-day monuments would someday become ruins was not, of course, an original reflection. But it became in this period a consuming obsession for men like John Soane, who wrote a manuscript describing the future decay of his own London home, and commissioned several paintings of the new Bank of England (which he had just helped to design) as a ruin. Romantic fascination with the ruined metropolis is not merely a reflection on mortality, or even on the vicissitudes of empire; it diverges from earlier forms of ruin sentiment by specifically evoking historical expectations about social change. These expectations are dramatized comically in P. B. Shelley’s anticipation of a time “when St. Paul’s and Westminster Abbey shall stand, shapeless and nameless ruins, in the midst of an unpeopled marsh,” and “some transatlantic commentator will be weighing in the scales of some new and now unimagined system of criticism, the respective merits of the Bells and the Fudges, and their historians” (341). The physical decay of buildings is secondary here to an expected transformation of critical assumptions, which guarantees that the future will be both “unimagined” and unimaginable from the perspective of the present.

Critics who have paid attention to Romantic writers’ impulse to historicize the present have often interpreted it as a foretaste of twentieth-century historicism. In his classic study *The Historical Novel* (1937), Georg Lukács argued that Walter Scott’s ability to depict the past as a product of contending social forces taught later novelists how to portray “the present as history” (83). Here of course Lukács is working with a Marxist definition of history: to see the present “as history” is to see it as a dynamic social dialectic rather than an inert backdrop for individual heroics. More recently, James Chandler has argued that Romantic writers anticipate the twentieth century’s technique of framing the present with chronological precision in order to identify it as a historical “case.” Works like P. B. Shelley’s “England in 1819” and Barbauld’s “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” reveal a conception of “the historical situation” analogous to the articulation of different

chronological speeds and scales that Claude Lévi-Strauss identified as a central strategy of modern historicism (Chandler 36–39).

### History's Relations with Other Discourses and Practices of Conservation

While the Romantic era certainly saw substantive and formal changes in historiography itself, history's importance to the period may be revealed even more vividly by its power to reorganize other discourses and social practices. Stephen Bann has forcefully described some of these consequences:

From being a literary genre whose "borders" were open to other forms of literature, history became over half a century or so the paradigmatic form of knowledge to which all others aspired. The "historical novel" set the pace for novelists of the 1820s; the "historical genre" (*genre historique*) forced its way into the traditional modes of painting at the same time and remained there for half a century. Not content with invading and assimilating traditional media, the representation of history became the practice of new, intense modes of popular spectacle like the diorama and new types of educational display like the historical museum. (4)

To this list of media transformed by historical content, one could add a list of discourses whose content was reshaped by historiographical modes of organization. The most familiar examples may be the ones Michel Foucault discusses in *The Order of Things*: the sciences of life, language, and wealth – all of which, according to Foucault, were transformed around the year 1800 from sciences of classification into sciences of generation and development.

In the long list of discourses transformed by historical habits of thought, fiction is not by any means the most surprising entry. The affinities between historiographical narrative and prose fiction have long been obvious, and the connection between them received abundant attention in the Romantic era itself. Much of this discussion centered on the question of fiction's historicity. Could the verisimilitude of fiction measure up to that of history? Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the question tends to be answered with an increasingly emphatic affirmative. William Godwin's essay "Of History and Romance" (written in 1797) goes so far as to give a decided preference to fiction. "The genuine purpose of history," according to Godwin, is "to enable us to understand the machine of society" (456). But most histories are too abstract and too greatly condensed to allow the reader to understand the true logic of human motivation. Because the writer of romance is "confined to individual incident and individual man," he can depict the workings of human character with greater verisimilitude (464). Thus "the writer of romance is to be considered as the writer of real history; while he who was formerly called the historian, must be contented to step down into the place of his rival, with this disadvantage, that he is a romance writer, without the arduous, the enthusiastic and the sublime license of imagination, that

belong to that species of composition” (466). This essay was unpublished in Godwin’s lifetime, but one can trace similar processes of thought in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (written in 1798–1799; published in 1817), which seems mostly to be laughing with (rather than at) its heroine Catherine Morland when she describes history as a sort of failed fiction: “I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention” (104).

In fact, rather than subjecting fiction to a test of historical verisimilitude, Romantic-era critics sometimes recommended novels as models of historical composition. The best-known example is perhaps Thomas Babington Macaulay’s 1828 essay “On History,” which asked historians to reproduce the texture of everyday life instead of devoting all their attention to “public men,” and concluded that in this endeavor they had so far been outdone by the historical novelist. His analogy to the construction of a stained-glass window was echoed later by other writers:

At Lincoln Cathedral there is a beautiful painted window, which was made by an apprentice out of the pieces of glass which had been rejected by his master. It is so far superior to every other in the church, that, according to the tradition, the vanquished artist killed himself from mortification. Sir Walter Scott, in the same manner, has used those fragments of truth which historians have scornfully thrown behind them, in a manner which may well excite their envy. He has constructed out of their gleanings works which, even considered as histories, are scarcely less valuable than theirs. (*Essays* 1: 307)

Phillips has recently shown that Macaulay’s praise of Scott was only a late and especially plain expression of a tendency – extending over many decades – for historians to emulate the novel’s vivid evocation of a concrete place and time, as well as its ability to dramatize the inner lives of characters. As Phillips stresses, this entailed a shift in history’s moral function: instead of inspiring readers to action by representing praiseworthy models of emulation, history was increasingly imagined to cultivate readers by exercising their powers of imaginative sympathy (103–128).

Print was not the only mode of historical representation; the Romantic period also saw the emergence of the first national museums. The Louvre was founded in 1793, and the National Portrait Gallery in 1824. The British Museum, open only to credentialed visitors at the time of its founding (1753), slowly evolved over the course of the following century into a broadly public institution. Contemporary reactions to the museum were mixed. In France, the Louvre was stocked in part through the spoils of war; observers like Quatremère de Quincy and François-René de Chateaubriand feared that it was extending Revolutionary revision of the past to Europe’s artistic inheritance, violently wrenching artifacts out of a living local context in order to display them as historical data. “Displacing all these monuments, collecting their broken fragments, classifying religiously their debris, and making this collection into a modern history course,” Quatremère wrote, “all this is to constitute oneself into a dead nation; it is like attending one’s burial . . . it is not writing history, but an epitaph” (cited in Maleuvre 17). The sense of loss articulated by Quatremère was

echoed later by Hegel and Nietzsche, and in another form, it remains central to contemporary scholarship. Accounts of the museum's emergence continue to be preoccupied by a contrast between the rationally ordered past that museums produce and the less self-conscious forms of tradition that preceded them. Contemporary scholars do not articulate this contrast as prescriptively as Quatremère, but the contrast is still descriptively central when Tony Bennett, for instance, identifies the museum's "reorganization of . . . social space" with Foucauldian "disciplinary or governmental power" (25, 22).

Recent emphasis on the contrast between traditional culture and museum culture has something in common with a broader theoretical trend that has opposed the production of historical knowledge to less formal modes of representation characterized as "memory." The concept of collective memory is not new, but recent academic discussion of the topic can be traced to the 1980s, and especially to Pierre Nora's seven-volume collaborative project on the French past, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984–1992). In his influential introduction to that collection, Nora argued that the proliferation of recording technologies and historical archives has marginalized "memory," which now survives only "in gestures and habits, unspoken craft traditions, intimate physical knowledge, ingrained reminiscences, and spontaneous reflexes" (8). As Kerwin Klein has pointed out, Nora's project might have appeared conservative in its French context, but was nevertheless received enthusiastically by historians interested in ethnic and postcolonial identity, who interpreted Nora's concept of "memory" as "a form of counterhistory that challenges the false generalizations in exclusionary 'History'" (Werner Sollors, cited in Fabre and O'Mealley 8; Klein 134–138). In Romantic studies, the concept of "memory" has been used especially to highlight the way women who may not have written histories nevertheless shaped British consciousness of the past (Campbell, Labbe, and Shuttleworth). Ian Baucom's *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005) articulates a concept of time as "accumulation" that seems similarly to envision a conservation of the past prior to, and independent of, official historiography (309–333).

### German Developments, and their British Reception

Studies of Romantic historiography that are primarily concerned with the emergence of the modern discipline tend to focus on Germany, because German scholars did make many of the innovations that critically shaped modern historiographical practice. F. A. Wolf's *Prolegomena to Homer* (1795) used philological analysis to reconstruct the ancient history of the Homeric text before it achieved a standardized form. Wolf's attempt to write a history of textual transformation – rather than a purely corrective "emendation" – was influenced by Eichhorn's *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1780), and it in turn influenced Barthold Georg Niebuhr's *Roman History* (1811–1812) (Zetzel, Most, and Grafton 15–20). But Niebuhr's innovations extend beyond textual questions. The more fundamental problem Niebuhr confronted was that Livy, the primary source for much early Roman history, had come to

be regarded as a mere retailer of fables. In order to write a history of early Rome, Niebuhr had to reconstruct the prehistory of the legends Livy had transcribed, and show that it was possible to separate elements of truth from poetic fiction. He did this in part by developing a structural model of myth. Legends that corresponded to analogous stories in other national traditions (for instance, Romulus and Remus) could be dismissed as shared mythic patterns; by contrast, the more idiosyncratic ones (like the Rape of the Sabine Women) might provide genuine, if distorted, glimpses of early Roman history – for instance, about the customs governing intermarriage (Preyer 29). If Niebuhr's methods were shaped by a philological tradition passing through Wolf, his goals were shaped by the cultural historicism of Herder. For Niebuhr, the historian's task was not to pass judgment on ancient leaders, or to recommend them as models for the present; rather it was sympathetically to reconstruct a unique and internally coherent social world.

Although some Britons read Herder, and more had an acquaintance with Wolf, the importance of German innovations was not fully acknowledged in Britain until historians began to read Niebuhr. It is true that some British historians (like John Lingard) had already begun to emphasize rigorous examination of original sources, and the notion that history could provide universal models of statesmanship had, in practice, already begun to give way to a preoccupation with social differences. But Niebuhr combined these insights in a monumental work that demonstrated their practical utility, uncovering an early Roman world that scholars had dismissed as primitive and irrecoverable. British appreciation of Niebuhr begins in the middle of the 1820s. Thomas Arnold wrote the first review of the *Roman History* in 1824; Connop Thirlwall and Julius Hare began to publish a translation two years later. By the 1830s, Niebuhr's name had become a buzzword, invoked whenever scholars wanted to affiliate themselves with progressive trends in history.

The growing influence of German historiographical models dovetailed with two preexisting trends. First, philology assumed an increasingly privileged position among the historical sciences. Coleridge had already recommended the study of etymology as a privileged window on the history of ideas; Richard Trench was only one of several disciples who liked to quote his remark that “more value may be conveyed by the history of a word than by the history of a campaign” (Trench 12–13). As German scholars (including, for instance, Franz Bopp) demonstrated that the development of language could become a systematic science, scholars began to scrutinize the history of individual languages for clues to the development of national character. Second, stadial theories of history acquired new complexity and a newly idealist dimension. Writers of the Scottish Enlightenment had proposed that different nations followed essentially parallel paths from hunting, through pastoral, to agricultural society, following a law of development prescribed by different forms of material sustenance. Niebuhr by contrast seemed to unveil laws of spiritual development peculiar to human history itself – where, for instance, a “mythic–historical” age intervened between purely poetical and purely historical epochs (Preyer 30). Influenced by both historiographical traditions, Thomas Arnold

produced a stadial theory of history driven by class conflict and divided by transitional eras, of which his own provided one example. In France, Henri de Saint-Simon developed a theory wherein “critical” epochs alternated with “constructive” epochs. Auguste Comte advanced a “Law of Three Stages” which traced social development from “theocratic,” through “metaphysical,” to “positive” knowledge. Thomas Carlyle would eventually be influenced by Saint-Simon, and J. S. Mill by Comte. But the names of these authors would begin to lead this essay beyond its chronological boundaries.

See PHILOSOPHY; RELIGION.

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# Ideology

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The concept of ideology has long been entwined with Romanticism. There is a long history in Romantic studies of approaching Romanticism as itself an ideological phenomenon. At the same time, however, the history of ideology has in many ways its origins in Romanticism. The relation between ideology and Romanticism is thus truly dialectical: as much as students of Romanticism have considered its ideological character, Romanticism arguably constitutes a thought experiment about ideology – about its scope, implications, and very theoretical efficacy as a working concept. The Romantic nature of ideology can be seen in the history of the term itself, which was coined by the French *philosophe* Destutt de Tracy to refer to the science of ideas. Associated with de Tracy's and others' attempt to influence the educational programs of the French Revolution, ideology was turned into an opprobrium by Napoleon Bonaparte, who used it to criticize the Revolutionary faith in abstract rational ideas over human nature and past history (Chandler 216–224). Insofar as Napoleon's criticism gets at the way that ideology signifies a non-knowing of the true causes and effects of one's ideas, his sense of the term begins to gesture toward the way that cultural critics routinely use the word today, to refer to how the beliefs and worldview of a dominant class or group of people are made to seem universal, timeless truths.

Another major figure firmly establishes this familiar meaning later on in the nineteenth century, when Karl Marx critiques followers of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel – the Young Hegelians – for, as the title of Marx's work indicates, *The German Ideology* (written in 1846). Marx's definition of ideology takes place within the context of a dialectical struggle among various modes of economic production, and thus inaugurates our contemporary sense of ideology as the dominant understanding of the world produced by the regnant social order, in this case the economic system of capital. Marx's analysis is compelling in the way that he not only describes

ideology's content but also how ideology operates. In his famous example of the camera obscura, the power of ideology comes from how forcefully ideology reverses the ways things really work, just as the camera obscura projects an image upside down. Conversely, the power of an ideological critique comes from its claim to rectify ideology's distortions and represent the world as it really is, producing the critical "shock to the mind" that is one of the main attractions of this type of analysis (Jameson, *Ideologies* 121).

Marx's main example of ideology is actually about ideology – about how German philosophy, as the Young Hegelians have come to understand it, tries to solve the world's problems by positing a transcendental, ideal solution to all the world's material woes. In doing so, according to Marx, the Young Hegelians have exactly reversed the way the world works, where immanent social situations give rise to idealized reality – to ideology. As Marx famously writes, "In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven" (154). Marx in effect weighs in on one of the fundamental oppositions organizing Romantic writing, the one between idealist and material reality. Insofar as one strain of Romantic thought (some might argue the dominant strain) coincides with a belief in idealist over material reality, Marx's analysis of German philosophy is also a vehement critique of Romanticism as an ideological formation.

This critical strategy underlies much of the historicist work begun in Romantic studies in the 1980s, which, unlike historicist scholarship done earlier in the century, often took a skeptical, aggressive attitude toward Romanticism. The point was not to reproduce the aesthetic, philosophical, and poetic values of Romanticism but to intervene in that very transmission, troubling, as the earlier 1970s deconstructive readings of Romanticism had done, the connection between being a Romanticist and being a Romantic. The study of Romanticism, particularly in its European forms, had often identified Romanticism as a reactionary force; however, before the 1980s, that view of the English Romantics, especially in the North American academy, had been pretty much marginalized, if not forgotten. The historicist version of the English Romantics was to view them as by and large progressively populist writers of the common rural people, while the humanist version represented them as visionary beings whose repudiation of the traumas of the French Revolution signaled a transcending imagination that was both healing and compassionate. For the 1980s Romanticist, however, this attempt to transcend the events of the Revolution, emblemized by M. H. Abrams's seminal 1963 essay, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," was merely the ideological attempt to evade history, a mystified rationalization of a more fundamental counterrevolutionary impulse. To see this attempt as a positive act, as Abrams had done, was merely to reproduce the same ideology that the Romantics had initiated.

Modeling this strategy of ideological critique for students of Romanticism in the 1980s and afterward, to today, was Jerome J. McGann's highly influential 1983 study, *The Romantic Ideology*. As its title implies, McGann's work placed itself in the same critical tradition of aggressively analyzing Romanticism as Marx's *The German Ideology*. McGann added to Marx's critique by asserting that not only philosophy but

also literature and poetry could be ideological, arguing that the Romantic ideology, through its humanist vocabulary of such ideas as individual imagination, singular creativity, and solitary genius, displaced the world of historical action occurring during the Romantics' time. Thus, McGann asserted, the Romantic assumptions of a totalizing synthesis underlying Abrams's earlier study, *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), actually kept Abrams from recognizing the value of the sociohistoric world of Romanticism. McGann's work had increasingly taken on a materialist bent throughout the 1970s; *The Romantic Ideology*, however, succinctly formulated a critical position that reflected the general historicist mood of the academic study of literature in the 1980s, where literature and aesthetics were seen by many as ideological formations shunting aside issues of a sociohistoric nature. Given how the contemporary meanings of both literature and aesthetics arguably originate in Romanticism, it could be said that the relation of Romanticism and ideology is nevertheless an especially distinct one. As one critic put it, there is something overdetermined about the disciplinary nature of McGann's title, why it had to be about the Romantic, and not the eighteenth-century or Victorian or Modern, ideology, even though similar ideological critiques occurred in those and numerous other literary fields (Redfield 149).

The Romanticist historicist work coming out of and associated with McGann's writings was by no means homogenous in its outlook and evaluation of specific Romantic writers. Two points, however, can be made about the scholarship. First, McGann's notion of the history displaced by the Romantic ideology was not strictly defined by the economic terms of Marx's German ideology – this is one distinction between McGann's study and Raymond Williams's earlier 1958 work, "The Romantic Artist," a consideration of the Romantic vocabulary of genius, autonomous art, and originality, which, while not using the term ideology, anticipates much of McGann's critical reading in making that vocabulary a response to rising market forces during the English Romantics' time. In many ways, by making the main history being displaced by Romantics that of the French Revolution, 1980s scholarship seemed to be trying to recover a Jacobin revolutionary history with which present-day Romanticists were in continuity. Since then, however, Romanticists have increasingly questioned what history was displaced by the Romantic ideology – whether it was simply that of the Revolution, or whether it could be understood in other ways also, such as the history of women authors, of ecological practice, or of Great Britain's empire. In that sense, the ultimate value of *The Romantic Ideology* lies not in any final argument it gave about Romanticism, but in its generative quality, where its polemics opened up the question of history for a generation of scholars studying Romanticism after the study's publication.

The second point about 1980s Romanticist historicism is the key role that William Wordsworth played as the object of ideological critique in a number of studies, including not only McGann's but also Marjorie Levinson's and James K. Chandler's, among others. Wordsworth's centrality makes sense, since much of his writing explicitly poetizes his change of heart from a supporter to critic of the Revolution. The clarity of this narrative could then be applied to other portions of Wordsworth's

writing – in Levinson’s case, the poem, “Tintern Abbey” (1798) – where the Revolution did not seem to be explicitly thematized, but then could be unearthed through textual clues as the ideological *non-dit* of Wordsworth’s piece. As Levinson cannily observed, the full title of Wordsworth’s famous poem contains a date (“July 13, 1798”) that was the anniversary of the day before the storming of the Bastille. Thus, the trauma of the Revolution inserts itself into Wordsworth’s poem, even as his narrative of poetic growth and tutelage under nature appears to repress social history in favor of the personal intimacies of a private autobiographical life. Levinson showed how the profundity of that life in “Tintern Abbey” was actually ideologically entangled with a history of counter-Revolutionary sentiment that was only clearly discussed in Wordsworth’s later works, such as *The Prelude*, published posthumously in 1850. The reasons behind why earlier twentieth-century Romanticists had extolled “Tintern Abbey” as a work about individual human redemption were now seen to be founded on a more complex, less laudatory desire to escape from the disappointments – and promises – of Revolutionary history.

The very clarity of Wordsworth’s change from Revolutionary supporter to adversary, however, demonstrated that the intelligibility of an ideological reading of the Romantics was not simply an exercise foisted upon Romantic texts, but actually enabled by the very literature being read as ideological artifacts. Chandler made this connection clear by arguing how Wordsworth uses Edmund Burke to create a poetics of “second nature” – a reality based on habit, custom, and tradition (219). Human beliefs are naturalized by such practices to become fundamental truths – the ideology – of a particular human society. Indeed, Burke’s famous polemic against the French Revolution, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), can be read as an advanced primer in ideology. Not only does Burke – anticipating Napoleon, as Chandler points out – claim that the elevated Enlightenment beliefs of the revolutionaries blind them to the atavistic impulses of the Revolution; he also famously holds up the “prejudice” of English ancient custom as a positive force (Chandler 218; Burke 100). As Chandler suggested, Wordsworth poeticizes with Burke’s help an “ideology against ‘Ideology’” (218). We can further note how Burke in effect *knowingly* acknowledges the ideological nature of his society, arguing that it is actually more reflexive and immune to abuse than the supposedly non-ideological power of Revolutionary Enlightenment reason. Rather than being unreflectively caught within ideology, Burke presents a sophisticated case of ideological practice where knowing and not knowing, agency and non-agency (habit), are not easily separated. Both Wordsworth and Burke thus show how much the Romantics themselves explore the complex character and implications of ideological processes, even if, unlike Tracy and Napoleon, they do not use the actual term. The Romantics do so from a diverse range of philosophical and political positions, while writing about a number of themes that make up the Romantic topos.

For example, the Romantics demonstrate a keen sense of the relationship between education and ideological training. This connection is glimpsed in Tracy, but it also clearly exists in Mary Wollstonecraft’s sense of why young women come to believe they are empowered in a patriarchal society when they are not, and in William Blake’s

*Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794), where figures such as Tom Dacre the Chimney Sweeper and the Little Black Boy learn to embrace their servitude. The Romantics also explore the way that a view of reality becomes naturalized as an inevitable truth of Nature. This dynamic is on display not only in Wordsworth's Burkean construction of Nature, but also in the thoughts of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the supposedly natural authority that underpins human society's normative views of language and sexuality. (Interestingly, the most searching study of this dynamic in Rousseau is not an explicitly ideological analysis, but Jacques Derrida's famous deconstructive study, *Of Grammatology* [1967; English translation 1974].) The Romantics are also themselves eminently able to critique the ideological rationalization of Wordsworth and others' turn toward political and social conservatism, as Lord Byron's quips about first-generation Romantic apostasy in Canto I of *Don Juan* (1819) and the ambivalent send up of the solitary Wordsworthian genius in *Alastor* (1816) by P. B. Shelley make clear. Finally, the Romantics very much investigate and exploit the religious and philosophic language of idolatry and superstition that they inherit from earlier times, in the anti-Catholic discourse of Romantic gothic works and in Blake's account of the priestly abstractions of the reigning Angels in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793).

Present-day scholars like W. J. T. Mitchell and Simon Jarvis have in fact argued for a continuity between Romanticism's language of idolatry and the theory of ideology, with Mitchell specifically seeing an iconoclastic sensibility at play in Marx's *German Ideology*. In that sense, Marx's analysis operates not so much as a critical break from Romanticism, but as the continuity of a type of critique already present in Romantic discourse. Mitchell's connection of ideology with idolatry, the worship of a graven image, also shows how much ideology in Romanticism is associated not only with mental error, but also a language of perceptual blunder. This connection can also be seen in Burke, who castigated the French Revolutionaries for being blinded by the "new conquering empire of light and reason" (171). Implicit in Burke's accusation is the assumption that epistemological error and ideological deviance constitute the same thing. We must then ask ourselves how literally we should take these figures of the literal, physical world, since, arguably, we need not have our senses deceived to be ideologically mystified. We will see later on that this predicament is precisely what Paul de Man calls the aesthetic ideology, one that, like McGann's, is also closely linked to Romanticism.

More immediately, the wealth of Romantic writings on mental, social, and linguistic constructions that resemble our present-day conceptions of ideology helps to explain why Romanticist scholarship since the 1980s, while oftentimes utilizing the notion of ideology to study Romanticism, is not known for relying heavily on the vast array of theories about ideology produced by both modern and postmodern thought. The presence, for example, of various Lacanian inspired theories of ideology, from Louis Althusser's to Fredric Jameson's to Slavoj Žižek's, is arguably much more noticeable in the scholarship of other historical literary fields. (*The Romantic Ideology* does engage with theorists of ideology like Althusser and Terry Eagleton, however.) This situation remains true even though certain

Modernist documents, like Walter Benjamin's famous critique of an artwork's aura, seem to speak to the way that Romantic notions of genius and autonomous art have been attacked as ideological creations. We might in part explain this predicament by noting the tendency of Romanticists to find implicit in Romantic texts blueprints for the ideological critique that the critics employ; Romanticists, in other words, don't really need to go beyond Romanticism to find models for their ideological critiques. This dynamic of discovering conceptions of ideology in Romantic writing is true even of Forrest Pyle's 1995 study, which found resonances between its Althusserian understanding of ideology and the language and imagery of Wordsworth and other Romantic writers. Still, both Lacanian ideological theories and Romantic texts narrate the invention – or construction – of the modern human subject. Critics have also argued that a number of activities associated with twentieth- and twenty-first-century capitalism – the object of critique for many post-Romantic modes of ideological analysis – already occur during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries of Romanticism. Indeed, scholars have been investigating the mass production of art in Romanticism along the lines that Benjamin formulates. So the potential is certainly there for critics to study Romanticism through theories of ideology whose critical genealogies are not immediately Romantic in nature.

That said, it remains an open question how much the category of ideology will be brought to bear as an analytic category in future studies of Romantic literature and culture. For as dominant as ideological analysis has been in Romantic studies, it has also been criticized from a number of different positions. The Marxist Williams in fact eschewed the reductive tendencies of ideological analysis, preferring instead to record what he called "structures of feeling" when historically analyzing cultural and literary works (*Marxism* 128–135). Likewise, even as 1980s Romantic historicism made its case for ideological analyses, historicisms in other fields inspired by the work of Michel Foucault contested the hierarchical notions of power that ideological critiques apparently assume to be true. More recently, the habit of always recovering a displaced history from a Romantic text has been resisted by critics insisting on the existence of poetic and literary form as something beside an ideological illusion. Others have returned to Theodor Adorno and the Marxist Frankfurt School to argue that Romantic aesthetics, far from being a simple ideological blind, is the very tool by which the instrumental character of capitalist history can be critiqued. The very ephemeral, intangible nature of art – emblemized for Adorno by the Romantic lyric – exposes how everything and everyone has come to be defined by the relentless demands of capitalist society.

Finally, people within and outside the field of Romantic studies have questioned one implicit belief of ideological analysis, that there is a position outside ideology from which the critique can occur – where a true perspective of history and social action lies. This is a basic tension in ideological analysis, whose growth in sophistication has been matched by an increasing sense of the pervasiveness of ideology, to include, as we have indicated, the very formation of the critical subject. Ideology thus suffers from the same problem of theoretical inflation that history does: if both



ideology and history are everywhere and everything, what is the significance of identifying something as either ideological or historical? That these two terms are oftentimes posed in opposition to each other – one looks past ideology to discover history – merely intensifies the problematic nature of their dilemma. One might in fact say, as Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* recounts, that history is itself first and foremost the history of ideology. There is thus something eschatological about many forms of ideological analysis, where, as both Blake and Marx assert, the task is to posit a different kind of history that somehow incites a break with a history dominated by ideology.

But some might see this as simply reformulating the insistence on non-ideological truth, this time figured not spatially, as something outside ideology, but temporally, as a time after ideology. This insistence oftentimes seem haunted by its own constative failure; hence the historical pathos of the full title of William Godwin's 1794 novel, *Things as They Are; Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. Both versions of the titular protagonist's fate – one melancholy and another psychotic – do not really seem to speak to a state purely beyond the ideological, whether one identifies that formation with the Burkean ideology of chivalry or what begins to replace that world of feudal honor, the more volatile class antagonisms of emerging modern capital. The phrase *Things as They Are* can thus be read ironically, as referring to the emphatic impossibility of ever presenting, knowing, or critiquing the world as it is.

Nevertheless, the question of ideology always seems to posit, implicitly or explicitly, its opposite, the possibility of truth. This predicament is enough, especially in the age of poststructuralism, for many to believe that the concept is of limited theoretical and methodological use. Others, still drawn to the critical power of ideological critiques, measure the sophistication of a theory on ideology by how well the theory engages with this situation. As we have indicated, Burke's notion of English prejudice can be seen as one canny attempt to acknowledge the pervasiveness of ideology while still subsuming it under a knowing political philosophy, where the truth of English nation-making custom appears in prejudice's understanding of human nature. The authenticity of that nature, however, lies precisely in its openness to being shaped (critics today would say constructed) by habit and tradition. The elegance of Burke's argument in many ways comes from his exploitation of this paradox. More recently, Slavoj Žižek has employed the Lacanian notion of the Real to get beyond the notion of a non-dialectical place objectively and *positively* beyond ideology. For Žižek, we gain access to the Marxist Real of class struggle only negatively, by seeing it as underpinning the very binary between objective reflection and subjective experience that itself structures the proposition of stepping outside ideology ("Specter" 17–23). For Žižek, the Real can also mark the place of our irrational enjoyment, or Lacanian *jouissance*, which both enables and blocks our ideological fantasies; in that sense the working through of *jouissance* replaces the critical search for truth.

Yet another approach beside Žižek's and Burke's would be to note how we conceptualize the space beyond ideology precisely in order to create the narrative intelligibility of our historical and cultural analyses. In that scenario, the non-

ideological would come more from the performance of critical thought rather than from the apodictic authority of critical truth. One might in fact argue that the issue of truth in ideology is actually the more overarching problem of truth in contemporary critical theory, one that has not been resolved absolutely even after over forty years of poststructuralist thought in many areas of the humanities. Žižek, of course, actually positions himself against what he sees as the easy relativism of poststructuralist or postmodern theory. Regardless of his antipathy toward such critiques of truth's essentialism, one can still see his attempt to combine psychoanalysis and Marxism as precisely the dialectical assertion of political claims that avoid becoming too nakedly beholden to a naïve ontology of objective truth. Alain Badiou's Marxist use of set theory to formulate his own notion of truth and subjectivization would be another recent example of the attempt to recover truth for a sophisticated form of politically oppositional theory, as difficult as theories of ideology have shown this challenge to be.

We can get at this problem from another angle by observing how, within Romantic studies, the most interesting engagement with ideology outside the historicist work exemplified by McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* has been Paul de Man's 1996 posthumous collection, *Aesthetic Ideology*. Published a little over ten years after McGann's book, *Aesthetic Ideology* contains de Man's final series of deconstructive readings, this time not on works of literature but on philosophy – many of which, like Kant's and Schiller's, come from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. If de Man's earlier writings intensely engaged with the literature of Romanticism, it could be said that *Aesthetic Ideology* explores the philosophy behind the literature. One way to make sense of the history of Romantic studies for the last forty years would be to see de Man's deconstructive forays into Romanticism in the 1970s paving the way for the ideological critiques of McGann and others. Like McGann, de Man also was skeptical of the humanist vocabulary of Romanticism that was extolled by mid-twentieth-century Romanticists such as Abrams, Earl Wasserman, and William Wimsatt. His argument, however, was not that Romanticism was an ideologically mystified phenomenon but that Romantic literature actually expresses a more volatile deracinating sense of ontology than the humanist language of earlier twentieth-century Romanticists supposed. Hence de Man's famous argument that, rather than extolling the synthesizing poetic power of the symbol, which brought together mind, Nature, and poem (as it does in Coleridge's definition), the Romantics were actually more beholden to allegory (which Coleridge devalues), a figure of language that stressed the radical discontinuity of any identity from itself (*Blindness* 187–298). In de Man's complete reversal of the very terms of opprobrium that earlier Romanticists had used to study the Romantics, he presented a methodology whose “shock to the mind” bore at least a family resemblance to the notion of ideological critique.

The work of McGann and others in the 1980s could then be seen as “completing” the 1970s deconstruction of Romanticism, demonstrating that the deconstructive version of a “shock to the mind” was merely the first step in revealing Romanticism's fundamental relation to history. Yet the publication year of *Aesthetic Ideology*

upsets this timeline, making de Man's collection a commentary on the historicist Romanticist scholarship begun in the 1980s. This critique is done indirectly, but is still present, insofar as it questions historicism's reliance on an unproblematic phenomenism, one that expresses a continuity between language and the phenomenal world. According to de Man's categories, insofar as the argument for literature's fundamental relation to history simply assumes this continuity, historicism is itself immersed in ideology. This is because, for de Man, the continuity between language and phenomenal world *is* the aesthetic ideology. While the ideological critique of McGann and others would oppose aesthetics-as-ideology and history-as-ideology's-other, de Man scrambles the relations among these terms, making a belief in history an aesthetic action, insofar as that belief relied on the phenomenism of an aesthetic ideology.

De Man had actually been working toward this critique of phenomenal language for a while, asserting in 1986 that those who in the name of sociohistoric concerns ignored the discontinuity between language and natural reality were, "in short, very poor readers of Marx's *German Ideology*" (*Resistance* 11). While de Man did not really elaborate his reference, his invocation set up an intriguing contrast with the more conventional understanding of Marx's work that underlay McGann's historicist readings. For, while de Man's passage actually flirts with the language of ideological critique, referring to the ideological mystifications of those who would accuse deconstruction of its own ahistorical tendencies, the formulation of ideology that de Man develops neatly sidesteps, or minimizes, the issue of seeing beyond ideology to truth. Indeed, de Man's model leaves behind the whole figurative act of getting "beyond" or "outside" ideology. The focus is on recognizing ideology, on how language and phenomenal reality are constantly confused as the same thing. The 1986 *Resistance to Theory* complicates things, however, by also focusing on the ineluctable quality of this confusion, which in fact defines how language and literary theory operate. Theory – de Man's version of the ideological critique – exposes the ideology of language and phenomenal reality; however, theory itself always incites a resistance to itself, in a manner that repudiates any eschatological narrative that would envision a space beyond ideology. Literary theory is the recording of this paradoxical blend of knowing and not knowing ideology, one that creates a scandal of mind much more vehement than Burke's own argument for English prejudice.

If de Man's 1986 formulation stressed the unavoidable confusion of linguistic and phenomenal reality – his resistance to theory – his 1996 *Aesthetic Ideology* focused on how a fundamental quality of language – its materiality – constantly unsettled any easy belief in that confusion. This materiality, however, did not exist as a physical reality; it was, as Derrida opined, a "materiality without matter" ("Typewriter" 350). While apparently referring to Marx's distinction between an idealist and material world, de Man also upended that opposition, making materiality a quality of language that was itself not phenomenal. Thus, rather than making ideological analysis about getting beyond or outside ideology, de Man made his critique about dramatizing as accurately as possible the machinations of language. This change in focus is especially interesting within the context of how much, as we have previously

seen, Romantic texts seem to conflate ideology with epistemological error – how much ideology can itself seem to be a phenomenal occurrence. Marx appears to make this connection himself with his comparison of the reversing power of the camera obscura to the physiological operation of the human cornea. But Marx’s sense of materialism is not really, or merely, about the physical world; more precisely, it is about the network of social relations that define human labor and its expropriated character. Like de Man, Marx eschews a simple phenomenalism. Thus, regardless of whether one is ultimately persuaded by de Man’s formulations, his treatment of ideology provides an interesting contrast to more conventional usages of ideology. He challenges us to think about the way language interacts with, or perhaps even underpins, the opposition between ideas and material reality that structures ideological analysis.

Also of note is how *Aesthetic Ideology* locates de Man’s notion of materialism in the philosophical writings of Romantic-period writers. While a reader of McGann might very well conflate Romanticism with ideological mystification, a reader of de Man might instead view Romanticism as a resource by which the aesthetic ideology is exposed. For de Man, of course, language is an inhuman operation, insofar as its actions do not lie in any originating human action. It therefore remains an open question what critical agency we might have in the conflict between aesthetic ideology and de Manian materiality. Regardless, it is important to note how central the role of Romanticism is in both McGann’s and de Man’s narratives, even though Romanticism appears to play contrasting roles in each critical plot. The Romantic ideology is something we must overcome while the aesthetic ideology is something that the materiality of Romanticism destabilizes. This contrast simplifies to an extent the procedures in both McGann’s and de Man’s arguments. Nevertheless, it highlights the crucial way that Romanticism functions as a place where different meanings of ideology contest one another, with the very intelligibility of literary and cultural history oftentimes at stake.

This fact is exemplified by the presence of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in differing narratives of ideology and Romanticism. Kant is the key figure in *Aesthetic Ideology* from whom de Man extracts his notion of materiality. And while Kant does not figure prominently in McGann’s notion of Romantic Ideology, which McGann instead relates explicitly to the philosophy of Hegel, the idea of an autonomous aesthetic realm, a key target of a number of Romanticist ideological critiques, is oftentimes associated with Kant’s thought. Interestingly, Kant’s characterization of the non-functionalist quality of art also underwrites Adorno’s sense of how aesthetics actually critiques the instrumental nature of capitalist society. Kant himself comes up with the cognitive act of “subreption,” which sounds very much like one definition of ideology, in this case the confusion of human conception with objective truth (114). The point here is not simply to choose among all these different versions of how Kant and ideology relate, or to feel the need to identify one monolithic, homogenous understanding of Kant. Rather, the point is to see how *Kant* functions as an umbrella term under which a host of different narratives about ideology congregate. Kant allegorizes the role of Romanticism as both object of

ideological critique and as intellectual resource by which the shape, implications, and very possibility of that critique can be thought.

Returning to the question of truth, of which Kant's definition of subreption reminds us, we can conclude by offering one possible way to think ourselves through the problem of discovering a place beyond or outside ideology. We can first note what de Man does in another work, how getting "outside" or "beyond" something refers to actions that are simply figures of language; to believe that they literally exist is to subscribe to the phenomenalism of the aesthetic ideology (*Allegories* 3–6). Still, they continually appear in critical plots about ideology. That predicament, however, can mean something beside either the logical sloppiness, and thus the limited significance, of ideological analysis or de Man's inevitable resistance to theory. Non-ideological truth is not a mystified, idealist assertion but the marker for the very aporia that structures ideological analysis. Its necessity is not a sign of a misplaced faith in ontological certainty but of a more volatile, *formal* operation that challenges the meanings of critical thought. Whether its "shock to the mind" translates into intelligibility about the social world – whether, for example, the aporias of inside and outside are beholden to the vicissitudes of class struggle, as Žižek insists – is precisely the question that energizes and shapes – defines – that challenge.

We can see this challenge poetized in the tropes of dreaming and waking that appear in a number of Romantic texts. The Romantic fascination with the idea of waking into a dream or another reality appears in a number of works, such as P. B. Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* (left unfinished at the time of Shelley's death in 1822), where the protagonist must decide whether his visionary slumber is qualitatively different from the story that the character of a disfigured Rousseau tells, of "wak[ing] to weep" (l.334). Whether that difference is indeed qualitative is the question, or challenge, that ideological analysis constantly poses. One might say that the exceptionalism of ideological analysis – what makes it in fact that kind of critique – comes from the constant assertion of this query, rather than any answer, assumed or otherwise, that a particular ideological analysis offers. In the case of *The Triumph of Life*, the impoverished nature of the world that both Rousseau and then the narrator wake into, with its combined features of post-Revolutionary despair and Hobbesian violence, forces the reader to wonder if, with such glaring limitations, the waking world cannot but help be its own nightmarish, ideological dream. The unfinished nature of *The Triumph of Life*, which leaves unanswered the fates of both the narrator and Rousseau, simply stresses the uncertain, non-ontological quality of that wonder, which nevertheless cannot be exorcized from the reading experience of the poem.

John Keats, Shelley's fellow traveler, has perhaps the most emblematic version of this dynamic in the conclusion to his famous poem, "Ode to a Nightingale" (1820). The piece's last words, "Do I wake or sleep?" (l. 80), make up one of the most famous lines of English poetry, to the point that their often quoted meditation on the volatile nature of reality can almost seem a cliché. The specific situation of the poet's rumination, however, lends a particular edge to this formulation. Toward the end of the poem, the poet's own word, "forlorn," works "like a bell" to wake the narrator out of his solitary musings on the Nightingale (ll. 70–71). There is thus something

jarringly self-censoring about the poem's policing of the poet's wayward thoughts, one that resonates with how the ideological subject internalizes its own subjugation, much like the "mind-forged manacles" that appear in Blake's poem "London" (l. 8), from *Songs of Experience*. Operating like its own morning alarm, the poem aurally awakens the poet out of itself, dropping him into the waking world. And in that action we can see allegorized the entire history of the alienated modern subject, rung out of its wayward dreams and thrust into what we call life – the techno-administrative world of labor – and what we all reluctantly embrace, simply because of its signature as ineluctable reality. To question this world is then to query the entire ideological operation by which we distinguish between the dreams of solitary mental life and the constraining, common world to which we awaken each day, even as the poem gives us no guarantee – no truth – of any ontological content that might supersede the reality that concludes the poem. Less the clarity of a "shock to the mind," the poetic analysis of "Nightingale" is more the mental ache of a fever dream that stubbornly continues to insert itself into any confident distinction among, and hierarchical organization of, various representations of human existence.

This manipulation of the tropes of dreaming and awakening has, of course, a long history before the Romantics, as the alliterative nature of both Shelley's and Keats's poems – one alluding to Dante and the other to Milton – makes clear. But theirs and other Romantics' texts do seem to exist as privileged examples of our modern, and postmodern, sense of how ideology operates. As we have suggested, the Romantic origins of our present-day understanding of terms like aesthetics and literature, prime targets of contemporary ideological analysis, might in part explain this connection. But perhaps this relation can also be elucidated by Romanticism's own intimate relation to the question of modernity – by its existence as a discourse that spans, among other things, responses to the French Revolution and Marx's own critique of capital. Like modernity, Romanticism's philosophical, literary, and political soundings are varied and oftentimes conflict. But if ideological analysis still seems today to retain its critical power, even though its relation to truth remains problematic and questions about its methodological limitations stay unresolved, perhaps that is the case because of the problem of modernity itself. Ideological critique is, in other words, the language of modernity: oftentimes unsatisfactory but indispensable as a way to think through who and what we are. As both the subject and object of ideological critique, Romanticism models for us this predicament in deliberate, oftentimes excruciating fashion.

See HISTORIOGRAPHY; PHILOSOPHY; POETICS.

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# Nation and Empire

*Julia M. Wright*

Nation and empire were deeply entwined categories in the Romantic period: on the one hand, imperial expansion, and critiques of it, as well as struggles between empires, often proceeded in terms of imperial nations' interests (economic, cultural, moral); on the other, myriad groups ruled by imperial powers sought to achieve the status of independent nations. The Romantic Century (1750–1850) is marked by dozens of such conflicts, including the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), the American Revolution (1776), the United Irishmen Uprising (1798), the four Anglo-Mysore and three Anglo-Martha Wars in India (fought over various periods from 1766 to 1818), the Belgian Revolution (1830–1831), and the Young Europe movements of the 1830s and 1840s, culminating in 1848, the so-called "Year of Revolution." That year revolutions were launched, sometimes successfully, in France, Italy, Germany, Hungary, Denmark, and elsewhere, in the cases of Germany and Italy laying some of the foundation for decolonization and unification as autonomous nation-states later in the nineteenth century. While the wellsprings of uprisings against imperial rule were varied, usually involving some measure of religious intolerance and oligarchies of class or ethnicity, the stakes were in these terms the same: who gets to define the nation's identity and direct the governance of the nation-state. Revolutions, uprisings, insurgencies, and unarmed popular political movements were motivated by these stakes, though often focused specifically on voting rights, land rights, religious freedom, or eligibility for government office, and related issues such as access to education, economic resources, or recognition of a group's language, the denial of which could serve as effective barriers to political power. The stakes were similar from the other side of the power divide. While empire worked most obviously to deny nationhood to others through military force, it also worked at the level of such

state apparatuses – by dismantling indigenous institutions and making the imperial language the language of governance, for instance, and imposing imperial law in the place of indigenous law. Such material practices find their rationale in Enlightenment political thought that both defined the nation on populist terms and justified the denial of nationhood to those targeted by the European empires.

The early Enlightenment thinker John Locke made two arguments in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) that are crucial here. He contended that “Law makes men free in the political arena” (113) so that, as Seamus Deane argues in relation to this passage, the imperial project as early as the sixteenth century represented itself as a liberation movement, making “barbarians” “free” by bringing them under the “Law” (33). Second, Locke reframed sovereignty as a political resource that flowed not from the Christian God to the European monarch (the sovereign under “Divine Right”) but from the people who willingly cede their individual sovereignty to “make one People” in order to enjoy the benefits of “Civil Society,” including a government that “make[s] Laws . . . as the public good of the Society shall require” (325). At the core of Locke’s argument is the sovereign subject of the Enlightenment – self-aware, rational, and able to exercise free will. As Locke argued in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), “In this then consists Freedom, (*viz.*) in our being able to act, or not to act, according as we shall chuse, or *will*” (248). Thus, the rational subject is free to act, and hence is sovereign and can therefore cede his sovereignty to a “civil society” which will in turn act for the “public good” through laws which, among other benefits, guarantee the political freedom of its citizens. But, as a corollary, if the individuals or a group are not sovereign subjects, then they cannot form a “civil society” or nation. To term a people “barbaric,” “irrational,” “superstitious,” or “tyrannized,” as imperial representations of colonized peoples typically did, is to claim that they are not sovereign subjects and that therefore they cannot have national or political rights – to freedom, to sovereignty, to “make Laws” for themselves through a nation-state. Enlightenment political theory thus not only created the premises by which nationhood was conceived and defended in well-established nation-states, but also the premises by which self-government was denied to colonized groups. It also defined the terms on which the right to self-government could be asserted against the claims of empire, as in the American colonists’ revolutionary declaration in the Preamble to the Constitution (1775) to be “one People” who *could* “make Laws”: “We the People . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

## Historical Background

Before the rise of postcolonial studies, accounts of British Romanticism that addressed the question of empire typically focused on an imperial trauma: the American Revolution and, almost metonymically, George III’s difficulties coping with the loss of the American colonies. This is a British empire suddenly troubled by a challenge not only to its colonial holdings but also to its claims to moral

superiority over competing Catholic empires (Portugal, Spain, France): white, European-educated Protestants had called the British empire tyrannical and exploitative, threatening Britain's nationalist self-image as the vanguard of enlightened liberty through "civilization, the Common Law and Protestantism" (Deane 35; also see Colley). William Blake's *America* (1793) yokes the American Revolution to 1790s radicalism, putting it at the ideological heart of radical Romanticism in propounding the rights of the individual against an antiquated system of tradition and privilege, a Blake made familiar to us by David V. Erdman's important *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (1954). Postcolonial theory has expanded critical vision to include not only the dispossessed lower classes within Britain, like Blake himself, but also those nations that the British empire would dominate. To understand the problem of nation and empire on these more global terms we must go back beyond the American Revolution to the Seven Years' War.

The Seven Years' War was the first "world war," involving all of the major European powers in theaters of conflict across North America and Europe, as well as smaller theaters in Africa, India, and the Philippines. Under the 1763 Treaty of Paris, European borders were returned to their pre-War originals, but a dizzying array of colonial territories were traded back and forth: France was allowed to keep its Caribbean colonies if it gave up most of New France in North America to Britain, but it also regained from Britain the islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon off the eastern coast of Canada (part of British-controlled Nova Scotia from 1713 to 1763); France also lost Louisiana to Spain, but Spain ceded Florida to Britain; in India, France regained its trading ports but the rest went to Britain, laying a clear path for the dramatic expansion of British control in India over the next decades; Britain returned some smaller territories conquered during the War to prior colonial powers, giving the Philippines back to Spain and Senegal to France, for instance; and so forth. While the scale of operations invites a focus on the North American theater and hence the growing importance of settler colonies to the European empires, the other territories drawn into the conflict highlight the growing significance of imperial trade to European interests: Senegal was central in the slave trade, the Caribbean key to the production of sugar for European markets, and India important for fabrics, opium, tea, and other lucrative commodities. This is not just a story about military might and economic interests, moreover, but also of a rethinking of colonial policy, especially on matters of religion. Although British and Irish Catholics would have limited political rights until 1829, Britain established policies of religious tolerance in the former New France and, before that, during its brief occupation of the Philippines in the early 1760s. It was also broadly tolerant of religious freedoms in India in the eighteenth century, on the assumption that tolerance would solicit cooperation from the populations it sought to dominate.

While the loss of the American colonies was a bitter blow, it ultimately did little to impede the rapid expansion of the British empire launched in 1763. Britain's control continued to grow in Africa, Australasia, India, and North America, and British wealth grew through imperial trade, including the lucrative opium trade which

Britain fought two wars to protect (First Opium War, 1839–1842; Second Opium War, 1856–1860). Its policies of religious tolerance were also part of a movement toward an imagined vision of a benign empire, ruling with “Law” rather than force and exploitation – a vision that would contribute to liberalizing policies in the nineteenth century that led to Britain being viewed by continental Europeans by the 1840s as one of the least repressive imperial regimes, and so a refuge for those fleeing the Austrian empire, for instance. The fuller picture is much uglier: Britain was a player in the Atlantic slave trade until the early nineteenth century and enslaved indigenous peoples (in India and Canada, for instance) long after it outlawed the African slave trade, brutally suppressed uprisings in nearly every colony it held during the Romantic period, economically drank its colonies dry (to the point that some have arguably still not fully recovered), and forcibly expelled various groups from their homelands. Britain paid a price as well, as scholars such as Mary Favret are beginning to explore, not only materially (in deaths, wounded military men, absent sons and husbands, and financial expenditure) but also culturally.

The Seven Years’ War, and Britain’s dominance in North America after 1763, situates not only the shock of the American Revolution but also the growing significance of the transatlantic, an emerging British tendency to represent its empire as morally managed, and the rise of Britain as, in Napoleon’s sneering phrase, “une nation de boutiquiers” – a nation of shopkeepers, increasingly profiting from imperial goods such as opium, sugar, tea, and cotton. While abolitionists lamented the cruelties of the slave trade and urged a sugar boycott, and radicals questioned the legitimacy of a war against a democratizing post-Revolutionary France, Britain was awash in the materials of empire, even to the growing problem of pollution. Imperial trade redrew the world map and redistributed populations, building cities in Britain, expanding port towns, and financing colonial settlements abroad. The story of the empire secured in the Seven Years’ War is inextricable from the story of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, and hence the growth of cities that William Wordsworth so deplored; it is also inextricable from the history of debates over the morality of empire, from those early policies of religious tolerance to the impeachment of Warren Hastings (1787–1795) for abuses of colonial power in India to the investigation of the Vellore Mutiny (1806), and beyond; and it is inextricable from the material culture that peppers the literature of the period, from the luxurious India shawls in novels of manners to the cheap opium in narratives concerned with aspects of British life that challenge such novels’ reassuring image of a harmonious, ethical, and “polite” society.

The Seven Years’ War also had its counterpart in the Romantic period: the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815). Like the Seven Years’ War, they involved most of the major European powers, and again France was on the losing side; at his apex, though, Napoleon achieved direct or indirect control of most of continental Europe. Like the Seven Years’ War, the Napoleonic Wars were concluded by an international agreement to exchange territories between the major European imperial powers, settled during negotiations at the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815). The 1763 Treaty of Paris reinstated traditional borders in Europe and the Congress did the same for

France, but for other countries the Congress redrew the map and changed the governments of a significant part of the European population: Denmark and Norway, politically united for centuries, were separated under the Congress as Norway was transferred to Swedish rule to punish Denmark for its support of Napoleon; smaller regions were exchanged between the victorious powers of the Napoleonic Wars, expanding Russian and Prussian territories in the continent, for instance. The German Confederation, forged by the Congress as well, controlled central Europe through a complex political arrangement between the monarchs of the Austrian empire, Prussia, Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands, along with various German kings (of Bavaria and of Saxony, for instance), myriad other rulers, and four free cities, largely following the borders of the Holy Roman Empire ended by Napoleon in 1806. And so on.

The Treaty of Paris and the Congress of Vienna were striking in their geographical reach, but smaller-scale remappings were common occurrences in Europe and its empires: Scotland and England were joined through the 1707 Act of Union and a second Act of Union in 1800 abolished the Irish Parliament and brought Ireland under the jurisdiction of the British Parliament (Wales had been politically joined to England in 1536); Portugal, weakened by such myriad forces as the Lisbon earthquake (1755) and Napoleon's conquest, lost its South American empire when Brazil declared independence in 1822; Spain, also impacted by the Napoleonic Wars, lost most of its American holdings around the same time. Britain's empire expanded steadily across the era, but was still troubled by resistance – including uprisings in Ireland, India (such as the Vellore Mutiny), Australia (the Rum Rebellion of 1808), and Canada (the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837). The Romantic period was one in which decolonization efforts – some successful, as in the United States and Nicaragua; some not, as in Ireland and Canada – were as much a global force as empire-building and the Congress's efforts to redistribute European territories.

### **Defining Nation and Empire**

Modern nationalism is a distinctive ideology that is generally traced to the late eighteenth century, though nationalism theorists disagree on whether the Industrial Revolution or French Revolution was a more significant contributing factor. Unlike earlier forms of patriotism, such as that which focused on fealty to the monarch, nationalism grounded the nation's rights and character in the people as a whole. As in Locke's theory of government, sovereignty flowed upward from the people, rather than downward from a monarch who ruled by divine right. This populist premise supported the definition of the nation as a community with a shared language, culture and history, and homeland, and facilitated the emergence, most influentially via Johann Gottfried von Herder, of a determining connection between the individual and the land that makes nationalist sentiment "natural" and, in its more repressive extensions, pathologizes dissent and immigration as "unnatural"

violations of that relationship. This kind of radicalization of nationalist thought is illustrated by the popular truncation of the 1872 dictum of German-American Carl Schurz, “My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right; and if wrong, to be set right,” to just “My country, right or wrong.” But, short of such simplistically absolute patriotism, there was a wide range of nationalisms. In the 1790s the United Irishmen, for instance, espoused a vision of the Irish nation that included all ethnicities and religious sects, drawing directly on Locke’s idea of a collective sovereignty. The Herderian vision, at the heart of what is commonly called “Romantic nationalism” in nationalism studies, was also uncomfortably at odds with imperial ambition: an implication of Herder’s argument about the people’s fundamental connection to the land is that empires were doomed to fail because imperial activity necessarily separates people from their homeland. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as David Hume, stressing nurture over nature, made it much easier to rationalize empire, envisioning imperial agents who could retain their culture wherever they lived as well as programmatically alter the culture of the colonized (see “Of National Characters”).

While the definition of the nation under nationalism can seem static, especially in its Herderian form where the identity of the people (including their language and culture) arises from the land they have always inhabited, it often undergirded claims that were fundamentally historiographical: the nation had a great past to which it must return; the nation has a great future if it continues on the right path; the national language was once pure, and must be restored to that purity; the national literature has achieved international regard, a sign of the nation’s cultural advancement; the national literature is corrupt, a sign of the nation’s decline; centuries ago, the nation triumphed against another nation, and will do so again; centuries ago, the nation was wronged by another nation and soon that wrong will be redressed; and so on. Narratives of progress, and imperial decline, undergirded imperial discourse not only in national claims to advancement but also in the premise that colonized peoples could not make such claims. Orientalism and modern racism not only represented particular peoples as “barbarians” on the basis of skin pigmentation and region of birth, but in doing so elided their national formations. The Ottoman empire, the Persian empire, the Mughal empire, and China were collapsed into a largely undifferentiated “Orient,” while dozens of nations in Africa were similarly conflated, as Edward Said influentially discussed in *Orientalism*.

Nationalism, in its imperial and non-imperial forms, is also fundamentally comparative. J. T. Leerssen has suggested that it proceeds on the basis of othering – England is opposed to France, Poland to Russia, and so forth – but in the Romantic period it also proceeds on the basis of present alliances and historical similes. Britain had ties to other Protestant nations, as much as it tended to oppose Catholic ones; after the fall of Napoleon at Waterloo (1815), the major imperial states of continental Europe defined themselves as a “Holy Alliance,” purporting to move forward on Christian terms while working on reactionary terms to quell democracy movements and other liberalizing efforts. Colonized national groups understood themselves as collectivities as well, Irish nationalists invoking a connection to the postcolonial

United States, for instance, and subordinated groups across Europe taking up Thomas Moore's nationalist, anti-imperial *Irish Melodies* (c.1808–1834) as a model. Historically speaking, similes abounded – imperial states claimed kinship with the Roman empire, while the nations they colonized identified themselves with groups that challenged Rome's power, such as the Scythians or unconquered peoples of northern Europe. As much as nationalism relies on privileging a distinctive language, culture, territory, and history, it also relies on such value-laden identifications.

In philosophical terms, both nationalism and imperialism drew on neoclassicism and Enlightenment concepts of culture, particularly in favoring centralized order (and hence bureaucracy), civic duty, and progress, and both drew on Romantic ideas of the nation as an organic whole, both in unifying the population at any one time and in unifying the nation's history as a natural development from a specific origin (see Smith). Romantic-era notions of empire are also deeply intertwined with neoclassicism. Imperialism on the one hand was encouraged by comparisons to Rome and the appropriation of Roman style, as in the use of Roman architecture or the use of Roman subjects in paintings celebrating self-sacrifice for the community (Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii* [1784], for instance); and, on the other, was disciplined by neoclassical reference to the Roman virtues, particularly those which related to simplicity, moderation, and fair dealing. In the early Romantic period this was highlighted by the impeachment proceedings against Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India, for various abuses of colonial power. As P. J. Marshall notes, Edmund “Burke considered that the possession of an empire should be primarily judged not . . . by its contribution to British wealth or British power, but by Roman concepts of ‘honour’ or ‘virtue’” (34), and it became a cliché of anti-imperial discourse to lament imperial luxury as a sign of vice and dishonor, as in such texts as Eliza Ryves's poem about Hastings, *The Hastiniad* (1785), or later Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy* (1795). This approach predates the impeachment, however. In Joseph Addison's tragedy, *Cato* (1713), much reprinted and anthologized in the Romantic period, the African character, Juba, declares,

A Roman Soul is bent on higher views:  
 To civilize the rude unpolish'd World,  
 And lay it under the restraint of Laws;  
 To make Man mild and sociable to Man;  
 To cultivate the wild licentious Savage  
 With Wisdom, Discipline, and lib'ral Arts . . .  
 The Roman Virtues lift up mortal Man.  
 While good, and just, and anxious for his Friends,  
 He's still severely bent against himself;  
 Renouncing sleep, and rest, and food, and ease,  
 He strives with thirst and hunger, toil and heat;

And when his Fortune sets before him all  
 The Poms and Pleasures that his Soul can wish,  
 His rigid Virtue will accept of none. (9–10)

This is a common model for virtuous governance in much of the Romantic period (and extended into the Victorian through “muscular Christianity”), and the influence of Addison’s *Cato* is, as Julie Ellison has noted, extensive in transatlantic political writing, with the African Juba at the center of its complicated representation of empire, the assimilationist enterprise, civic virtue and, more bluntly, the almost Orwellian effort to rationalize empire as a public good. As Said puts it, “Every empire . . . regularly tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, and that it has a mission certainly not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate the peoples and places it rules directly or indirectly” (“Imperial Perspectives”). The claim to proper empire through Roman virtue was also challenged by radicals who saw the Roman virtues as inextricable from imperial aggression, as in Mary Hays’s *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) where Emma, after calling soldiers mere murderers, dismisses “*Roman virtues*” for having “too much of the destructive spirit” (110).

Empire could not only threaten the moral integrity of the imperial nation but also, by rendering the nation’s borders porous, alter the national identity. William Wordsworth thus not only fears the effects of foreign literature on the English mind – the “sickly and stupid German Tragedies” popular because of the dulling effects of post-industrialization urban life (599) – but also, as Saree Makdisi has detailed, exhibits anxiety about the “flow” of objects and peoples from around the globe that “crashes through the open colonial flood-gates and mixes and interacts with the English crowd in the space of London” (35). Given the emphasis of nationalism on the national territory – the ties to the land, the integrity of borders – simple expansion could be a threat. As Marlon B. Ross argues in an important early essay on nationalism in British Romantic literature, the problem of empire was a relational one – about distinguishing the British imperial project from Napoleon’s and on terms consonant with ideals of organic national development, an effort to imagine “British expansion” as “integral growth, preordained by England’s glorious past” (57). This model of “national development” (56) envisions the nation as a rolling stone, gathering momentum and mass as the centuries pass, and so legitimating imperial aspirations as “natural,” even inevitable.

These aspirations were not only to be legitimated at home. International reputation was also a concern, allied with the Roman virtue of respectability, and practically connected to the territorial competition among the imperial nations of Europe – each imperial nation wanted to “win,” and on cultural as well as territorial terms. Burke, in his first speech on Hastings’ impeachment, declared,

my Lords, the credit and honour of the British nation will itself be decided by this decision. My Lords, they will stand or fall thereby. We are to decide by the case of this gentleman whether the crimes of individuals are to be turned into public guilt and national ignominy, or whether this nation will convert these offences, which have thrown a transient shade on its glory, into a judgment that will reflect a permanent lustre on the honour, justice and humanity of this Kingdom. (271)



Note Burke's emphasis here on transformation: "the crimes of individuals" will be "turned into public guilt" or "convert[ed]" "into a judgment that will reflect a permanent lustre." The vehicle of that transformation is the nation-state's response; if it disciplines its agents (such as Hastings), it is lawful and so worthy; if it does not, it is criminal as well. To be lawful is to be "civil," to have a legitimate government; to be otherwise is to be "barbarians," and so lose the rationalization for empire as an extension of "Law" to those in need of it (see Deane).

## National Literature

The distinction between civility and barbarity extended to cultural forms, particularly poetry. Anthologies proliferated in the Romantic period to both validate British nationalism and trace the nation's cultural development (Wright, "Order"). Such anthologies, defining an organic British cultural history that legitimated its claims to superiority and an imperial reach, were also circulated to maintain empire. Charles Grant, James Mill, and Thomas Babington Macaulay, to name just a few leading figures from across the Romantic period, all argued for the education of Indians in British culture as a means of rendering the colonized population more amenable to British interests.

There is, of course, a fundamental contradiction here: on the one hand, British national identity is either consistent with its origin or develops organically out of it; on the other, non-British peoples can become more British through contact with British culture, suggesting that British people could also be changed by contact with non-British cultures. The latter mechanism is precisely that which disturbed Wordsworth – the corrupting of the national character by foreign influences. David Lloyd has argued that Romantic-era theorizations of "major" culture versus minority cultures situated the "major" culture as universal and civilized, and the "minor" culture as specific to itself and primitive. British nationalism positioned British literature as "major"; it could thus facilitate progress (that is, movement toward Britishness) for "minor" cultures, such as those that Britain colonized. "Minor" literature, conversely, could be safely consumed, being too idiosyncratic and backward to influence readers from a "major" culture. This elaborates on the threat that so concerned Wordsworth: the influence of "German Tragedies" suggests English adaptation to another culture, and so threatens the "majority" status of English culture. Hence there were myriad laments across the first half of the nineteenth century that British culture was in decline, susceptible to foreign influences that would drive it back down the cultural evolutionary ladder. National literature thus had to be insular if it were to do the work of consolidating national identity against foreign incursions – and this project is vital both for empires impacted by their own expansion (see Ross), and for colonized peoples seeking to preserve their own identity against empire's assimilatory pressures.

Three genres are especially central to literary articulations of national identity in relation to empire in this era: epic, including the hexameter line associated with

classical epic and the English variation of the heroic couplet; ballad and song; the national tale. The epic stressed the neoclassical elements of nationalism, and facilitated imperial aspirations by further linking the nation's imperial future to the great empires of the past. Ballad and song tended to be more insular and nativist, privileging the national past and origins as the authenticating ground for the nation's future. The national tale, in this context, emerges as a distinctly modern form, attempting to reconcile the idealization of the past with the practical requirements of the present.

## Epic

It has long been a commonplace of English Romantic studies that some of the most canonical poets viewed Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667; rev. 1674) as the great English epic and attempted to write its successor – John Keats's *Hyperion* (1820), Wordsworth's *Prelude* (revised from 1799 to 1850, and published posthumously), and William Blake's *The Four Zoas* (written from 1797 to 1807, but left in manuscript), for instance. To these we can add a number of epics by their contemporaries, including Robert Southey, who churned out such epics as *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), *Madoc* (1805), and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), and scores of lesser-known writers of the Romantic period. The value of epic was twofold: on the one hand, epic was a form through which history was made both comprehensible and meaningful, its extended similes and epic catalogues gathering all into its unifying vision; on the other, it linked imperial nations together, as great empires had great epics from the defeaters of Troy (Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) to the rulers of Rome (Virgil's *Aeneid*) and forward to the European empires of the early modern era. The proliferation of epics from the 1790s forward is symptomatic of the effort to organize a nationalist vision of empire, as well as solicit support for it – most directly in celebrations of military successes. As Herbert Tucker succinctly puts it, “it is the very idea of epic to tell a sponsoring culture its own story. . . . To narrate the tale of the tribe is at once to receive an order, describe an order, and to issue an order, in a powerful gyro-stabilized loop” (13–14).

The nationalist investments of epic emerged in literary controversies such as the one over the amenability of the English language to the metrical line of classical epic, dactylic hexameter. The German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock was a lightning rod on the subject, writing a Miltonic epic, *Der Massias* (1748–1773), and reputedly “declaring to English visitors that their language was incapable of the epic grandeur of hexameters,” eliciting Blake's scatological and scathing nationalist response, “When Klopstock England defied” (Blake 863n). Classical epics dealt with not only empire-building but also nation-building, particularly Virgil's *Aeneid*, the prehistory of Rome which anticipates Rome's foundation and rise to power. Neoclassicism gave such classical models, from epic to the Roman virtues, significant cultural weight. Blake's rejection of “Greek or Roman models” in his brief epic, *Milton*, is

specifically a rejection of neoclassical empire and the cultural apparatus through which it was promoted, including epic (Wright, *Blake* 128–130).

Epic is fundamentally a conservative form, a mythic underwriting of the “glorious past” invoked by Ross, though not without its instabilities, as Balachandra Rajan has argued in his discussion of Luís Vaz de Camões’ 1572 Portuguese epic, *The Lusiad* (31–49). The nostalgic tendency is clear in two epics on Alfred the Great – Joseph Cottle’s *Alfred, an Epic Poem* (1800) and Henry James Pye’s *Alfred, an Epic Poem* (1801) – and a number of other contemporary epics on British originary greatness, including John Ogilvie’s *Britannia, a national epic poem* (1801). The focus on Alfred, a ninth-century king, builds on his reputation as a founder of English law, for instance in Cottle’s juxtaposition of “Viking savagery and English civilization,” exemplified by the “liberal worthiness” of Alfred (Tucker 96, 97). At the same time, translations of earlier epics abounded: Homer and Virgil continued to be republished and retranslated, of course, and *The Lusiad* was translated into English as early as 1791. Epics were written in the wake of the French Revolution to commemorate the Glorious Revolution (J. Ogden’s *The Revolution, an epic poem* [1790]), and after the rise of Napoleon to commemorate British victories, including William Hamilton Drummond’s *Battle of Trafalgar* (1806), Hannah Cowley’s *The Siege of Acre* (1810), and Joseph Waugh’s *The Tagus, an epic poem* (1814). These epics take as their subject a national hero – from the legislator Alfred to contemporary military leaders such as Horatio Nelson and Arthur Wellesley (the Duke of Wellington) – akin to an Odysseus or an Aeneas, in order to represent the nation to itself on celebratory terms. As Byron would joke in the wake of this epic flurry, in the opening stanzas of Canto I of *Don Juan*, “I want a hero – an uncommon want / When every year and month sends forth a new one . . . Evil and good, have had their tithe of talk, / And filled the signposts then, like Wellesley now” (1–2, 11–12: Wu).

In Scotland, nationalist epics countered such works as the *Alfred* epics by framing Scotland as the land of liberty through accounts of Robert the Bruce and William Wallace (see Goslee). James Macpherson’s Ossianic poems, especially the epic *Fingal* (1761), offered nativist heroism against that of the classical world and the new imperial metropole in London. In Ireland, despite a strong nationalist literary culture, epics are, however, hard to find. This is partly a question of cultural weight: epics were very long, and disadvantaged groups could command neither the patrons nor the market for lengthy works. Irish publishing, particularly of Irish nationalist verse, tended to produce relatively small octavo volumes. Even Drummond’s “epopee” (from the French term for epic) in praise of British victory, *The Battle of Trafalgar*, published in Belfast and Dublin, was limited to two books (rather than the multiple of twelve books that is standard in epic), and less than 150 octavo pages long. More commonly, Irish nationalist narrative verse focused on native heroism was written in relatively short forms with heroic couplets and other neoclassical formal devices to maintain the classical connection without requiring the heavy page demands of epic. John Corry’s “The Patriot” (1797), for instance, is a narrative poem in heroic couplets interspersed with odes.

Similar strategies were used by English anti-imperial writers, who adapted neoclassical elements to more private forms such as the lyric and the epistle which could be published in newspapers and small volumes as well as set personal feeling against public agendas – sympathy over wealth, moral concern over growing power, and so forth. Poems against empire often turned epic neoclassicism against itself, using heroic couplets and other allusions to classical precedent in order to condemn the imperial project. Tighe’s “Pleasure” (1811) for instance, alludes extensively to Homer’s epic, *The Odyssey*, and Anna Letitia Barbauld’s near-epic “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” (1812) invokes “Roman virtue” (l. 148: Wu) to praise the pacifist William Roscoe. Blake’s anti-classical *Milton* (c.1804–1811) similarly embraces key elements of classical epic – the division into books, the national hero, the invocation of the muses – and Blake’s other debts to epic have been discussed by scholars from Northrop Frye to Tilotama Rajan. The cultural weight of epic and classical precedents could thus be adapted for anti-imperial purposes, as well as used more conventionally to promote empire.

### **Ballad and Song**

The classical literature that underwrote the privileging and proliferation of epic, however, was largely known to men with access to formal schooling, then based largely on the classical languages and literature. Though some women and lower-class men learned the classics via other means – hedge schools in Ireland and Sunday schools in England, brothers teaching sisters at home – Greek and Latin were very much the languages of the elite, reinforcing the epic’s conservatism as a genre (and the radicalism inherent in Barbauld’s and Blake’s adaptations of the form). While epic fit well with the neoclassical aims of nationalism and imperialism, ballad and song were conservative in another sense. They reinforced the nativist and distinctively Romantic assumptions of nationalism: populist rather than elitist, ballad and song were understood to be older, pre-literate forms that looked back to the nation’s origins, and were hence conservative in the literal sense of conserving tradition, rather than in looking forward to imperial expansion and future greatness. Thomas Percy’s influential *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) thus associated the ballad with a distinctively English, and pre-Norman, culture, but this recovery project was adapted by other nations. Thomas Osborne Davis writes of Charles Gavan Duffy’s *Ballad Poetry of Ireland* (1845):

How often have we wished for such a companion as this volume! Worse than meeting unclean beds, or drenching mists, or Cockney opinions, was it to have to take the mountains with a book of Scottish ballads. They were glorious, to be sure, but they were not ours, they had not the brown of the climate on their cheek, they spoke of places far, and ways which are not our country’s ways, and hopes which were not Ireland’s, and their tongue was not that we first made sport and love with. . . . [B]ut now, Brighid be praised! we can have all Irish thoughts on Irish hills, true to them as the music, or the wind, or the sky. (230–31)

In the same vein, early folklorists began to collect prose narratives from the oral tradition: Thomas Crofton Croker's *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (1825) was translated into German by the Grimm brothers in 1826, whose own collection of folktales had begun to appear in 1812 and in English translation in 1823. As Jennifer Schacker notes, it is a peculiarity of these nationalist-driven recovery projects that they were also often international, "useful to understanding the domestic past as well as the foreign present" (6).

Such folkloric projects were ethnographic in purporting to preserve a vanishing oral culture unique to a particular language and region, and were rooted in the prevalent, and rarely questioned, premise that national literature reveals national character, but not the Enlightenment premise that great literature shows evidence of cultural advancement. These two competing ideas of national literature – folkloric remainders of an originary national culture, versus advanced literary forms that demonstrate cultural progress – are still with us, in the division between literature departments and folklore departments and in anthologies still heavily reliant on authorial attributions, dating, and manuscript sources. What we have anthologized, especially in the Romantic period, is a series of literary forms that are deeply rooted in classical traditions – the ode, the lyric, the epic, the drama. The songs of Burns, Moore, and others are rarely represented in any depth.

The major exception to this is the literary ballad, an adaptation of the oral form for a literate market. Its folkloric roots are clearest in the 1798 version of Coleridge's famous "Rime," "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere": the 1798 version, without a gloss, echoes the antiquarians' collections of antique ballads in its attempt to imitate an older form of English, primarily in spelling, and use of supernatural material (as well as, of course, Taylor's influential translation of Bürger's *Lenore*). The adaptation of ballads of the oral tradition into "literary ballads" was common across Europe in the Romantic period, and allied to a bridging of the nationalist divide between the literate elite and the more "authentic" oral culture of the majority of the population. This gentrification of nativist and oral culture also worked through the figure of the bard, popularized in Thomas Gray's "The Bard: A Pindaric Ode" (1757) which explicitly responds to Edward I's execution of the bards on his conquest of Wales. The bard was celebrated in antiquarian writing as a well-read political advisor – not only a poet, but also an expert on the national literature and history who could therefore keep the nation's leaders on the right path. As a tacitly Celtic figure with a history of persecution, the bard was adopted by English poets "as an inspired, isolated, and peripatetic figure" (Trumpener 6), voicing moral truths from the margins of power. As Katie Trumpener suggests, however, such English appropriations were often dislocated from the actual bardic traditions of the Celtic nations – and in some instances, we might add, involved relatively privileged figures adopting the mask of the colonized to heighten their claims to victimhood, a Romantic-era equivalent to middle-class suburban teenagers in the United States adopting features of fashion, slang, and music associated with the impoverished inner cities. Both the Romantic bard and the literary ballad repackaged abjected oral traditions, largely from the Celtic periphery, for the literate

classes, simultaneously fetishizing that oral culture and, as Trumpener notes of bardic verse (6), putting it under erasure.

### **The National Tale**

While the epic drew on a millennia-old tradition of celebrating empire as it marches forward and the ballad returned to nativist forms to idealize the cultural past, the national tale emerged to engage the competing demands of nation and empire in the context of modernity. The national tale is, as scholars such as Trumpener and Miranda Burgess have noted, a hybrid genre, as the novel generally tends to be. But the national tale bridges not only a range of modes – the sentimental, the gothic, the antiquarian – but also incorporates elements of the poetic forms addressed above. The national tale is epic in its interest in nation-building, though it tends to seek nation-building through conciliation rather than conquest; its account of the colonized culture is typically antiquarian, and often quotes ballads directly or discusses them as an aspect of the culture; and it is often punctuated by topographical description in which the land is rendered nationally meaningful, as in the georgic and other topographical verse forms (see O'Brien on the georgic). The national tale, moreover, is founded on the marriage plot as an allegory for the harmonious union of nations – a plot with roots in European political history, for centuries forging national alliances through contracted marriages – but in so doing takes the domestic interests of the novel to push the messy details of political history into the background. The national tale in its narrowest form ends with a domestic couple, not a resolution to colonial or international conflict.

Trumpener has pointed out that a key facet of the national tale is “its plot of loss and growth through historical change” (131): whereas the epic looks backward to find the nation’s future and the collection of oral materials does the same to find the nation’s authentic self, the national tale looks backward to academically organize the materials of the past as the foundation on which to move forward into a political and cultural modernity identified with the imperial metropole. It in effect stages the repackaging of oral culture for literate audiences traceable in the history of the figure of the bard and of the literary ballad. Whether we take the national tale back to Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800) or Sydney Owenson’s *Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806), or select Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley* (1814), which deals with the entrenchment of the 1707 Act of Union between Scotland and England, as an exemplary instance, one feature remains the same: the Celtic periphery is represented as passing away before the rise of a specifically English modernity defined by capitalism and bureaucratic centralization, while Celtic culture is contained and framed through nostalgia and antiquarian scholarship. In this way, the national tale represents the national culture as passing out of lived and popular experience at the moment that the nation-state which represented it ceases to exist.

But while many national tales superficially legitimate colonization as modernization, they also offer varying degrees of resistance to that dominant imperial narrative. Owenson's *Wild Irish Girl*, for instance, silences both its Irish heroine and her sympathetic English fiancé, Horatio, for the English patriarch's lesson on managing the Irish, complicating the novel's earlier impetus toward the training of Horatio to be a better English landlord (Wright, *Ireland* 71–72). Scott's *Waverley* heavily romanticizes the Scots who are on the verge of passing away into history, and myriad novels in the 1810s wrote directly against the national tale. In Robert Torrens's *The Victim of Intolerance, Or, the Hermit of Killarney: A Catholic Tale* (1814), published at nearly the same time as *Waverley*, the Penal Statutes that disenfranchised Catholics prevent reconciliation through marriage and drive its ethical, talented hero into rebellion.

The national tale, in its broadest form, operates within what Mary Louise Pratt termed the “contact zone” – the interface between dominant and dominated cultures, metropole and periphery, alien and domestic – in exploring at the level of the individual and the personal the effects of epic ambitions on colonial agents and local peoples. The national tale is indebted to the travelogue, discussed by Pratt, which also works to explore this zone, from the rural and Celtic “tours” that proliferated in the Romantic period to the growing body of writing on more recently colonized spaces, including such poems and novels as Helen Maria Williams's *Peru* (1784), Thomas Campbell's *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809), Adam Kidd's *The Huron Chief* (1830), and John Galt's *Bogle Corbet, Or, the Emigrants* (1831). Some sympathetic to the dispossessed indigenous peoples of the Americas, some representing the difficulties of colonial life for settlers of various classes, and some imagining the New World as an escape from the Old, such texts overlap with the national tale in their tendencies to mix romance with politics and juxtapose picturesque and sublime scenery with accounts of historical conflict.

While these three genres predominate in positive articulations of nation and empire, it was through the modes of the gothic and satire that these political structures were often critiqued. Fenwick's *Secresy*, for instance, used the gothic in condemning the exploitation of the imperial project, while William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) challenged complacency about the virtues of English justice over the French administration of the law by turning the gothic gaze onto English prisons and judges. Thomas Moore's anti-imperial satires from *Corruption and Intolerance* (1807) to *Memoirs of Captain Rock* (1824) and occasional verse (much of it collected in *Odes upon Cash, Corn, Catholics, and Other Matters* [1828]) launched volley after volley at the moral failures and administrative follies of colonial rule, while graphic satire by James Gillray and his contemporaries both lampooned and deployed national stereotypes. Mainstream theater, conversely, subject to government censorship, was often used to bolster complacency about the British imperial project – as in the work of Mariana Starke, for instance. While nation and empire were inescapable political forces in the Romantic period, what they meant and how they should act were ongoing subjects of debate in print and on stage.

See HISTORIOGRAPHY; NARRATIVE; POETICS; RACE; RELIGION.

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# Class

*Michael Scrivener*

Class enters the discourse of Romanticism in three different ways. Most obviously class announces itself in the bold manifesto that is *Lyrical Ballads* (1798–1802) about using the language of the “middle and lower classes” to represent “incidents and situations from common life” for the highest kind of poetry. The most philosophical poetry depicts carefully “low and rustic life” because rural existence is closer to the eternal truths poetry aims to grasp (Wordsworth 174). The Romantic critique of Augustan literary norms in terms of poetic diction and poetic decorum was conducted under the sign of class, a broadly anti-aristocratic cultural offensive. A second way class becomes meaningful is by attending to the class position of the authors themselves, a social awareness displayed at the time in relation to “peasant poets” like Robert Burns and John Clare, and aristocrats like Lord Byron, and exercised much later by sociologically oriented critics like Raymond Williams. A third site where class meets Romanticism is ideology, the question of how the literary texts function in relation to the structure of power. Ideology was not something of recent interest only, for the prominent critic Francis Jeffrey zealously patrolled the cultural norms as he defended in the *Edinburgh Review* against any and all incursions from what looked like democracy. The critical concepts of Romantic anti-capitalism and Romantic individualism are especially pertinent in relation to the category of class.

Of course class has been part of the critical tool kit at least since the 1980s when the categories of race, class, and gender became principal areas that had been earlier excluded from but now routinely included in literary studies. However, as Jonathan Rose points out in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), “today’s literary scholars” pay mostly lip service to the category of class. “A search by subject of the online *MLA International Bibliography* for 1991–2000 produces 13,820 hits for

‘women,’ 4,539 for ‘gender,’ 1,826 for ‘race,’ 710 for ‘postcolonial,’ and only 136 for ‘working class.’” Moreover, while race and gender have numerous critical journals devoted to their study, not a single academic journal is on working-class writing and writers (Rose 464).

### **Class, Language, and Genre**

When William Wordsworth penned his defense of popular language, he was building on an already existing movement critical of elite language theories and practices. According to Olivia Smith in her pathbreaking *The Politics of Language 1791–1819* (1984), class assumptions about the superiority of refined, polite language and the intellectual inadequacy of “vulgar” language were vigorously challenged in the late eighteenth century by linguistic philosophers like Horne Tooke and democratic writers like Thomas Paine, and Thomas Spence. Privileging Greek and Latin, ascribing higher value to abstract words and writing over concrete words and speech, preferring uniform correctness to expressiveness, valorizing the timeless over the ephemeral, the theorists of the hegemonic view of language – James Harris (1751), Samuel Johnson (1755), the Bishop Lowth (1762), and Lord Monboddo (1773–92) – found confirmation for their views in the practices of Parliament, which routinely declined to accept petitions if the language were deemed “vulgar” and “coarse” (Smith 30–34). Using language that was not “polite” was grounds for being excluded from political and philosophical debates. Indicating how fundamental to intellectual life were these class-inflected theories of language, one notes that even the Scottish Enlightenment writers such as Reid, Beattie, Campbell, and Blair reinforced rather than challenged the elitist linguistic theories (Smith 26).

At the philosophical level the hegemonic linguistics was challenged by *The Diversions of Purley* (1786/1805), authored by Horne Tooke, bourgeois radical activist in the Wilkes controversy in the 1760s, the agitation in favor of the Americans in the 1770s, and the movement for parliamentary reform in the 1780s and 1790s. Patron and mentor of the young John Thelwall, Tooke was the second defendant acquitted in the 1794 Treason Trials. The efforts of a gentleman radical were profoundly reinforced by the revolutionary writings of Thomas Paine. As Olivia Smith observes, Paine’s task in inventing the “intellectual vernacular style” of *The Rights of Man* (1791–1792) that was neither vulgar nor refined was made easier by several things, including linguistic developments in America where Noah Webster produced spellers, readers, and dictionaries that assumed the legitimacy of an American language distinct from an aristocratic British language (Smith 41). The discourse of the American Revolution and early Republic – Paine’s *Crisis* (1776) and *Common Sense* (1776), Cobbett’s *Peter Porcupine* essays (1794–1799), the vitriolic polemics between Federalists and Jeffersonians, Joel Barlow’s writings – established another center of gravity where the English language was backed by political authority.

Another thing lending legitimacy to Paine’s democratic rhetoric was the example of Edmund Burke’s wild rhetoric in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

“With a style that was recognizably deviant, Burke brought vulgar terms, arguments based on experience, and impassioned speech into political discourse” (Smith 39). The eminent orator and political writer of the day had already broken the rules, used emotions as points of departure for reflection, personalized the reaction to political events, and if anything cast doubt on the authority of abstract thinking. Paine had merely to follow in Burke’s wake and consolidate these rhetorical moves for a democratic rather than loyalist–aristocratic purpose. Paine brings readers into his pamphlet and establishes that “everyone’s thought is adequate for political participation” in numerous ways, by using the first person plural, by the clarity of the plain style with its syntactic emphasis on nouns and verbs, by mixing “formality and colloquialism,” and by appealing to the concrete, empirical realities of a shared world (Smith 43–53). The spectacular popularity of *The Rights of Man* was in some ways a revolutionary event in itself, as popular literacy was now established on a new foundation. The several hundred thousands of copies circulating in Britain and Ireland were “facts on the ground,” something that could not be ignored. The government devised numerous strategies to limit, control, and punish popular literacy ranging from counter-propaganda (Hannah More’s subsidized loyalist pamphlets, the subsidized *Anti-Jacobin Review*) to harsh repression (libel prosecutions of publishers, printers, and authors) and “taxes on knowledge” (excise duty on paper itself and the stamp tax on newspapers). Resistance to repression of popular literacy was led by figures such as Richard Carlile (1790–1843) and the working-class journalists during the war of the unstamped (1830–1836). These courageous men and women spent long years in unhealthy jails. Carlile and his assistants in their struggle for a free press spent a total of 200 years in prison (Scrivener, *Radical Shelley* 55).

Favoring popular language was part of an anti-aristocratic cultural insurgency that included the ballad revival, the rise of the novel, the increase in women’s and workers’ literacy and education, the growth of the middle class (or “middling classes” as they were usually called then), and the brief copyright “window” (1774–1808) of thirty-four years during which cheap reprints of older English texts by authors like Shakespeare and Milton became widely available. According to William St. Clair, the period following the Donaldson vs. Beckett case (1774) opened up the publishing industry by invalidating perpetual copyright to allow for an unprecedented proliferation of material that people outside the elite classes could read (53). Inexpensive copies of poetry like that of James Thomson (1700–1748) were able to fall into the hands of laborers like John Clare, who purchased Thomson’s *The Seasons* when he was thirteen. Allen Davenport, shoemaker and radical poet, read from the forty-eight low-priced (6d.) volumes of *Cooke’s Pocket Edition of Select British Poets* (1794–1805). It was not easy for Clare or Davenport to acquire literacy, nor was it easy for them to write poetry and prose, but it was not impossible because of material conditions – legal, technological, social, and political (Rose 131; Clare 9; Davenport 41).

The “self-taught” tradition of poetry, in which Clare and Davenport participate, began at least as early as Stephen Duck, the Thresher Poet, and continued with other laboring-class poets like Mary Collier, Mary Leapor, and Ann Yearsley. The self-

taught tradition of laboring-class poetry is diverse ideologically, ranging from Leapor who had cordial relations with her patron, to Yearsley who publicly disputed with her upper-class patron Hannah More. Even on poetics – the hierarchy of genres, poetic diction, and decorum – the laboring-class poets do not follow a uniform orientation, as many are happy to stay within the poetic norms set by John Milton and Alexander Pope. Despite the social elite's fear and anxiety about political and social democracy, the literary public largely accepted the work of these poets, even in some cases turning the poetry volumes into bestsellers, as with Robert Bloomfield and John Clare (his first book [1820] but not the others).

Laboring-class poetry published for the literary market is an important area for Romanticism and class, but it is not the only one, to be sure. Theaters, both the legitimate patented versions (Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and Haymarket) and the so-called illegitimate ones, reached far more people of all classes than did single-authored poetry. The huge London patent theaters – between 3,000 and 3,600 seats – with differentially priced tickets became one of the few cultural sites where the different classes enjoyed the same literary entertainment. New research in the Romantic-era theater as a matter of course deals with social class, for the theaters, along with the shows discussed by Richard Altick, were the popular culture in London. Songs popular in a play would then recirculate outside the theater and find themselves in a volume like *The Universal Songster* (1825), which reprinted old and new songs, and find themselves also performed in the non-patent theaters. Other texts actually read by laboring-class readers would include chapbooks, ballads, cheaply printed fiction, and an assortment of popular religious literature such as hymns, psalms, sermons, prophecies, and conversion narratives. Religious periodicals like the Methodist *Arminian Magazine* (1778–1797) reached many thousands of readers, and radical pamphlets and periodicals, despite political repression and legal prosecutions, also circulated extensively. In the 1790s a pamphlet war between left and right revealed just how broadly literacy had spread, with Paine's *Rights of Man* achieving a spectacular popularity matched only by the equally popular Hannah More's *Village Politics* (1793) and *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795–1798).

The irony of the genteel, politically conservative More ventriloquizing effectively the voices of laborers brings back the contentious language issue raised earlier in relation to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Betty Bennett pointed out the inexorable nature of cultural democratization: loyalist discourse was forced in the 1790s to legitimize the literary forms and the linguistic usage of the very people loyalist political structures excluded from political participation (Bennett 1). Loyalist, anti-democratic content was translated into colloquial English, which was stuffed into four-beat ballad stanzas and other song forms. A similar irony emerged in the 1790s during the Revolution controversy, as Burke's powerful defense of aristocratic culture in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* provoked a flood of democratic pamphlets which self-confidently played back to Burke some of his own tropes, like the swinish multitude. Although the London Corresponding Society (1792–1799) failed to effect its democratic reforms, the broader movement of class insurgency could not be turned back, so that by the early twentieth century working-class Labour Party MPs

sat in the House of Commons. The conservative loyalists won many battles but the long war was not something they could ever win.

Reading explicitly political texts – pamphlets, songs, speeches, periodicals, broadsides, even trial transcripts – as aesthetic performances worthy of careful analysis and interpretative scrutiny is something we now take for granted, but it has become commonplace only in the last few decades. What was earlier context is now text. This hermeneutical move has opened up a whole new literary area of largely but not exclusively plebeian texts. Kevin Gilmartin's *Print Politics* (1996) and *Writing Against Revolution* (2007) continued the work on periodicals begun by Smith and Jon Klancher (1990). By conceiving of readers as differentiated according to class and ideology, Smith and Klancher denaturalized and restored political significance to reading practices. Gilmartin's radical journalists and counterrevolutionary rhetoricians are equally innovative, so that he avoids trying to identify Romanticism with a particular ideological position.

Romantic-era trials have attracted attention from John Barrell, whose treatment of the 1790s sedition and treason trials entails much that relates to social class and law. Gilmartin (*Print Politics* 114–157) has studied William Hone's spectacular trials in the Regency for his pamphlets illustrated by Cruikshank. Thomas Pfau looks at the treason trials in terms of politicized psychoanalytical categories (146–190). I have written about Thelwall's treason trial as well as the trials of Thomas Spence and Robert Wedderburn (*Seditious Allegories*). Wedderburn's trial centered around issues of class and literacy. If judge and jury could see Wedderburn as the poor, illiterate son of a Jamaican slave, then the court could be lenient toward his political misdeeds, and could perceive him as being duped by educated radicals; if, however, he understood and supported fully the republican and deist ideas for which he was on trial, then he was as guilty and dangerous as any educated miscreant (Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories* 146–164). Only individuals can be put on trial, even when a government would prefer to put a whole social group in jail. The limitation of an authored text intended for private reading as opposed to a theatrical production experienced by thousands is that it might not be sociologically significant. Nevertheless, despite the limitations, authored texts are what we ordinarily study inside and outside the classroom.

### Laboring-Class Poetry

The three kinds of laboring-class poetry are verse authored by an identifiable laborer, verse produced anonymously but clearly by laborers, and verse identified uncertainly as the mimetic representation of laborers. The latter kind might be called ventriloquized laboring-class poetry. The popular three-volume *The Universal Songster*, for example, includes many dozens of songs, which imitate the voice and language of laboring-class people of various ethnicities and geographical regions: Jews, Africans, Irish, Scots, Welsh, and residents of London and Yorkshire. Many of these songs are anonymous, pseudonymous, or authored by writers whose names are too obscure to

infer anything about them. Although some of the numerous “Jew Songs” in the *Songster* might have been written by Jews, there is no way to tell, and even if one could find out, the reader is facing over fifty songs with overwhelmingly similar qualities, regardless of who seems to be the author. When we read the politically radical poetry from the Spencean *Songbook* (1807?), the periodicals like *Politics for the People; or, a Salmagundy for Swine* (1793–1795), and the Luddite broadsides, the identity of the author is less significant than the verse’s social meanings. The various Luddite songs collected by Kevin Binfield are largely anonymous. If we want to make sense of Olaudah Equiano’s religious poem included in his *Interesting Narrative* (1789), we have to turn to Methodist and Dissent hymns, the most meaningful context for such writing. The great bulk of Romantic-era religious poetry, some of it written by laboring-class people, much of it written for them, has been unfortunately ignored by scholars.

The category of laboring-class poetry has attracted author-centered ways of reading to stress the political agency and cultural pride of the laboring class. The biographical and ideological approach stresses the poet’s life and resistance to established power. A recent special issue of *Criticism* (2005) devoted to laboring-class poetry edited by Donna Landry and William Christmas, two of the most important critics of laboring-class poetry, wants aesthetic and religious issues to take center stage. Brian Maidment several decades ago countered the dominant Marxist emphasis in his anthology *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-Taught Poets and Poetry in Victorian England* (1987). His traditions of working-class poetry – politically radical, Parnassian, and “homely” (in dialect or vernacular) – were organized so that formal issues were prominent.

The most popular and influential laboring-class poets of the Romantic era, Burns, Bloomfield, and Clare, fit well within the “long revolution,” the slow, uneven, and immensely complicated democratization of political, economic and cultural institutions, as described by Raymond Williams. The collection of laboring-class poetry published by Pickering and Chatto – six volumes of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century verse with historical and literary commentary and notes – marks a new moment in the study of this mostly ignored poetry. If the editors could not include all the poetry that they wanted, their difficulties suggest the large size of the archive, so long neglected until now. The Pickering and Chatto volumes have forty-three poets who published between 1780 and 1830, the half-century period usually designated as the Romantic era. Other than Clare, Burns, and Bloomfield, only a few of these poets have received much professional attention. If we also include the ventriloquistic or anonymous kind of verse, then the field of laboring-class poetry becomes even larger.

Terminological issues have worried scholars because any label misses some things and catches others, but no label is perfect. In the Pickering and Chatto volumes, editor John Goodridge identifies the “laboring class” criteria: the poets who come from “lower-class or working families and did not receive a classical or university education” and who also identify with a class-specific tradition (*Eighteenth-Century English* 1: xiv). Some of the Pickering and Chatto poets do



not identify with other laboring-class writers. The famous example is William Gifford, eminent Tory satirist, classical scholar, and editor, who came from an impoverished background and was apprenticed as a shoemaker until a scholarship sent him to Oxford where he flourished. How social being – one's location in the social hierarchy – determines social consciousness is one of Marxism's primary theoretical and practical issues. From Eduard Bernstein's revisionism to Antonio Gramsci's hegemony, Marxists have tried to explain how actual consciousness can be ascribed to class location. The politically anti-democratic but intellectually talented Gifford is a provocative but not entirely unusual example of how power influences intellectual decisions.

Another label used by some critics such as E. P. Thompson, Anne Janowitz (*Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*), and William Christmas is "plebeian," stressing the issue of social deference. Maidment (*The Poor-House Fugitives*) has used "self-taught," which makes language-use central. Poets like John Keats and William Blake from a lower-middle-class background could be located sociologically within what was called at the time the "middling class," above the laboring poor, below the genteel classes. The famous review in *Blackwood's* (1818) that attacked the "Cockney School" of poetry influentially tied together class and aesthetic issues. Similarly, Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* characterized Thelwall as a social bounder, someone who was trying to move in circles where he did not belong. Literary ambition such as Thelwall's displayed "impatience of honest industry," and "presumptuous vanity," for Thelwall, according to Jeffrey, should remain behind the shop counter (200). The literary ambition of women was also delegitimized with similar rhetoric of presumption and laziness.

Although the three-class paradigm – aristocracy, middle class, working class – functions within the sociopolitical discourse, sociological precision requires more nuanced categories. The Marxist historian R. S. Neale has developed a five-class model for the late eighteenth century and early decades of the nineteenth century, the "formative phase of industrial capitalism": the exclusive, authoritarian landowning upper class; the deferential middle class; the socially blocked, less deferential, and often politically insurgent middling class; the working class seeking state protection; and finally the deferential, dependent, and politically passive working class (130–133). According to Neale, after 1850 the middling class fragmented after industrialization became ascendant, along with the rise of working-class and bourgeois radicalism, but in the period we ordinarily refer to as "Romantic" the middling class was "the central, most unstable and most significant political class in England" (134–135). The self-confident middling class shaped artisanal radicalism, the parliamentary reform movement, and the various publishing enterprises from radical newspapers to radical pamphlets. Before the heavy capitalization of the printing industry in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a golden age of popular publications and small presses, as well as numerous cheap editions of canonical literature following the Donaldson decision that ended perpetual copy-right in 1774. For example, Davenport was able to publish several books of poetry and memoirs by using radicalism's own print-culture institutions.

## Romantic Anti-Capitalism and Romantic Individualism

After Jerome McGann's *Romantic Ideology* (1983) inaugurated new historicism in Romantic studies, it is remarkable how few readings stressed Romantic communitarianism. Rather, the orthodoxy was that Wordsworth, the most representative Romantic, was the poet of bourgeois, male subjectivity, the individualist par excellence, ideologically aestheticizing the violent and oppressive transition to industrial capitalism. Wordsworth, at one with the dominant currents of his society and age, pioneered the adaptive strategies of constructing the "modern psychological subject," in Clifford Siskin's phrasing: "a mind, capable of limitless growth, that takes itself to be the primary object of its own inquiries" (11). The Romantic lyrical self, which is dominant even in the contemporary moment, replaced the older eighteenth-century structure of meanings within which community was prior to individual. Marjorie Levinson, David Simpson, Alan Liu, Thomas Pfau, Anne Mellor, Marlon Ross, and others described the various ways Wordsworth's displacements were governed by various repressive forces. The only community of the Wordsworthian subject is the community of individualists who undergo perpetual self-revision and self-possession. Identifying Wordsworth with individualism is consistent with one line of Marxist criticism, notably Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality* (1935), but one can find similar Marxist readings of Romanticism as expressions of bourgeois individualism. Although Levinson *et alia* are more sophisticated and nuanced than Caudwell, the ideological nature of Romanticism is more or less similar.

Communitarian Romanticism can be found in Alfred Cobban's unjustly neglected *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century* (1929), which treats the Lake poets as Burkean traditionalists. Using Marx and Freud to great effect, Michael Friedman's study of Wordsworth and community was published perhaps too early to have the influence it should have had (1979), but his description of Wordsworth's communitarianism as a form of Tory humanism has not been improved on. E. P. Thompson from a strongly Marxist position wrote sympathetically of Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge, and Thelwall in several essays, depicting Thelwall as the Jacobin "fox" who was hunted down by the government, while Wordsworth and Coleridge made a retreat and withdrawal from radical politics that Thompson both lamented and respected (*The Romantics*). It is likely that Thompson's treatment of the young Romantic radicals was shaped by his own political experiences. Thompson tried to fashion a Romantic Marxism in his study of William Morris, whose Marxism is made to seem continuous with his Romantic love of beauty and medieval art (*William Morris*). The key mediating Romantic figure in the Morris study is Keats, whose aestheticism is implicitly antagonistic to the values of competitive capitalism. Thompson's Romantic hero was the antinomian Blake, the "witness against the Beast," as he phrased it in his 1993 study of the same name, building on the work of David Erdman, who is wholly sympathetic to the antinomian and radical Protestant prophecies against empire in the poetry. Thompson's great historical study, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963),

resonates with Romanticism in important ways. Perhaps the most characteristic chapter in all of *Making* is the ninth, "The Weavers," the tragic story of skilled workers whose entire way of life was destroyed piece by piece. As Thompson writes: "In the weavers' history we have a paradigm case of the operation of a repressive and exploitive system upon a section of workers without trade union defences. Government not only intervened actively against their political organizations and trade unions; it also inflicted upon the weavers the negative dogma of the freedom of capital as intransigently as it was to do upon the victims of the Irish famine" (312). The weavers in Thompson's narrative have a voice, an intelligent and morally sensitive protest movement. As weavers and other skilled workers turned to Luddism, Thompson represents them with political intentions and a discriminating use of force. It is true that ultimately the weavers lose the battle to free-market forces, but the narrative has a morally meaningful context that judges the capitalists harshly. The underlying assumption is that moral judgments mean something and have consequence. Moreover, the narrative is written to highlight the agency of the workers, so that by the end of the story the reader feels that history could have been different; things could have turned out otherwise; the historical world is not fatalistically determined. As in Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History," Thompson's history refuses to accept as final the victories of the most powerful. Thompson writes: "I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity." Thompson does not want to neglect "the blind alleys, the lost causes, and the losers" of history (12).

The parallels between Thompson's elegiac and commemorative narratives and Romantic texts like Clare's "Lament of Swordy Well" and Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" and "Michael" are obvious. With Clare and Wordsworth we have Romantic protest against a capitalist logic that triumphs socially and that is resisted as well by Morris whose moral vision, according to Thompson, is closest to Blake's. Morris's sense of the Romantic is provocative in the present context, for Morris defines Romanticism as "the capacity for a true conception of history, a power of making the past part of the present" (*William Morris* 27). That definition has an emphatic "making," a shaping of the past so that it opens toward the future and responds to the desire of the present.

Thompson was not alone in developing the idea that Romanticism itself was connected in important ways with opposition to the worst abuses of a capitalist system. Michael Loewy and Robert Sayre in numerous essays and several books have developed their ideas about Romantic anti-capitalism. The title of a recent work expresses well their intellectual agenda: *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (2002). They do not cover the same territory as Thompson, to be sure, and are more oriented to the Continent than Britain, but their general idea is that Romanticism is a source of resistance to the modernizing logic of capitalism. David Simpson's recent study of Wordsworth reads the poetry as symptomatic of the reifying power of capitalist commodification, just the opposite emphasis in Loewy and Sayre.

Romantic anti-capitalism is by no means monolithic, as it contains moderate tendencies, like the communitarianism and sentimental humanism one finds in the mainstream of the British labor movement from the early nineteenth century through much of the twentieth century, and a more militant utopianism at odds with modernity itself. To return to Wordsworth where we started, the *Lyrical Ballads* Preface also protests against modernity, at least some of its features, such as a debased popular culture. Whether this protest is prescient social insight or an ideologically self-serving maneuver depends on the critical tradition in which one is working.

See DRAMA; IDEOLOGY; PERIODICALS; POETICS; RELIGION.

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# Race

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## Introduction

The “Race” issue, the origins of the “Race” idea, and its growth, articulation, and continued pervasiveness are central preoccupations of contemporary literary and cultural criticism. One of the main reasons for this is that, in the words of Robert J. C. Young, “the nightmare of the ideologies and categories of racism continues to repeat upon the living” (28). What we know as the Romantic period coincided with the development of the historical and material processes of British and European colonialism and imperialism that would lead to the establishment of Britain’s nineteenth-century empire, a formation that would dominate a quarter of the globe. Although European maritime expansion had begun much earlier in the fifteenth century, it was in the last quarter of the eighteenth century that, after its spectacular victories in the Seven Years’ War, Britain began the process of establishing itself as *the* world superpower of the nineteenth century. Although Britain lost its American colonies in the War of Independence of 1776, it emerged triumphant in Canada, the Caribbean, and especially the Indian subcontinent. By this time Britain had also established itself as the major national player in the transatlantic slave trade, between 1790 and 1807 exporting somewhere between 25,000 and 50,000 people annually from Africa into slavery. Fueled by its industrial revolution and facilitated by its massive Royal and merchant navies, British commercial and military power began to encompass the entire globe, not just the territories of its official empire, but also areas such as Oceania (the “South Seas”), Africa, and especially China. Often backed by the Royal Navy and the Royal Society, British voyages of discovery by land and sea attempted to chart the entire globe from pole to pole and discover the fabled Northwest Passage over the Canadian Arctic to China and India. At home the

demand for foreign products expanded exponentially in the eighteenth century, as a thriving and increasing middle class demanded commodities such as silk, porcelain, lacquerwork, and especially the increasingly popular beverage tea: a commodity only available in China and exported from there to Britain by her East India Company. All these forces brought British people into an ever-closer contact with other civilizations, peoples, religions, and customs, from the apparently “savage” Africans and Indians of North America, to the sophisticated and refined cultures of China and the Indian subcontinent.

As most critics of Romantic-period writing (and the long eighteenth century) have increasingly come to realize, the literature of the time is one that is heavily invested in negotiating the issue of human difference and variety. Today we speak of a “global eighteenth century” and a “postcolonial Enlightenment” as well as of a “global” or “postcolonial” Romanticism in which, according to Felicity Nussbaum, eighteenth-century studies are resituated “within a spatially and conceptually expanded paradigm” (*Global* 1). By common critical consent, it is usually maintained that our modern conception of “race” is one that derives from Enlightenment thought, as numerous philosophers and thinkers attempted to map and describe the peoples of the world and to account for the differences that they perceived in these peoples’ physical forms, as well as their religions, languages, and beliefs. The period roughly from 1750 to 1830 sees the growth and development of the new and heavily racialized sciences of comparative anatomy, ethnology, and physical anthropology as thinkers attempted to find ways of explaining and categorizing physical difference. Increasingly toward the end of the eighteenth century, the body becomes the site for discussing human variety and physical attributes, such as skin color, hair, skull formation, physiognomy, and anatomy become key, though never exclusive, signifiers in the debates about difference. This essay attempts to discuss and evaluate the importance (or lack of it) of what we know as “race” to the writing of the period. But first, it is necessary to determine some of the meanings of this most slippery of terms.

### **Theorizing Race**

Race is a very ambiguous concept and a word that is used to signify different ideas in the period itself and in our own later times. As Bulmer and Solomos comment, “the very notion of *race* has no fixed and unchanging meaning” and “from a historical view it is clear from research on the usages of the notion of race over the past two centuries that it has taken on various forms in different national contexts” (7). Robert Young has convincingly shown that the texts of racial theory are not homogenous and stable but “contradictory, disruptive and already deconstructed” (27). Yet one of the major debates about the use of race concerns the importance one attaches to the biological and somatic aspects of its thinking. According to most scholars, racism in the modern sense did not exist as a way of thinking before the Enlightenment as there were no developed sciences of biology, comparative anatomy, anthropology, or genetic hereditary principles to support the concept of



racism. Margaret T. Hodgen, for instance, argues that in the early modern period, “any effort to distinguish among the ‘races’ of mankind on either anatomical, physiological, or cultural grounds was relatively negligible” (213). Robert Bernasconi claims that “the invention of the concept of race . . . took place some time after the introduction of the broad division of peoples on the basis of colour, nationality, and other inherited characteristics that could not be overcome subsequently, as religious differences could be overcome by conversion.” Previous historical occurrences of the brutal oppression, persecution, or extermination of subordinate peoples may have been “racist” in the looser sense of the term, but they were not “sustained by a scientific concept of race” (11).

Others, however, have argued that biological determinism constitutes only one historical phase, or one articulation, of a larger and more comprehensive grammar of race that exists as early as the sixteenth century. This can be seen in the prevalence of a Christian semiotics that associates black with evil and sinfulness and whiteness with purity, as well as in a pervasive ethnocentrism derived from the material process of colonialism and settlement from Columbus onwards. An influential critic of this view, David Theo Goldberg, has argued that the term “race,” with its concomitant category “racist thinking,” emerged in the sixteenth century (chiefly following the Spanish conquest of the New World) as a central invention of European modernity. Goldberg uses the term to describe a process of “group differentiation” by which Western society promoted and developed general standards, which were then universalized. In this process the native was placed outside the reach of universality and liberal morality. Goldberg tracks this naturalization of the Eurocentric vision into modernity’s (and liberalism’s) formulations of moral personhood and subjectivity. All racism at its core is thus a mechanism for promoting exclusions and inclusions (1–84). Goldberg wishes to retain the notions of race and racism, but to use them in the more general sense of a justification for group dominance over other subject groups, including ethnic rather than strictly racial formulations of identity. Such notions recall the earlier postcolonial insight of Albert Memmi that one becomes racist with “the deployment of a difference to denigrate the other, to the end of gaining privilege or benefit through that stigmatization” and that “the focus on biological difference . . . is not the essential aspect of racism.” For Memmi, “Racism does not limit itself to biology or economics or psychology or metaphysics: *it attacks along many fronts and in many forms*, deploying whatever is at hand, and even what is not, inventing when the need arises” (37–38, 92, 78).

A number of critics, however, have made a more explicit linkage between ideas of race and differentiation and the Enlightenment thought that preceded and influenced Romanticism. Influential postcolonial critics such as Emmanuel Eze, Gayatri Spivak, and David Lloyd have argued that the relationship between Enlightenment philosophy and natural history anticipates later articulations of race by excluding non-Europeans from its construction of a conception of humanity or of a “universal subject.” Famously, for Kant, the ability to make universal, pure, and disinterested aesthetic judgments depended upon one having reached a certain stage of civilization (i.e., European). The claim is that the Enlightenment and its Romantic and

post-Romantic successors constructed the notion of a universal human subject as a premise for developing its theories about humanity, society, and the natural world. The problem with this construction, it is alleged, is that it is a Eurocentric conception, which effectively excludes cultural difference and disavows social and moral relativity. As Frantz Fanon argued, it thus denies subjecthood to the racial other (cited in Lloyd, "Pathological" 96). Or as Carey and Festa maintain, "inasmuch as its values are identified as coextensive with modernity, the Enlightenment naturalizes a project in which all roads lead inexorably to an episteme associated with the West" (8). The primitive and savage are thus excluded from the universal enlightenment subject, inscribing a racial dynamic at the heart of Enlightenment thought and colonialism is justified as a civilizing mission. The Enlightenment, however, represents a complex and often contradictory body of work by numerous thinkers and it is wrong to reduce it to a simply polemically pro-colonialism and proto-racist Eurocentric movement. Indeed, as Sankar Muthu has shown, many key Enlightenment thinkers such as Diderot, Herder, and Kant attacked the very foundations of European colonialism and imperialism as immoral, unjust, and ultimately counterproductive.

### **Race in the Romantic Period**

Srinivas Aravamudan has drawn our attention to the contribution of "Xenophobia, colonialism, orientalism and racism" to the "constitution of national identity" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (10). Numerous scholars and writers have already addressed aspects of colonialism, race, and human variety in this period, including Hannah Augstein, Robert Bernasconi, Alan Bewell, David Bindman, Patrick Brantlinger, Laura Brown, Laura Doyle, Tim Fulford, Sonia Hofkosh, Suvir Kaul, Colin Kidd, Jonathan Lamb, Nigel Leask, Debbie Lee, Felicity A. Nussbaum, Alan Richardson, Londa Schiebinger, Nicholas Thomas, Roxann Wheeler, Saree Makdisi, Dror Wahrman, Kathleen Wilson, and Marcus Wood. This substantial body of critical work, which is rapidly growing, is recasting studies of the Romantic period and the long eighteenth century in a global context in which identity and difference are created from an often bewildering range of historical processes and discourses, of which race is one of the most important.

Historians of race have noted that there is a congruity between the development of a systematized sense of human difference in the natural sciences and the period we roughly designate as Romantic, if not earlier. George Mosse claims that "Eighteenth-century Europe was the cradle of modern racism" (1). In his seminal study of the idea of race, Ivan Hannaford also argues for its comparatively modern pedigree. He argues that the idea of race is "fundamentally an Enlightenment notion used within the structure of legitimate intellectual inquiry to explain complex human arrangements, such as caste and tribe, that are based on historical presuppositions and dispositions totally antipathetic to both politics qua politics and to race" (6). David Lloyd also argues that Enlightenment and Romantic natural philosophers crucially

established a paradigm of difference that was no longer an arbitrary mark or a cultural distinction, but rather consisted in and of natural signs written on the body itself (“Race” 62–69). This is the key point. Romantic theories of humanity, nature, and society tended to employ an organic model of growth and development that proceeded toward predetermined ends. As such they privileged biological life processes and a concern with the natural. The application of a teleological organic metaphor, so beloved by Romantic poets such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Keats, when applied to human society and history could result in the privileging of certain kinds of physical types and organizations, as well as certain kinds of environments. By the early nineteenth century, then, what increasingly served to distinguish one people from another was not their religion, their degree of “civilization,” their customs or their beliefs, but rather their anatomy and external appearance. These scholars attempt to track a particular strand of thought that becomes the dominant mode of racial thinking in the nineteenth century. This is not, of course, simply to maintain that pre-nineteenth-century thinking is necessarily innocent of racial thought or racism and that Romantic transcendentalism, cloaking racial thought in the garb of an aesthetic and idealist philosophy, turns out to be the real villain of the story, but that, for whatever reason, thinkers of the Enlightenment and Romantic periods sought to provide accounts of human difference in which the physical and biological became increasingly more important than they were in earlier periods. Their motivations for doing so are mixed and complex, and their working methods saturated with assumptions and prejudices of which they were often unaware, or could not be aware.

In this context “race” is used to denote a system of categorizing and describing the peoples of the world by inheritable physical and sometimes moral and emotional characteristics. Historians of race have thus argued that a kind of paradigm shift occurs toward the end of the eighteenth century in ideas about the differences between peoples and cultures, one that signals a move from an interest in cultural to physical or bodily markers. These classificatory or descriptive systems were fed by a huge increase in ethnological data resulting from a series of British, French, Russian, and other voyages of exploration to the hardly known or completely unknown parts of the globe, of which the three historic voyages of Captain James Cook were only the most famous. Both the leading Enlightenment natural historians Comte de Buffon and Linnaeus attempted to describe and categorize humans in terms of their physical appearance: skin color, hair texture, and anatomical form and other physical features. For Buffon, all humans derived from the same origins and were thus one species not several. A species was defined for Buffon by its inability to mate with other species and have fertile offspring. Buffon argued that physical differences between human beings were the result mainly of climactic and environmental conditions that caused some humans to “degenerate” from the norm. Hence a darker skin was the result of the action of the sun over a period of time that then became hereditary (Kitson 22–23). The Swedish naturalist Linnaeus, however, classified humanity into first four (1735), then five varieties (1758): *ferus* (wild man), *americanus* (American), *europaeus* (European), *asiaticus* (Asian), and *afers* (African). These designations

began simply as physical varieties but became ossified into morphologically stable types with equivalent moral and intellectual capacities. Linnaeus, for instance, described African people as phlegmatic and indulgent and Asian people as melancholic and inflexible. His categories were combined with neoclassical notions of physical beauty derived from Greek and Roman statuary to create an aesthetic hierarchy of races that placed Europeans at the summit because of their alleged beauty (Kitson 16–18).

It was in the writings of Immanuel Kant, so important for Romantic aesthetics, however, that we first encounter what may be described as an explicitly biological notion of human difference that would give rise to the modern notion of race. The leading theory of human variety in the period held that physical human differences were created chiefly by climatic effects. Kant, however, argued in 1775 that the ancestral human stock was endowed with latent powers that could be activated in response to differing climatic conditions. Once this racial programming was activated it was not possible to reverse its effects. There were four distinct varieties or races of the human species – White, Negro, Mongolian, and Hindu – each deriving from an ideal stem genus that corresponded to the white European type. Races were, for Kant, distinct and permanent. Later he added a fifth, the Malay, to account for the new peoples discovered in the South Seas. As one might expect, Kant believed that hot and sunny climates brought out the worst in humanity and that African peoples were lazy, soft, and desultory in temperament and lacking in intelligence when compared to the white European.

Kant's hypothesis received support from the most influential anthropological writer of the period, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Blumenbach accepted Kant's postulation of a *formative force*, which ordered and structured the world. The notion of an active principle innate in nature and structuring the natural world in accordance with teleological (or predetermined) ends is closely allied to the belief in an active nature that the Romantic poets, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and especially Coleridge espoused. Like Kant, Blumenbach also divided humanity into five varieties: Caucasian (he coined the term, believing that Europeans originated from Mount Caucasus after the biblical Deluge), Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malayan. Blumenbach maintained that Europeans were the original, historic race from which descended ("degenerated" in his terms) the other varieties, with the Ethiopian and the Mongolian at the foot of this scale. Blumenbach discussed human variety in terms of physical characteristics describing skin color, hair texture, skull, and anatomical detail. Although he argued against absolutely fixed and permanent human types, Blumenbach's fetishization of the human skull and his notorious collection of crania, his "Golgotha," had a pernicious history as later craniometrists sought to construct tables of measurements confirming the racial inferiority of non-Europeans.

Blumenbach, as a Christian, argued for the essential unity of mankind as descended from Adam and Eve, and subsequently from Noah's family after the Deluge. His hypothesis probably remained the consensus position throughout the period. Others challenged this model, arguing that humanity was composed

of several distinct and fixed species originated through a series of separate creations (or polygenesis). Philosophers as diverse as Voltaire and Henry Home (Lord Kames) and natural historians and anatomists such as Samuel Thomas von Sömmering and the Manchester surgeon and obstetrician Charles White espoused such views in the period. Some, such as the historian of Jamaica, Edward Long, argued that African people were a separate species from Europeans and that they were thus more suited to the heavy and punishing labor of the slave plantations. By and large, however, Romantic poets and writers avoided narrowly biological expressions of racial thinking.

All this is not to say that race was the most significant discourse of difference in the Romantic period. Most scholars would argue that it was not and that religion, class, gender, and nation (and their interrelationships) remained powerful for forging identities. After 1850 or so, there is more of a case for regarding race as the primary and crucial category which Europeans used to understand their relationships with other people. Linda Colley has shown how Protestantism provided an ideology by which Britain was able to forge a powerful sense of identity in the eighteenth century. Protestant evangelicism remained a potent force in defining national identities in the nineteenth century, especially with the activities of the London Missionary Society (only one of several such societies), founded in 1794, and the beginnings of that great wave of Protestant missionary activity to all parts of the globe. Although the missionary model for understanding other peoples and cultures was one based on a familial concept of humanity, deriving from a shared point of human origin, nevertheless such writing was often infiltrated with racial thought, often in contradiction to the leading tenets of their theology. Race can also cut across other divisions, especially those of class, gender, and nation as, in the period under discussion, ideas of race and nation seldom overlapped but grouped peoples in different configurations than those that became current after the nineteenth-century dominance of the ideology of the organic nation-state. In the early stages of the formulations of their typologies, the key theorists of human variety also tended to homogenize large numbers of peoples and the key category for describing British and European remained Blumenbach's influential "Caucasian," or one of the major variations upon it. In some iterations, nations can contain more than one race, the Franks and the Gauls in France, for instance, and races can also contain many nations. Romantic-period racial typologies, like other forms of categorization, may also have had a descriptive function that did not necessarily imply hierarchy.

### **The Eighteenth-Century *Ancien Régime* of Identity**

So what were the major theories of human difference in the period and to what extent was race an issue? How is it possible to theorize "race" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as an emerging discourse? Should we, following Goldberg and others, abandon the necessity to locate race thinking in the biological and essentialist realm of natural history and its influences and define race thinking

in terms of cultural theories of human difference which may relate to gender, religious, social, philosophical, medical, ethnic, and national discourses? At a time when there is no consensus as to the causes of human difference and no agreement as to how those differences are articulated, is the issue of race a relevant one to pursue in critical studies?

In *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (2000), Roxann Wheeler convincingly argues that a kind of paradigm shift occurs toward the end of the century in ideas about the differences between peoples and cultures, one that signals a move from an interest in cultural to physical or bodily markers:

In eighteenth-century Britain, the ideology of human variety broadly changed from being articulated primarily through religious difference, which included such things as political governance and civil life, to being articulated primarily through scientific categories derived from natural history that featured external characteristics of the human body – color, facial features, and hair texture. At the end of the century, the contours of racial ideology were more established than a century before, a solidification that accompanied the more important role of race and racism in the intellectual pursuits and structures of everyday life in Britain. (291)

Wheeler argues that it is not until the third quarter of the eighteenth century that skin color emerges as “the most important component of racial identity” in a range of scientific and other texts (9). Wheeler’s account of race thinking in the eighteenth century, however, also counsels against the narrowing of racist culture to the realm of natural science. Older, classical notions of human difference based on the theory of the four humors persist in the period and the powerful “proto-racial-ideology” of Christian and savage remains potent in the thought and writing of the period.

Similarly, the newly emerging Enlightenment sociology stressing a model of four stages of social development derived from the Enlightenment cultural anthropology of Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, John Millar, Kames, and others was also infiltrated with racist assumptions. In this model of human development, peoples were composed of the same universal nature but at different stages of social development from that of “savage” (hunting, fishing, gathering), to non-settled shepherding (barbarian), to agriculture and settlement, culminating in trade and commerce. This model, deriving from Scotland but exported to societies around the world, entailed a dynamic similar to that of biological racism in that it justified conquest and colonization as a means of accelerating a society’s progress as well as in maintaining that some societies were imprisoned in a savage or barbarous state and thus unable to progress beyond a position of inferiority (Wheeler 7, 33–36, 182; Carey and Trakulhun 246–247). Wheeler goes as far as to argue that four-stages theory “offered a more significant form of racialization of the body politic than the categories concerning the physical body found in natural history” (7). Informed by the cultural anthropology of Nicholas Thomas and others, her work demonstrates how difference and identity were not confined to the issue of white and black complexions but

rather focused on such matters as religion, rank, costume, and nationality. Rather than concentrate on the racial binary of black and white that has dominated the Anglo-American academy, Wheeler theorizes race and difference in terms of a “situated multiplicity” of factors that merge and flow into each other (38–45). Wheeler’s use of this term invoked, among others, Bhabha’s notions of *hybridity* and *ambivalence* in preference to rigid binaries of self and other. For her, race “is best understood as a hybrid political, economic, religious, and social construction that, from the 1770s onward, also had a healthy life in the emerging disciplines of moral philosophy, natural history, and comparative anatomy” (289). The focus of Wheeler’s work is on the eighteenth century (c.1720–1800) rather than the Romantic period itself. Nevertheless, the variety of beliefs that account for human difference and the lack of consensus engulfing them is certainly not diffused in the early nineteenth century, where competing models and typologies of humanity proliferate.

The emergence of race thinking in the eighteenth century and its contribution to identity formation has been influentially explored by Dror Wahrman in *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (2004). Wahrman argues that our modern notions of self and identity came into being during the long eighteenth century. Race is one of the categories of identity, along with gender and class, which creates a sense of personal identity. Wahrman maintains that up to around the last two decades of the eighteenth century there existed a certain configuration of assumptions about selfhood, which he terms the “*ancien régime* of identity.” At the end of the eighteenth century this “distinctive configuration” of identity lost ground and was replaced by a new regime of identity with a harder and clearer emphasis on the essential self. The late eighteenth century and the beginnings of the Romantic period thus mark a radical discontinuity or rupture in people’s understandings of the self. The *ancien régime* of identity is marked by very fluid, porous, mutable, and unfixed conceptions of categories of race and gender that harden drastically at the close of the eighteenth century:

... this was a regime of identity characterized by the relatively commonplace capacity of many to contemplate ... that identity, or specific categories of identity, could prove to be mutable, malleable, unreliable, divisible, replaceable, transferable, manipulable, escapable, or otherwise fuzzy around the edges. Conversely, it was a regime of identity *not* characterized by an axiomatic presupposition of a deep inner core of selfhood. (198)

Throughout the earlier period, gender and race identities are seen as things that can be assumed, imitated, and performed, put on and off almost at leisure, whereas by its close this is no longer an easy process. In terms of race, Wahrman maintains that during the *ancien régime* of identity, human diversity was located in the “external and contingent” rather than in an “immutable physical body” and that such things as complexion and physiognomy were entirely eradicable. “White” Europeans became

indistinguishable from Indian “savages” as European notions of physical difference were explained as the product of climatic, environmental, and social processes: categories of race and gender “were perceived to be potentially malleable, unfixed, unreliable, changeable through circumstances or even through self-conscious choice” (86). Race thus underwent a cognate transformation at the beginning of the Romantic period where fluidity and malleability were exchanged for an emphasis on an innate and essential biological and often cultural nature. Such transformations were noted in the numerous captivity narratives in which North American Indians or Muslim moors held Europeans captive on the Barbary Coast, their captives becoming virtually indistinguishable in outward appearance from their hosts. Toward the end of the century, however, climate, culture, and environment were seen as creating variation in humans that were degenerative and, as the century wore on, required much longer periods of time to reverse. Emphasis on essential traits combined with a less powerful climatic theory (“weak transmutationism”) became more pronounced. This “essentializing shift” (Wahrman 151) is not simply confined to discourses of race, but permeates those of gender and class in a larger process of identity formation, race being in this case impossible to isolate from these other elements leading to the racialization of women and the working class. Identity becomes “personal, interiorized, essential, even innate” and “synonymous with self” (276). The causes of the shift are not easy to determine, though Wahrman identifies the problems in discerning identity occasioned by the American War of Independence as crucial in pushing Britons toward a more stable and fixed sense of self and reconstructing a common identity from religion, race, class, and gender (246).

Felicity Nussbaum has similarly problematized our notion of race in the long eighteenth century in her wide-ranging discussions of poems, dramas, fictions, autobiographies, and visual representations in several publications. Nussbaum substantially agrees with Wahrman and Wheeler that prior to the last decades of the century, representations of racial difference were crosshatched with representations of gender and class. Nussbaum’s work, however, is more focused on issues of masculinity and national identity than are Wheeler’s and Wahrman’s, notably that of black men and women, especially as performed on the London stage. During the period of the long eighteenth century she argues that sexual and racial identities, in our modern sense of the word, begin to emerge but are marked with ambivalence, contradiction, and confusions (*Limits* 1–20). Like Wahrman, Nussbaum identifies a “ferment swirling around definitions of difference in the eighteenth century” (9). Conflicting notions of “race” in language and culture coexist in the long eighteenth century and “strategic confusions persist regarding the meanings assigned to skin colourings, physiognomies, and nations.” In the nineteenth century the nascent discourses of scientific racism would harden the distinction between black and white but in the eighteenth “the relationships between costume and geography, pigmentation and the faculties of the mind, bodily features and character, and social privilege and ‘blood’ remained inconsistent and uncertain, deemed to be *both* performative and foundational” (150). More recently, Nussbaum has also called



into question our critical tendency to separate the African and the Oriental into discrete areas. "Orientalism," as conceptualized by the influential postcolonial critic Edward Said, is a Western and Eurocentric construction homogenizing a wide variety of cultures, located in the "East," chiefly Islamic. This construction, which appears to be objective and disinterested in Western scholarship, is, in Said's view, entirely complicit with and necessary for imperial conquest and domination. For Nussbaum "the conceptual boundaries that we have erected between the 'East' and Africa" are very frequently little more than "misleading dichotomies that significantly inhibit our interpretation of the history of racial thinking" ("Between" 137–138). A separation of black from oriental subject was necessary for Abolitionism to oppose the transatlantic trade in slaves from sub-Saharan Africa, while in the same period, British imperial interests necessitated an ideology which would allow them to dominate North Africa, especially with the decline of the power of the Islamic Maghreb and Barbary Coast pirates in the early nineteenth century. In this process "Islamicized" and "Negriified" subjects were constructed for the African continent. A drama such as Mariana Starke's *The Sword of Peace* (1790), for instance, deals with both oriental and black African subjects and is dependent on both discourses.

As an exemplary text to illustrate late eighteenth-century notions of difference, Wheeler and Nussbaum both discuss the case of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789). Wheeler notices the increased sense of color consciousness in Equiano's texts but argues that he is more concerned with the category of nationality than with race and that the narrative demonstrates his attempt to keep whiteness separate from his notion of Britishness, allowing him to construct an authoritative public identity as a former slave. Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* is also a spiritual autobiography, in which Equiano locates his sense of self in the context of an evangelical nonconformist Christianity, dependent on being born again through Christ. Throughout the text Equiano minimizes the importance of color, arguing that "in regard to complexion ideas of beauty are wholly relative." Recalling "three negro children" who were "tawny" and white, he comments that they were "universally regarded by myself and the natives in general, as far as related to their complexions, as deformed" (117). Nussbaum argues that Equiano's sense of masculinity is also as important as his notion of race as he attempts to establish a black masculine identity in competition with the very many fictional, dramatic, poetic and other cultural representations available (*Limits* 213–238). Throughout the text, Equiano minimizes complexion as a sign of difference. After serving in the navy during the Seven Years' War, he comes to regard himself not as African or black but as "almost an Englishman" (77). So great is his acclimatization to the British way of life that he fails to recognize his kinship with "a black boy about my own size on the Isle of Wight" in the 1750s and momentarily and hurtfully turns away from his embrace. When Equiano travels to the Ottoman empire, the major sign of difference he encounters is not that of color but religion. Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* present us with a hybridized identity composed from a variety of forces relating to nationality, religion, class, and gender.

## Romanticism and Race: The Racial Sublime

If the discourse of race becomes more important in the early nineteenth century, how is this reflected in the literature of the period? In what ways does the literature relate to the increasing tendency to define humans by their biological and hereditary characteristics, including skin color, the shape of their skulls, and other such physical characteristics? We have already seen how some have argued that the concept of an active nature readily espoused by Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge could be used to both explain and justify a hierarchy of races that had descended or degenerated from an originary European people. Yet in addition to this, Romanticism as an aesthetic system has been accused of complicity in this racialized project because of the ways in which its adherents privileged notions of nation and race and incorporated racial assumptions, knowingly or otherwise, into their artistic programs. According to Martin Bernal's controversial *Black Athena* (1987), Romanticism was one of the major forces that led to the overthrow of the hitherto generally accepted notion that Greek civilization was indebted for its ideas and achievements to the Afro-Asiatic civilization of Ancient Egypt and its replacement with an "Aryan" or "Indo-European" conception of civilization. Bernal argues that the Romantic concern with ethnicity, the local and the particular as expressed in an admiration for the vigorous, virtuous, and primitive folk (especially in Johann Gottfried Herder and the Ossianic poems of James Macpherson, but also in Wordsworth's poetry), led to the belief that as the landscape and climate of Europe were better than those of other continents, then Europeans must therefore be superior to other races (198–223). Laura Doyle has deployed Bernal's suggestions further by arguing that Romantic-period texts demonstrate what Hannah Arendt referred to as "race-thinking before racism," a movement "in Western aesthetics from classicism to nativism to racialism" (22). The late eighteenth-century fashion for the primitive northern ballads collected by Bishop Thomas Percy in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1764), Doyle alleges, provided Wordsworth, Coleridge, and others with a mythology of locally rooted English races to exploit artistically which established "a race myth that could figure forth the English as both humble and heroic, sensitive yet superior, an ancient, soil-rooted folk fit to become modern, global conquerors" (22). Crucial to this progress was the theory of the sublime, which Doyle argues became associated with a racial English (Saxon) poetic consciousness. Wordsworth's idealization of the northern English Lake District and the yeomen farmers and rural folk organically related both to the land and the organic rural community is the most epiphanic exemplar of this tendency (Doyle 15–37).

Critics of Romanticism have increasingly remarked upon the politicized and racialized content of Romantic aesthetics, especially the characteristic espousal of the category of the sublime. The key text for establishing this category in Romantic poetry is Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; revised 1759). Burke famously deduced the nature of the sublime from our empirical desire to avoid pain, locating it in that which excites terror in the human mind. For Burke the sublime could be found in dramatic

landscapes, and powerful literature, such as the Bible and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Burke's text attempts to ground the subject's aesthetic response to the sublime in its response to terror, a response, he believes, that is universally shared by perceiving subjects. Critics such as Meg Armstrong and David Lloyd, however, have demonstrated that Burke's aesthetic of the sublime is racialized and gendered. Notably, into his discussion of the sublime and the beautiful Burke introduces a black female body. Burke argues that "blackness and darkness are in some degree painful by their natural operation, independent of any associations whatsoever" (275). Associating the sublime with the masculine (and the beautiful with the feminine), Burke also ascribes the quality to "dark" and "black" things. To illustrate this point he cites the case of a boy, blind from birth due to cataracts in his both eyes. When these were removed by a surgeon, "the first time the boy saw a black object, it gave him great uneasiness; and that for some time after, upon accidentally seeing a negro woman, he was struck with great horror at the sight. The horror, in this case, can scarcely be supposed to arise from any association" (98). Blackness is thus naturally to provoke "great horror" by nature of its intrinsic qualities and not by any association with other ideas (such as night), as we have a natural inclination to be frightened by anything dark that produces, in the body of the black woman, threat. Blackness is thus naturally sublime and creates terror as a result. The black body, which Burke later describes as a "vacant" space reflecting no light (281), becomes, according to Lloyd, the abyss into which the claims of universality, founded as they are on difference, inevitably founder ("Pathological" 101). Burke's treatise, which claims to present a universal account of our aesthetic categories of the sublime and beautiful, thus shows how these very categories can be used to create or reinforce existing racial and gender-based distinctions.

Kant's equally influential discussions of the sublime and beautiful are thoroughly saturated in assumptions about race and gender. In his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764) he argued for a hierarchy of aesthetic responses with the German at the summit and the African at the base: the "Negroes of Africa have no feeling that rises above the trifling," he opined. Echoing the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume's notorious statement in a footnote to his 1753 essay "On National Characteristics," Kant stated that Africans had never produced "anything great in art or science" ("On National" 55). In response to the report of a clever riposte from an African carpenter, Kant affirmed that "this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid" (57). As Christine Battersby has demonstrated, Kant describes the "enjoyment of the sublime in ways that are racially and ethnically specific, so that the 'Oriental' is denied the capacity to appreciate the sublime" (13). David Bindman has explored this subject in great scholarly detail in the realm of eighteenth-century visual arts, and especially the German aesthetic theories of Kant, Winckelmann, and others, demonstrating how the idea of race in the eighteenth century both shaped and was shaped by the current aesthetic theories. He concludes that "the essential elements of nineteenth- and twentieth-century racial aesthetics were present in the eighteenth century, but these elements were usually separated from each other by a number of antitheses that were

somehow resolved in the nineteenth century” (11–21, 225). Scholars and critics accept that race thinking became more scientific in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and that its impact was not confined to scientific texts. Rather, they argue that there was an interrelationship between aesthetic, literary, cultural, and scientific discourses that mutually shaped all.

By the end of the Romantic period, the biological understanding of race is clearly becoming the dominant paradigmatic explanation of human difference, though there is still enormous confusion as to what the races are, how many there are, where they originate from, and how their difference is occasioned, confusions that will become less foggy in the world of European empires. One can point to Wordsworth’s privileging of the northern and English in his work and see this as complicit with the general trend of race thinking in the period. One can also draw attention to the numerous and problematic representations of Africans and Eastern peoples in their works, many of which can be seen as racialized, often racist, in one way or another. Scholars have argued about whether or not Romantic writing such as Blake’s “The Little Black Boy” from *Songs of Innocence* (1789) is a racist poem, and cases have been made that the Romantics challenged the current paradigms of racial thinking. Some Romantic writers did take up explicitly racialist stances. The political writer and journalist William Cobbett, for instance, clearly believed in the racial inferiority of African people and supported the slave trade. Thomas De Quincey represented Asian peoples as not fully human in his *Confessions of An English Opium-Eater* (1821), writing of their alterity and strangeness and the extreme terror that they inspired in him. When he meets a Malay traveler in the English Lakes, he can only describe him in terms of the rats and tigers of the animal kingdom and the diseases and infections that he feared. Similarly, the Creature in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) has been interpreted as reflecting fears of racial others such as African slaves and Oriental peoples, as well as questioning the boundary between human and animal that is so central an anxiety of the period (Kitson 75–87).

It is in the later writings of Coleridge that the most troubling signs of Romantic racialism are discovered. Coleridge certainly began his literary career as someone who opposed the slave trade and who fully believed in the Christian universalist consensus concerning the origins and unity of humanity. However, in 1798 when he studied at Göttingen, he encountered the anthropology of Blumenbach and saw his collection of skulls. Coleridge seems to have accepted Blumenbach’s hypothesis of a formative force, which coincided with his own intuitions of an active and vital force in nature; he also more or less accepted Blumenbach’s fivefold typology of mankind. Coleridge, unfortunately, was to go even further than Blumenbach. Integrating this racial anthropology with his own attempts to provide a systematic philosophy of nature and history, he began to argue that the European race was the original race from which all others have degenerated both physically and morally. Combining Christian eschatology with an idealist version of natural history, Coleridge argued, in a series of notes, unpublished essays, and other pieces, that it would be the historic mission of the European race to reunite and perfect the rest

of the peoples of the world, thus fulfilling the master narrative of world history. Famously, Coleridge could never accept that Shakespeare intended Othello to be represented as a black African and he also commented that one of the anecdotal proofs of his belief that white was the primary racial coloring consisted in the allegation that African slaves came to admire the whiteness of the scars inflicted by their overseers. Studies of Romantic-period writers in the twenty-first century are now fully engaged with issues relating to models of variety and human difference and are valuable in showing how conflicting and contradictory notions of race were constructed and infiltrated with aesthetic preferences as well as with assumptions about gender and class. As such it is hoped that they may aid in the process of understanding contemporary cultures and how we came to where we are, as well as addressing that most urgent of questions, as to how the various peoples of the globe manage the business of living together and sharing the world's finite resources.

See HISTORIOGRAPHY; NARRATIVE; NATION AND EMPIRE; SUBLIME.

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## Gender and Sexuality

*Kari Lokke*

In September 1791, at the height of French Revolutionary enthusiasm, Olympe de Gouges composed her *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (*Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*), conceived as a challenge to the false universalism of the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme* (*Declaration of the Rights of Man*) (1789). De Gouges's feminist manifesto was to be decreed at a future meeting of the National Assembly. Among her radical claims for women, De Gouges demanded equal rights to all public positions and forms of employment as well as self-representation in the National Assembly. She appended to her *Déclaration* a template, including spaces for two signatures, for a "Social Contract between Man and Woman" that would replace the institution of marriage that she termed "the tomb of confidence and love" (128). This social contract presupposed communal property and could be dissolved with the cessation of mutual inclination. A postscript to the *Déclaration* exhorts women, in a highly ironic appeal to Reason and Nature – terms traditionally invoked to denigrate women – to free their fellow revolutionaries from the hypocrisy implicit in the exclusion of womankind from "the rights of man." "Women, wake up; the tocsin of reason sounds throughout the universe; recognize your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies. The torch of truth has dispersed all the clouds of folly and usurpation. Enslaved man has multiplied his force and needs yours to break his chains" (126).

In De Gouges's manifesto the volcanic energy that characterized 1790s debates about sex and gender in Europe is palpable. One can easily imagine a William Blake engraving illustrating the struggle for liberation, among the competing claims of reason, nature, and superstition, that De Gouges's exhortation portrays. Her critique of marriage and advocacy for vocational opportunities for women were, however,

not new. Almost a century before, the English philosopher Mary Astell had exposed the injustice of women's conjugal subjection to men in *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700) and argued for improved educational possibilities for women in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* (1694). In France, Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (*Letters of a Peruvian Woman*) (1747) emphasized that increased educational opportunities for women were necessary to their emotional, spiritual and, of course, economic well-being and depicted a Peruvian heroine who scandalously chose seclusion in her library over marriage to an idealized male savior, a French Prince Charming. The Dutch Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres de Mistriss Henley* (*Letters of Mistress Henley*) (1784) offers a devastatingly subtle portrait of the social and economic realities that undermine the late eighteenth-century middle-class model of companionate marriage. And Denis Diderot's *La Religieuse* (*The Nun*) (1760) is a passionate outcry against the hypocrisy and cupidity that imprisoned young unmarried women, even those with no spiritual calling, in convents because they were not prepared or permitted to support themselves. Clearly the intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment prepared the way for the revolutionary demands of European women writers in the Romantic era. Indeed Immanuel Kant, in his iconic essay "What is Enlightenment?" (1784), throws down the gauntlet to "the entire fair sex" and challenges them, along with the common people, to throw off the role of placid "domestic cattle" and to find the courage to think for themselves: "Have the courage to use your own reason!" – that is the motto of enlightenment" (263).

What, then, distinguishes late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century debates about gender and sexuality? Why their characteristic urgency and intensity? In what historically specific terms are these debates about sexual identities and gender roles framed? In order to create a context for addressing these questions, I call attention to a confluence of political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors that shaped the Romantic-era literary scene as a locus of sharply competing aesthetic visions and ideological stances. First, French Revolutionary debates provided an unprecedented, highly public and cosmopolitan platform for the expression of women's political opinions. Second, women writers were coming into a newfound prominence by the end of the eighteenth century, not just as novelists, but also as dramatists and poets. The demise of aristocratic patronage, the democratization of the reading public through rising literacy rates and the proliferation of lending libraries, pamphlets, and new journals opened doors to both laboring-class and women writers. Third, new models of sexuality worked synergistically with heightening class and economic tensions to compel questioning of the fundamental nature of marriage, the family, and sexual relations, both heterosexual and homoerotic.

## I

Women writers in the late eighteenth century were speaking out in increasingly public and political ways that gave their ideas more widespread currency than ever

before. Graffiny and Charrière had written epistolary novels, a genre that mediated between public and private, and, as Mary Favret has shown in *Romantic Correspondence* (1993), continued to be a crucial venue for women's assertion of sociopolitical influence in the Romantic era. And, almost a century earlier, the royalist Astell had been a vigorous Tory pamphleteer inveighing against the mercenary and commercial spirit of her age. Her vision for improving female education included a proposal for a kind of Protestant female religious community. Now, however, in the midst of the cataclysmic events of the French Revolution, de Gouges was claiming the public forum of the National Assembly, demanding a role in steering its future, and proposing concrete legal and administrative measures for the transformation of the institution of marriage. As she wrote so famously and presciently, given the fact that she was guillotined two years later, if women could be publicly executed, they also had the right to public assertion of their political views: "[W]oman has the right to mount the scaffold, so she should have the right equally to mount the rostrum" (125).

Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) called for a revision of the French Constitution of 1791 in the name of "JUSTICE for one half of the human race" (105) and was addressed to the French statesman Talleyrand in his role as legislator of the French National Assembly. In her dedication, Wollstonecraft respectfully but passionately took issue with Talleyrand's *Rapport sur l'instruction publique (Report on Public Instruction)* (1791) that had advocated ending public education of girls at the age of eight. In the name of reason, she furthermore claimed for women the right to participate in government and asserted "that women cannot, by force, be confined to domestic concerns" (104). And if Wollstonecraft seems to write under the banner of republican motherhood – i.e., that women, *as citizens*, should be educated in order to become better wives and mothers – she ultimately moves beyond this masculinist ideal to assert the intrinsic value of women themselves, repeatedly emphasizing that women must have occupations and money of their own: "their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that . . . of a mother" (283). The inextricability of the very public and political French Revolutionary struggles and the private and personal "revolution in female manners" (158) envisaged by Wollstonecraft and women throughout Europe is rendered evident by the heroine of Wollstonecraft's posthumously published novel, *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). Trapped in a marriage to a profligate and abusive husband, Maria laments that "marriage had bastilled [her] for life" (115).

Women's presence on the international political stage in new and highly visible ways provoked intense ideological battles over their participation in the public sphere. As Anne K. Mellor has shown in *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780–1830* (2000), women such as Hannah More, Joanna Baillie, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and Charlotte Smith represented a formidable presence on the British political landscape. At the same time, however, ideological resistance to women's full participation in public debate was fortified by the challenge women writers posed to conventions of middle-class domesticity. These conventions were developing simultaneously with women's growing influence on public opinion as

the bourgeoisie sought to affirm its ascendancy over aristocratic mores and values. French women's pre-Revolutionary influence on salon and court culture came to symbolize aristocratic decadence in British public opinion, especially after the declaration of war against the French Republic in 1793. The figure of Marie Antoinette in particular, as collectively represented by writers as diverse as Edmund Burke, Smith, Mary Robinson, Wollstonecraft, and Helen Maria Williams, not to mention popular broadsides and prints, became a grotesque composite of victimized womanhood, self-sacrificial maternity, monstrous sexual voracity, and political cunning. Thus the Romantic era represents a time of glaring contradictions between theoretical prescriptions about women's unsuitability for professional, public, and political arenas and their actual participation in such discursive realms as the periodical press, editorial endeavors, literary criticism, salon culture, the theater, and reading societies (see Waters). Women also held leadership positions in the Evangelical, anti-war, and abolitionist movements as well as in advocacy efforts among British Dissenters for religious and civil liberties.

These contradictions took myriad forms in Romantic-era literature. Friedrich Schiller's *Maria Stuart* (*Mary Stuart*) (1800), for example, explores questions of the potential for women's political leadership raised by French Revolutionary demands for women's rights. The contemporary context of this play is evident in Schiller's representation of the deliberations of Elizabeth's advisors Burleigh, Shrewsbury, and Leicester over the beheading of Mary Stuart as translations of the debates carried out by St. Just, Robespierre, Malherbes, and the Girondins that led to the execution of Louis XVI. Schiller portrays both Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I as charismatic and powerful rulers who are in many ways fully capable of ruling their realms. He then, however, rewrites history to stage a face-to-face conflict between the two queens as stereotypically feminine beings undone by their emotions – desire for vengeance and jealousy over the affections of Leicester. Schiller is clearly torn between his fascination with these two magnetic historical figures and his reservations about women's capacities for rational and dispassionate exertion of will. In a final dramatic turn, however, his Mary achieves a sublime moral victory over her emotions in her last moments as she forgives her "sister" and relinquishes her love and hate to God. Thus Schiller's heroine, in facing death, attains a sublimity associated in the aesthetics of Burke, Kant, and Schiller with exclusively masculine capacities at the same time that her sacrifice prevents her from any further transformative historical action. With one hand Schiller grants woman sublimity while denying her historical agency with the other, thus ultimately reinforcing her relegation to a sphere of moral influence beyond or outside of the public and political.

Many British women writers strained to assert their political perspectives and their rights to full citizenship without offending their readers. Complex epistolary debates about the French Revolution and accounts of revolutionary turmoil dominate Smith's historical novel *Desmond* (1792). Yet Smith felt compelled in her preface to justify herself against the charge that women "have no business in politics" by reminding her audience that women writers have "fathers, brothers, husbands, sons,

or friends" (45) who are sent to war and live lives immersed in governmental and public matters. She also emphasizes that, obliged as she is to manage her children's financial affairs, writing to earn money represents fulfillment of her domestic duties rather than disregard of them. The tensions between hegemonic pressures stifling women's public voices and women's efforts to develop and express their acute political awareness of the extraordinary times in which they lived define *Desmond's* heroine Geraldine. In Geraldine, Smith creates a character who pushes the role of dutiful wife and mother to an almost parodic extreme, risking her life by following her profligate aristocratic husband to France to nurse him on his deathbed even after he has attempted to sell her off to one of his friends to settle his debts. As if to provide herself cover, Smith then delivers protofeminist and pro-revolutionary political opinions through the vehicle of this saintly woman. Even as she is resigned to the role of dutiful martyr, Geraldine pointedly asserts that her husband has treated her as a slave and refers to herself as his property. Most importantly, it is the angelic Geraldine who echoes biblical prophecy in her profoundly radical defense of French Revolutionary violence:

While humanity drops her tears at the sad stories of those individuals who fell the victims of popular tumult so naturally excited, pity cannot throw over these transactions a veil thick enough to conceal the tremendous decree of justice, which, like "the handwriting upon the wall," will be seen in colours of blood, and however regretted, must still be acknowledged as the hand of justice. (326)

In the same vein, Barbauld opens her "On the Expected General Rising of the French Nation, in 1792" with a call to revolution: "Rise, mighty nation, in thy strength,/And deal thy dreadful vengeance round;/Let thy great spirit, roused at length,/Strike hordes of despots to the ground!" (1–4; Ashfield 16). Barbauld, in contrast to Smith, refused to emphasize her identity as woman, instead fashioning a rationalist, ungendered authorial persona befitting the Dissenting academies where she had been educated and where her father, brother, and husband taught (Craciun 16–26). Barbauld furthermore declined an invitation to found an academy for the instruction of young women, asserting that "she saw no point in producing *femmes savantes* rather than 'good wives or agreeable companions'" (Lonsdale 300). Her poem "To a Lady, with some painted flowers" was judged "ignoble" by Wollstonecraft for its glorification of women's sweetness, delicacy, and desire to please. Barbauld also chose not to publish most of her political poetry of the 1790s during her lifetime, after the appearance of her eloquent abolitionist "Epistle to William Wilberforce" (1791).

Nevertheless, the range and power of her political writings are exemplary, as is the trajectory of her reception throughout the Romantic era. Her courageous prose pamphlets published in the 1790s included *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790), *Civic Sermons to the People* (1792) on democracy and popular education, and *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* (1793), an anti-war tract denouncing narrow British nationalism. Despite her efforts

to distance herself from Wollstonecraft's overt feminism and unconventional personal life, Barbauld became a target of Richard Polwhele's polemical attack on proponents of women's rights, *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), along with the pro-revolutionary Mary Hays, Smith, Ann Yearsley, and Williams. Polwhele branded these writers "Gallic freaks" and set them in opposition to the conservative, nationalistic More and the previous generation of Bluestockings. That Polwhele viewed women's demands for equal rights in the 1790s and their involvement in international politics as unprecedented is clear from the poem's introduction: "Survey with me, what ne'er our fathers saw,/A female band despising NATURE'S law" (11–12). The height of public ignominy, however, did not come for Barbauld until later, when after almost two decades of war, anti-French sentiment had hardened, and knowledge of Wollstonecraft's "scandalous" life, as depicted in her husband William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), became more widespread and undermined her cause among an increasingly conservative public. Barbauld met the horrors of the Napoleonic era with "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven," a daring poem that challenged the English to examine their own mercenary efforts at worldwide dominion ("Britain, know,/Thou who hast shared the guilt must share the woe" (45–46) and prophesied the demise of the British empire in the face of the rise of the New World. After this scathing jeremiad was condemned by viciously misogynist and condescending critics, Barbauld published no more poetry. Indeed she gave up the long-held intention of collecting her poetry into a new edition; that task was left to her niece Lucy Aiken, who published a posthumous edition of Barbauld's works in 1825.

In France, the battle for women's rights suffered similar setbacks. Under Jacobinism women were exiled from public life, as Madelyn Gutwirth has shown, all the while being idealized or demonized allegorically in neoclassical emblems as figureheads of the Revolution. The consignment of women to the home and to motherhood at the inception of the French Republic of male citizenry only intensified under the Empire and its Napoleonic Code. After all, when asked by Germaine de Staël, Napoleon reputedly replied that the woman he most admired would be the one who had given birth to the largest number of children. According to Gutwirth, the 1804 Code that influenced much of the European continent, despite allowing divorce, was more conservative than Revolutionary family legislation as its "legal diminution of women followed the course of increasing ideological pressure to limit women's separate rights" (371).

In the French Revolutionary era of the 1790s, then, women cracked open the door to the exercise of their rights to full citizenship and to political power only to have it slammed again in their faces. Yet what clearly must have seemed to guardians of patriarchal gender relations a Pandora's box of unsettling questions and demands had already escaped into public consciousness and could never again be fully contained, despite the backlash of the decades to come. In the early years of the next century, for example, even that model of propriety, Hannah More, was publicly vilified by Church of England supporters for her role in the Sunday School Movement. Condemning her for spreading Methodist propaganda, attacks on her

took a decidedly personal and misogynist tone that evinced unmistakable fear of feminine political influence. More was branded a Pope Joan who drew “within the vortex of her petticoats, numerous bodies of the regular Clergy of the land, who are made subservient to her views and accessory to her designs by the liberty of issuing her bulls and promulgating her mandates” (cited in Keane 131). The alliance of women’s strengths with the potential power of a literate peasantry and an educated laboring class brought forth charges against More of leveling and of enthusiasm or fanaticism meant to align her, ironically, with the regicidal Puritans of the last century. The specter of a mass audience hungrily devouring the productions of scribbling women too numerous to count *or* control was clearly most unsettling to guardians of civic and ecclesiastical power.

In France, Napoleon’s nemesis de Staël lived her entire life in the spotlight of international public opinion. As the daughter of Louis XVI’s finance minister Necker, she was introduced as a young woman to the French court. During the Revolution, she may have co-authored Talleyrand’s *Rapport*, which prompted Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*. She and her lover Benjamin Constant were leaders of the liberal opposition to Napoleon who exiled her from Paris and had the first edition of *De l’Allemagne (On Germany)* (1813) pulped for its glorification of Germanic culture and its condemnation of the exploitative, self-interested impulse at the heart of French imperialism. Indeed de Staël’s friend Mme de Chastenay named de Staël, alongside England and Russia, as one of the three most powerful opponents of Bonaparte. Yet de Staël’s writings reveal a pragmatic maneuvering as well as an intense emotional ambivalence in relation to women’s public political and artistic expression that were to echo worldwide throughout the nineteenth century. In her early work *De la littérature (On Literature)* (1800), she emphasizes, as did Wollstonecraft, in a clear appeal to the male reader, that the education of women and the development of their faculty of reason will benefit all: “If the situation of women in civil society is so imperfect, what we must work toward is the improvement of their lot, not the degradation of their minds. For women to pay attention to the development of mind and reason would promote both enlightenment and the happiness of society in general” (*An Extraordinary Woman* 205). In the later *On Germany*, she even purports to endorse women’s exclusion from the public sphere, but under conditions she certainly judges unrealistic:

It is right to exclude women from political and civil affairs: anything that puts women in competition with men goes against their natural vocation. Fame itself is only a brilliant way to bury the happiness of a woman. However, if women’s destiny is to be one continuous act of devotion to conjugal love, the reward of this devotion will have to be the scrupulous fidelity of any man who is the object of it. (318)

Toward the end of her life, however, in a social atmosphere particularly inimical to women’s rights, de Staël affirmed her commitment to the cultivation of women’s intellectual gifts. In 1814, at the height of her persecution by Napoleon, in a new

preface to her first published work, *Lettres sur J. J. Rousseau* (*Letters On Rousseau*) (1788), she mounts a spirited defense of women's education and of the "woman of genius." She emphasizes, tongue-in-cheek, that "domestic slavery" will not be imposed on European women because "Christian society requires nothing but justice in family relationships" (40). While comforting men with the reassurance that they will always have plenty of undistinguished women from whom to choose wives, she exhorts women to welcome the "greater intensity of life" and happiness that intellectual development brings: "[I]f you do not find a sense of the natural in spiritual exhilaration, and sincerity in a knowledge of the truth – if you do not finally breathe easy in some wider realm, you are nothing but a doll who has learned her lesson well" (40–41).

The heroine of de Staël's enormously influential novel *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (*Corinne, or Italy*) (1807) struggles with this unwelcome patriarchal lesson as she embodies a vision of inevitable and tragic conflict between fully realized female genius and the restrictive expectations of marriage and domesticity as she performs a self-willed demise when abandoned by her lover for her innocent and malleable stepsister. De Staël's epigram about women's "fame" quoted above epitomized the fate of the woman writer for Romantic women poets throughout Europe and beyond who took up her figure of the abandoned woman – Ariadne, Sappho, or Dido – as the prototype of the female artist: Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans as well as their Victorian descendants Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti in England, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and Delphine Gay in France, and Karolina Pavlova and Evdokia Rastopchina in Russia (see Vincent). As Richard Cronin notes, this tradition was not limited to women, as Tennyson joined in, writing "quite uninhibitedly as a woman" in a group of poems about enclosed or secluded figures of female creativity including "Mariana," "The Lady of Shalott," "Oenone," and "Fatima" (239). Prose writers also engaged with de Staël's *Corinne*, though in much more critical ways. Mary Shelley deemed de Staël's heroine lacking in moral courage and created her philosopher-ruler and model of enthusiastic eloquence Countess Euthanasia in the novel *Valperga* (1823) as a corrective to *Corinne*. Similarly, Margaret Fuller, author of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), found de Staël and her heroine unphilosophical and excessively emotional. And Maria Jane Jewsbury satirized *Corinne* in her brilliant send-up, *History of an Enthusiast* (1830).

## II

De Staël experienced first hand the social and political risks encountered by a strong woman in competition with men. By virtue of their numbers, their popularity, and their influence, Romantic-era women writers represented an artistic and commercial threat to the male literary establishment as well, particularly in Britain. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the novel as a genre was associated predominantly with women, as both writers and readers (see Todd). In her 1799 *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, Robinson asserts unequivocally



her belief not just in the popularity but also the superiority of her contemporary female novelists:

There are men who affect, to think lightly of the literary productions of women: and yet no works of the present day are so universally read as theirs. The best novels that have been written, since those of Smollett, Richardson, and Fielding, have been produced by women: and their pages have not only been embellished with the interesting events of domestic life, portrayed with all the elegance of phraseology, and all the refinement of sentiment, but with forcible and eloquent, political, theological, and philosophical reasoning. (84)

Robinson also praises the plays of Hannah Cowley, Elizabeth Inchbald, Sophia Lee, and More. Baillie, in fact, was almost universally deemed the finest dramatist, indeed the Shakespeare, of her age. The threat she posed to male writers of her age can be gauged by Byron's infamous response; in a letter to John Murray, he affirms Voltaire's assertion that "the composition of a tragedy requires *testicles*" and exclaims "If this be true Lord knows what Baillie does – I suppose she borrows them" (203).

Many more women – hundreds, in fact – were writing poetry and publishing collections of verse than ever before. In his comprehensive *Romantic Poetry by Women: A Bibliography, 1770–1835* (1993), Jackson lists 2,584 works by over 900 British authors. Similarly, Stephen Behrendt's panoramic study of Romantic-era women's poetry, *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community* (2009), alerts us to the remarkably diverse talents of the many Romantic-era women poets still virtually unknown today, despite the wealth of relatively recent anthologies by Isobel Armstrong, Andrew Ashfield, Jennifer Breen, Paula Feldman, Margaret Higonnet, Anne Mellor and Richard Matlak, and Duncan Wu. As Roger Lonsdale emphasizes, by the last decade of the eighteenth century, women's poetry in Britain had made dramatic gains against the early decades of the century, in its profound impact on the cultural landscape, if not always in prestige and recognition. The poetry of cosmopolitan German–Danish author Friederike Brun, for example, was the source and inspiration for Wolfgang von Goethe's "Nähe des Geliebten" ("Nearness") (1795), Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Hymn Before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni" (1802), and William Wordsworth's "The Seven Sisters" (1800).

The responses of the Romantic poets we now term canonical to these women artists, rather than expressing unmitigated misogyny, were characterized by an intriguing combination of condescension, admiration, fearful fascination, and emotional ambivalence. Marlon Ross, in *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (1989), has revealed the complex gestures of self-fathering engaged in by male Romantic poets in order to evade full recognition of the debt they owed to the women poets of their day. The twists and turns of John Keats's responses to Mary Tighe's *Psyche, or, The Legend of Love* (1805), as explored by Greg Kucich, Harriet Kramer Linkin, and Susan Wolfson, are emblematic of the complexities inherent in the reception of women's poetry by

the canonical Romantic poets. Similarly, Keats jokingly refers to the “fine Mother Radcliff names” he gives to his characters in *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1820) and *Isabella, or, the Pot of Basil* (1820), all the while disavowing his control over these choices; “it is not my fault,” he writes (283). Thus Keats ironically acknowledges a kind of hypnotic influence exerted by Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic poetry and prose over the next generation of writers. And in one of her last poems, “Saint Monica,” Smith identifies herself with the mother of Saint Augustine; instead of giving birth to the Christian Church, however, she imagines herself the progenitor of a new line of poets in service to a religion of nature.

By the 1820s and 1830s, with the rise of gift books and annuals, and, on the other end of the economic spectrum, cheap or pirated editions, the process of democratization, commercialization, and feminization of the literary marketplace had advanced to the point where Byron conflated the writing of poetry with prostitution and expressed disdain for an audience composed of women and the masses (see Hofkosh 36–64). With sales of individually authored poetry collections waning, Coleridge and Wordsworth began reluctantly to contribute to gift books, annuals, and newly minted periodicals. These two aging poets were now overshadowed by the enormously popular Landon and Hemans who, along with Scott and Byron, dominated the literary scene in Regency Britain. With Byron and L.E.L., the modern media celebrity was born, having been prefigured by the meteoric but ultimately tragic career of the brilliant Mary “Perdita” Robinson – actress, novelist, poet, and satirist – who is quoted above and was briefly mistress of the Prince of Wales. Even as both Landon and Hemans lamented the compromises in quality they feared resulted from economic pressures to maintain their prolific output and their popular appeal, both made the instrumental relations between poet and audience the subject of some of their finest poetry. They dramatize an eroticized relation between poet and reader in which abandonment or neglect by an individual lover is superseded by betrayal on the part of an uncomprehending or jaded audience. Landon’s *Erinna*, for example, condemns herself for profaning her invaluable poetic gifts and succumbing to the temptations of empty flattery and fame:

To what use have I turn’d  
The golden gifts in which I pride myself?  
They are profaned; with their pure ore I made  
A temple resting only on the breath  
Of heedless worshippers. (231–235)

And Hemans’s *Sappho* is equally disillusioned with the economies of artist/audience exchange: “The heart . . . / Hath poured on desert sands its wealth away” (23–24; Ashfield 193). Finding no echoing response in her audience, she seeks refuge for herself and her laurels in the alien echo of the vast ocean before her:

Give to that crown, that burning crown,  
Place in thy darkest hold!

Bury my anguish, my renown,  
 With hidden wrecks, lost gems, and wasted gold! (29–32; Ashfield 193)

.....

I, with this winged nature fraught,  
 These visions, brightly free,  
 This boundless love, this fiery thought –  
 Alone, I come! O! give me peace, dark Sea! (37–40; Ashfield 194)

During her lifetime, Hemans's public chose, for the most part, not to acknowledge the darker shades and complexities of her vision, thus validating her sense that her readers did not fathom her depths. Instead she was celebrated simultaneously as the poet of hearth and home and as the voice of triumphant British nationalism and imperialism that depended on the domestic realm for support and survival. Seen in this light, her poetic persona provides a bridge between cultural constructions of femininity that were coming into being in the late eighteenth century with the rise of the bourgeoisie and their reification as normative notions of female domesticity in the Victorian era.

### III

In the late eighteenth century, just as challenges to political, educational, and vocational restrictions on women coincided with increased ideological pressure to reinforce these limitations, so loosening up of patriarchal family structures coexisted with intensified efforts to shore up feudal institutions such as primogeniture and arranged marriages. Social theorists and historians as diverse as Michel Foucault, Lawrence Stone, Thomas Laqueur, and G. J. Barker-Benfield all point to the late eighteenth century as an era of intense ideological debate concerning questions of sex and gender as well as paradigmatic shifts in cultural conceptions of non-procreative sexuality and the female body in particular. As Robert Miles has argued, Foucault's genealogical theories coalesce with Stone's more teleological histories in their emphasis upon the explosion of writing about sex in the latter half of the eighteenth century, as feudal codes based in familial/patriarchal alliances of power competed with bourgeois discourses of sexuality, individual desire and the nuclear family (10–29). Barker-Benfield similarly highlights this era as a time of shifting conceptions of gender when the rise of capitalism was grounded in male heterosocial commerce and female domestic consumerism. For Barker-Benfield, shifts in normative conceptions of gender presupposed the reformation of men's manners – be they aristocratic and libertine or rough-hewn laboring and peasant – so as to be suitable for the heterosocial realm of commerce. In the construction and establishment of these new models of masculinity, women, as agents of moral sensibility and influence, physically sensitive emotional barometers, as well as household consumers of their fathers' and husbands' goods, were indispensable.

These shifts in gender roles were strongly reinforced by new scientific and medical models of sexuality. For Foucault, the long eighteenth century was the era in which religious understanding of sexuality was supplanted by scientific discourses on the body. And as Thomas Laqueur has shown in *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990), the latter half of the eighteenth century witnessed a transformative shift from a one-sex model to a two-sex model of the female body. Women's bodies were no longer conceptualized according to the Aristotelian schema as simply inferior, weaker versions of the male; instead female sexuality became for the first time distinct from and incommensurable with that of the male. Grounded in appeals to nature and biology, this emphasis upon the binary opposition of male and female bodies underscored and was enhanced by the newly powerful gender-complementary models of appropriate masculine and feminine realms of activity, regimes of feeling, and patterns of behavior described above. While the work of these cultural theorists and historians has met with critique, revision, and even repudiation, it is nevertheless crucial for the understanding of Romantic-era conceptions of gender and sexuality to recognize these thinkers' consensus that the period saw revolutionary upheavals in matters of sex and gender.

The Gothic mode in particular gave literary form to Enlightenment- and Romantic-era anxieties about the nature of subjectivity and sexuality occasioned by these cultural changes. In fact, the prominence of Gothic and fantastic literature in the period from 1750 to 1850 is a highly overdetermined phenomenon. The enormously popular Gothic novels of writers like Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Dacre, and Matthew Lewis developed alongside the realistic novel tradition as a means of articulating the psychosexual conflicts and social struggles occasioned by conformity to heteronormative and masculinist moral codes and institutions (see Moglen). Gothic and fantastic literature across Europe reads as a virtual compendium of sexual taboos and non-procreative desires: necrophilia (Goethe's *Die Braut von Corinth* [*The Bride of Corinth*] [1798], Gautier's *La Morte amoureuse* [*Loving Lady Death*] [1836]); incest (Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert* [*Blond Eckbert*] [1797], Byron's *Manfred* [1817], Chateaubriand's *René* [1802]); intercourse with demons and elemental spirits (Cazotte's *Le Diable amoureux* [*The Devil in Love*] [1772], Lewis's *The Monk* [1796], De la Motte Fouqué's *Undine* [1811], Bannerman's "The Dark Ladie" [1802], Landon's "The Fairy of the Fountains" [1835], Hoffmann's *Der Goldene Topf* [*The Golden Pot*] [1814], Nodier's *La Fée aux miettes* [*The Crumb Fairy*] [1832]); sadism (Diderot's *La Religieuse* [*The Nun*] [1796], Dacre's *Zofloya* [1806], *The Monk*); lesbianism (*La Religieuse*, Coleridge's *Christabel* [1816]); homoeroticism (*Christabel*; Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* [1823], Shelley's *Julian and Maddalo* [1819]); maternal sexuality (Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother* [1791], *Christabel*, Hoffmann's *Die Bergwerke zu Falun* [*The Mines of Falun*] [1819]).

French Revolutionary conflicts fed the proliferation of Gothic texts. With a particular focus on the unnaturalness of female revolutionaries like the *poissardes* who marched to Versailles, Charlotte Corday, and even the moderate Mme Roland, metaphors of monstrosity were actualized in writings depicting political women as

allied with French Revolutionary masses. Authors of these texts spanned the entire political spectrum from Edmund Burke to Godwin to Mary Shelley (see Paulson). Shelley makes Ingolstadt, the center of Adam Weishaupt's proto-revolutionary group the Illuminati, the birthplace of her archetypal modern monster, Victor Frankenstein's creature. The imbrication of French Revolutionary narratives with the Gothic is uncannily evident in the story of Jacques Cazotte, author of *Le Diable amoureux*, an originary eighteenth-century *conte fantastique* and crucial influence on Lewis's *The Monk*, who was reputed by La Harpe to have accurately prophesied his own beheading and that of a number of fellow French aristocrats including the Marquis de Condorcet.

With the rise of the bourgeoisie, class boundaries were in a state of flux; sex and gender ideologies, on the other hand, grew more rigid, and, in that sense, more oppressive. Women writers were particularly drawn to the Gothic as a vehicle for avoiding censure by displacing their critiques of the sex-gender system as well as their exploration of forbidden sexualities into exotic worlds permeated by fantastic occurrences. The poetry of Anne Bannerman, Charlotte Dacre, Robinson, and Smith, and the plays of Baillie, feature strikingly Gothic elements. Novels written by and for women were populated by young women victimized by ruthless and predatory patriarchal figures who immure them in castles and dungeons until they can be freed to marry for love. Canonical Romantic poets disdained the mass appeal of these lucrative Gothic novels, all the while appropriating Gothic generic codes into some of their finest poetry: Wordsworth's supernatural ballads and the ghostly spots of time from *The Prelude* (1850); Coleridge's *Christabel* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798); Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes* and *Lamia* (1820); Shelley's *Alastor* (1816) and *Julian and Maddalo*; and Byron's *Manfred*, *The Giaour* (1813) as well as the haunted later cantos of *Don Juan* (1819–1824). Their evasive stance in relation to the Gothic – replicated even today in critical condescension toward this central Romantic mode – signals a hope of attaining both economic and aesthetic success while seeking to avoid the stigma of association with a feminized, popular mode (see Gamer). Shelley is perhaps the exception here. He wrote two gothic novels, *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *St. Irvyne* (1811). And his *Julian and Maddalo* is a moving evocation of male friendship, an intense homoeroticism mediated by the main characters' sympathy for the troubled figure of a feminized mad poet enclosed in a dark Gothic tower.

Much of the excitement of Romantic-era discourse on sexuality derives from its unsettled and ambiguous nature, a quality, as we have seen, particularly evident in Gothic and fantastic highlighting of tensions between supernatural and rational/scientific explanations of extraordinary happenings and paranormal sexual or psychic states. For Romantic artists and writers, these uncertainties translated into radical questioning of sexual mores and heightened awareness of the historical, culturally specific determinants of masculinity/femininity (see Wolfson, *Borderlines*). Conflicting codes of sexual behavior and shifting hierarchies of class and gender encouraged freedom of thought and action in unprecedented ways. In the realms of both theory and praxis, Romantic-era challenges to rigid ideologies of sex

and gender were staged in strikingly unconventional arenas that were both intensely intimate and overwhelmingly communal, nationalist and cosmopolitan, affective and intellectual: the London of the Joseph Johnson publishing circle, Anna Seward's Lichfield, the Lake District poets, the ladies of Llangollen, the Shelley Circle, the Jena and Heidelberg Romantics, de Staël's Coppet, Friederike Brun's salons in Copenhagen and Rome, the Berlin salons of Rahel Varnhagen and Bettine von Arnim, the Parisian Petit Cénacle, the world of George Sand's Nohant. Boundaries between masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual, married and unmarried, passionate and platonic blurred into indistinction in these countercultural worlds. Such ambiguities and tensions clearly conflicted with the ascendancy of companionate marriage and related gender-complementary models of sexuality based upon neat binaries of male and female. Brun, for example, maintained a long-term intimate relationship with the Swiss philosopher Victor von Bonstetten despite the fact that she was married to the wealthy financier Constantin Brun, who made her cosmopolitan existence possible. Bonstetten and his son even lived with the Bruns in Copenhagen for a number of years. And after August Wilhelm Schlegel's wife Caroline left him for Friedrich Schelling, Schlegel became the devoted friend of de Staël and tutor to her children for many years. It was he who rescued a copy of *De l'Allemagne (On Germany)* from Napoleon's agents and smuggled it out for publication in England.

As another instance of the fluidity of erotic experience that fed Romantic-era creativity, I cite here just a few examples of female friendships that defy efforts at the "scientific" categorization and coding that Foucault suggests intensify in the years 1750 to 1850. Anna Seward's lifelong devotion to John Saville, her music teacher and choral vicar of Lichfield Cathedral, coexisted with her love for Honora Sneed, the inspiration for her most exquisitely moving poetry. And von Arnim's youthful and unrequited love for the poet Karoline von Günderode is memorialized in her *Briefroman Die Günderode* (1840) after decades of a solid marriage to Achim von Arnim that produced seven children. The passionate friendships of de Staël and Mme Récamier or Sand and Marie Dorval complicate stereotypic portrayals of these two artists as sexually or emotionally insatiable heterosexual women. And Wollstonecraft's lyrical *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) reveal that, despite her distinctly heterosexual history with American entrepreneur Gilbert Imlay and her subsequent marriage to Godwin, the true love of her life may have been her passionate friend of youth, Fanny Blood:

When a warm heart has received strong impressions, they are not to be effaced. Emotions become sentiments; and the imagination renders even transient sensations permanent, by fondly retracing them. I cannot, without a thrill of delight, recollect views I have seen which are not to be forgotten, – nor looks I have felt in every nerve which I will never more meet. The grave has closed over a dear friend, the friend of my youth, still she is present with me, and I hear her soft voice warbling as I stray over the heath. (99–100)

In her purportedly “conservative” phase after the death of Percy, Wollstonecraft’s daughter Mary Shelley admitted an erotic obsession with Jane Williams who had also been the object of Percy’s desire in the last years of his life. In 1827 Shelley also gave full emotional support to the cross-dresser Mary Diana Dods/Walter Sholto Douglas and her/his wife Isabella Robinson and helped the couple obtain false passports for a trip to Paris.

The intensely social and eclectic nature of the aforementioned literary/publishing circles and salons as well as the associated living arrangements unconfined to the nuclear family give the lie to the cliché of the isolated, lonely male Romantic poet. Indeed, women played such a key role in many of these Romantic communities that Romantic conceptions of sex and gender may be said to have been created in a crucible of male–female dialogue (see Lau). I conclude with a discussion of a small number of these numerous highly self-conscious and sometimes contentious interactions. In Germany, Friedrich Schlegel’s autobiographical and experimental novel *Lucinde* (1799) exploded the sexual hypocrisy and double standards of the day with Romantic irony in its self-conscious and scandalous representation of his erotic relations with his mistress and future wife Dorothea. She responded with *Florentin* (1801), a parodic *Bildungsroman* published under Schlegel’s name. *Florentin* depicts male sexual aggression, homoerotic desire, and the possibilities opened up by a *ménage à trois*, all the while exploring the theme of cross-dressing as a necessary but hypocritical cover for such “illicit” sexual experience that can also run the risk of putting a woman in danger (see Krimmer 182–192).

On the English cultural scene, both Robinson and Barbauld wrote fascinating poems to Coleridge; Robinson flirtatiously acknowledged the sexual subtext of “Kubla Khan” while Barbauld offered gentle but perceptive counsel to an excessively abstract and ungrounded intellect. Much to his discredit, Coleridge responded to Barbauld’s solicitude with ungenerous ridicule and public contempt. The relations of Wordsworth and his sister–lover Dorothy upon whom he projected his idealized visions of nature and childhood also involved her symbolic silencing and destruction in the Lucy poems. In the fragment “Nutting” excised from *The Prelude*, we seem to see Wordsworth’s own clear-sighted admission of man’s ecological guilt in relation to a feminized nature, his acknowledgment that the marriage with nature he celebrates in his poetic autobiography and *The Excursion* (1814) can also take the form of rape. Yet this self-awareness is strangely negated by the fragment’s paternalistic conclusion in which the poetic persona projects his own guilt onto an anonymous “maiden,” a proxy for Dorothy whom he admonishes to respect the sacredness of virgin nature.

William Blake’s representations of female sexuality have been the subject of enormous critical controversy; he is branded an unequivocal misogynist by some and heralded as an advocate of female sexual liberation by others. Rather than attempting to categorize Blake in terms of the misogynist–feminist binary, I think Helen Bruder is wise to emphasize the liberatory effect of Blake’s staging of female agents whose voices exude sexual power; he “constructs a notion of femininity centred upon the concept of dissent. He allows disputatious female voices into his texts in a truly revolutionary way and this polyphonic liberty can be historically located” (36). This

liberty might be literally located in the Joseph Johnson circle and Blake's interactions with Wollstonecraft, whose *Original Stories* he illustrated for its second edition in 1791. There is no more powerful or perceptive portrait of the suffering an envious society inflicts upon an exceptional, free-spirited woman than Blake's poem "Mary," which many believe was written in honor of Wollstonecraft.

Similarly, no more damning portrait of the interpenetration of corrupt patriarchal and ecclesiastical power exists than P. B. Shelley's *The Cenci*. This dramatic rendering of the historical Count Cenci's rape of his daughter Beatrice and her subsequent murder of her violator was Mary Shelley's favorite of her husband's works. In its representation of Beatrice's moral contamination by evil, it mirrors and answers *Mathilda* (1819), her earlier story about father-daughter incest, which places the accent upon the daughter's complicity with and desire for the seductive but transgressive father. *Manfred*, Byron's own poetic meditation on incest, stages a complex cacophony of female voices as forceful and recalcitrant nature spirits whose curses the protagonist seems to welcome as just retribution for his violation of their realm. Byron, of course, was known for his flagrantly libertine sexual bravado and his contempt for many of the women who found him irresistibly seductive. Yet his visits to Coppet and friendship with the sexually emancipated de Staël (none of her four surviving children was fathered by the Baron de Staël) seem to have produced in him an intriguing moral alchemy. His response to de Staël and her character Corinne reflects an astute perception of the social restrictions that limited the potential of his female contemporaries and a sympathy for their plight. According to Lady Blessington, Byron objected ethically to de Staël's characterization of the female artist as discouraging the assertion of female reason and independence of will while undervaluing women's talents. Seen in this light, Byron's famous dictum from *Don Juan* – "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart, 'Tis Woman's whole existence" (1.194.1–2) – should be read not as an eternal verity but rather as a critique of social mores and codes that stunted women's full development (Wilkes 40–54).

These interchanges between male Romantics and the women they disdained, admired, and idealized seem to have compelled increasing self-awareness as the Romantic period progressed. Thus E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (*The Sandman*) (1816) constitutes a brilliant (self)-critique of the male narcissism that prefers the acquiescent automaton Olympia as love object to the clever, intellectual Klara who cannot stomach his morbid self-indulgent poetry. And his *Der Goldne Topf* ironically celebrates the male Romantic poet's tendency to identify woman and nature and to prefer dreams to reality. Reactions by later writers to Goethe's *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*) (1774), an inaugural text of the Romantic era, suggest the distance conceptions of sex and gender traveled in the next century. Charlotte Smith saw the wildly popular novel as offering an opportunity to profit from her skills as a sonneteer in the cross-dressed persona of the lovelorn, nature-worshipping, suicidal Werther. When the object of his unrequited desire confronts him with the fact that he craves self-dramatization more than he cares for her, the narrator of Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie* (1853), ironically styling himself a "Werther minus the pistols," comes to understand that his idealization of



women is actually hurtful and disrespectful. He asks “where is love?” and responds as a disillusioned modern: “Illusions fall, like the husks of a fruit, one after another, and what is left is experience. It has a bitter taste but there is something tonic in its sharpness” (83). Most refreshing of all, von Arnim writes to Goethe in her epistolary novel *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (*Goethe’s Correspondence with a Child*) (1835) that if he had only had the sense to create a heroine like herself instead of the insipid Charlotte, his hero would never have shot himself.

See AUTHOR; CLASS; DRAMA; GOTHIC; NARRATIVE; NATION AND EMPIRE; POETICS; RELIGION; SENSIBILITY.

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## Part 4

# Disciplinary Intersections



# Philosophy

*Marc Redfield*

It is hard to know where to begin or end a capsule presentation of “philosophy” in relation to “Romanticism.” Neither term has a stable definition: although philosophy boasts an ancient and prestigious lineage, the borders between philosophical and other kinds of writing (theological, political, literary, etc.) have always been porous, and perhaps never more so than in eighteenth-century Europe, when the various discourses we now distinguish as economics, political philosophy, aesthetics, ethics, and psychology were emerging out of moral philosophy. Even if, in a pragmatic spirit, we take “philosophy” simply to refer to the range of texts shelved under that category in twenty-first-century university libraries, and “Romanticism” simply to refer to the range of texts generally taught under that rubric in twenty-first-century literature departments, we find ourselves faced with such a wide range of texts and contexts that coming up with a meaningful generalization about them seems an impossible task. (For the classic formulation of the difficulty of defining Romanticism, see Lovejoy.) Yet generalize we must, for it is *also* true that Romanticism and philosophy have a certain elective affinity. Because Romanticism tends to signify both a hard-to-delimit historical period, on the one hand, and variously defined sorts of literary or artistic production, on the other – because, that is, not all texts composed during the Romantic era are *prima facie* Romantic – the notion of Romanticism has triggered intense theoretical debate over the course of its academic elaboration during the last hundred years: a debate animated by aesthetic questions that are so fundamental (what is a Romantic text or period? a Romantic “self” or “imagination”?) that Romanticists as a class have tended to be more visibly drawn to philosophical or theoretical speculation than scholars working in other literary fields.

In this the Romanticists, in circular fashion, can claim to be following the lead of the Romantics themselves. It seems somehow part of the DNA of the stories we tell about Romanticism that S. T. Coleridge named his first two sons after the associationist David Hartley and the idealist George Berkeley; that Heinrich von Kleist famously suffered a “Kant crisis” in 1801, prior to launching his brief and brilliant career as a writer; that Friedrich Schiller, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Thomas de Quincey were all in their quite different ways committed readers of Immanuel Kant; or that Friedrich Schlegel saw fit to affirm, in a famous *Athenäum*-Fragment published in 1798, that “the French Revolution, Fichte’s philosophy, and Goethe’s [novel *Wilhelm*] *Meister* are the greatest tendencies of the age” (Schlegel 2: 198). These well-known chestnuts, raked up out of a large field (for obviously most poets and novelists of the era did not log many, if any, hours reading Kant) feel exemplary of a much broader and more diffuse tendency within the period and texts we call “Romantic.” When the French Revolution exploded in 1789, the intellectual energies of the Enlightenment appeared to be finding historical expression, and the secular possibilities of thought acquired a new urgency. Counterrevolutionary polemics laid the blame for the Revolution on what Edmund Burke (1729–1797) called overweening speculation and “theoretick dogma” (208). (It is in Burke’s writings in the early 1790s that the word *theory* acquires for the first time in its history a negative meaning – coming to mean something like *excessive* rationality: too much philosophizing, appearing too soon and linked too immediately to political action. I shall say a little more about “theory,” one of the keywords shadowing the conjunction philosophy-and-Romanticism, later in this essay.) Ripostes to Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) by Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, and others brought forcibly into the public sphere essential philosophical questions about the nature of human nature, ideology, social justice, and human rights. Coleridge may have had fit audience though few when “explaining metaphysics to the nation,” as the witty narrator of Lord Byron’s *Don Juan* puts it (“I wish he would explain his explanation” [Byron 41]); but an expanded interest in philosophy, broadly conceived, can plausibly be attributed to the era. In these years the *conte philosophique* of Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Denis Diderot mutates into the idea-driven narratives of William Godwin and Goethe; the salon attains historical consequence as an intellectual space in groups around Rahel Varnhagen, Caroline Schlegel, and Madame de Staël; the philosophical poem, though hardly a Romantic invention (it is in fact literally as old as philosophy: our earliest Greek philosophical texts are poems) attains new intensity in the writings of William Blake, William Wordsworth, Friedrich Hölderlin, and P. B. Shelley. Even Mary Shelley’s monster, in *Frankenstein* (1818), lingers over an empiricist account of his coming-to-consciousness. Such speculative impulses can at times coexist with the pastoral affirmations for which Romanticism is also famous – Wordsworth’s affirmation of “wise passiveness,” for instance, in the short lyric “Expostulation and Reply” (1798), occurs as part of a stanza that ironically alludes to the empiricist tradition of John Locke and David Hartley, even as it proposes to turn away from “books” (Wordsworth 106). As a literature preoccupied with consciousness, imagination, the causes

of tyranny, and the promises of freedom, Romanticism develops in proximity to at least potentially philosophical questions of being, time, memory, selfhood, reflection, ethics, aesthetics, politics, and power.

In the present context I propose to offer a brief account of the singular intimacy between literature and philosophy that existed for a little while in Jena at the very end of the eighteenth century. The phenomenon of “Jena Romanticism” (also sometimes termed “early German Romanticism”) is unique; it cannot be taken simply as a more extreme or focused instance of “Romanticism” *tout court*. Yet for students interested in the intertwinings of philosophy and literary Romanticism, certain *fin-de-siècle* writings of Friedrich Schlegel; Novalis, the pen-name of Friedrich von Hardenberg; and Hölderlin, who was not part of the Schlegel circle, but was deeply involved with the new philosophy, as I shall summarize below, are as unavoidable as *The Prelude* (1850) or *Jerusalem* (1804–1820) would be to a student of Romantic epic. There are several good reasons to focus on the post-Kantian philosophico-literary adventure in Germany. One is that “Jena” offers the example of a literary movement drawing on philosophical thought in a way that neither subordinates literature to philosophy as expression to source, nor (to say the same thing differently) reduces philosophy to a theme or a narrative convenience within literature. (A borrowing of that sort can serve a poem, but usually does not represent what really interests us about the poem. “I took hold of the notion of pre-existence,” Wordsworth told Isabella Fenwick apropos the “Intimations” Ode, “as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorising me to make for my purposes the best use of it I could as a poet” [Wordsworth 587]. The point, for Wordsworth as for most readers, is the poem, not the broadly Neoplatonic “notion of pre-existence” that the poem exploits. The philosophical “notion,” unless transfigured in and through its “use,” is in a sense being not just used but used up. For a recent attempt to limn a deeper philosophical impulse in Wordsworth that would be inseparable from the performance of the poem itself, see Jarvis.) Another reason is that the Jena Romantics – the only group active during the Romantic era, it should be added, who in fact wielded and theorized the term “Romantic” – are the first to articulate a fully modern notion of “literature,” as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy argue in their by-now classic study, *The Literary Absolute* (1979).

A third reason to privilege the German context is this: the philosophical revolution inaugurated by Kant opened the space of modern philosophy. More specifically, the history of thought connecting Kant to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel not only had a decisive impact on the aesthetics of “Romanticism” (sometimes quite directly, via Coleridge’s famous borrowings from Schelling in *Biographia Literaria* [1817]), but also laid foundations for the rich “Continental” philosophical tradition, from Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche to the present. That tradition in turn has a complex link with the emergence of a discourse that came to be called “theory” in the 1970s (for further reading on the intersections between nineteenth-century philosophy and twentieth-century theory, see Rajan and Clark): a “theory” that in turn seemed to possess a curious affinity with “Romanticism” as an academic subject (see Redfield). In what follows I offer overviews first of Kant and the “idealist”

turn in Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, and then of the literary–philosophical contributions of Schlegel, Novalis, and Hölderlin. In conclusion I return briefly to some of the large questions of philosophy, literature, and Romanticism that these authors help bring into focus.

### Kant's Copernican Revolution

Stories about modern philosophy traditionally begin with René Descartes, whose attempt to ground philosophical truth in the reflective subject shaped the fundamental questions that Kant's critical project set out to solve. How can we obtain reliable knowledge about the world? How do we know our experience of it is not illusory? To what extent does the world yield itself to scientific knowledge, and is human freedom thinkable in a material, mechanistic universe? The Kantian revolution in philosophy splits and refigures the difference between the rationalist tradition of Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and Christian Wolff, which answers these questions by way of *a priori* principles, and the empiricist tradition of John Locke and David Hume, which grounds philosophical speculation in sense experience. In Kant's view, crippling problems beset both traditions. Rationalism cannot rationally justify its *a priori* affirmations, and falls into dogmatism; empiricism cannot derive objective knowledge from sensory experience, and falls into skepticism. Kant famously credited Hume with having interrupted his dogmatic slumber, and forced him into new philosophical directions. From the point of view of experience, as Hume famously shows, the concept of causality is philosophically unobtainable. No matter how many times we hit a billiard ball and record the result, we gain only pragmatic wisdom: our notion of causality remains an unjustified extrapolation, grounded in nothing more than habit.

Kant's solution, as elaborated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), is that both rationalists and empiricists are right: we do have *a priori* knowledge, but this knowledge bears only on experience. What we experience are not things in themselves but appearances (*Erscheinungen*). Experience is constructed through pure concepts, or categories, of the understanding. (One such concept – to return to our previous example – dictates that every event must have a cause: not because things-in-themselves necessarily work this way, but because causality is one of the *a priori* categories through which we obtain experience.) We ourselves make the spatiotemporal world of appearances that we know and study as nature; and scientific knowledge is valid and objective precisely insofar as it refers to this world. Transcendental critique thus establishes the limits of pure reason in uncovering the mode of our *a priori* knowledge of objects.

Reason also, however, in its practical employment – when addressing itself to what should be done, rather than what can be known – teaches us that a noumenal world of spontaneous moral action complements the phenomenal world in which every event has a cause. Kant's central theme throughout his philosophy is the *autonomy* of the subject; and in a sequence of publications culminating in the *Critique of Practical*



*Reason* (1788), he elaborates the moral law or categorical imperative as the sheerly formal necessity of an action divorced from any particular end or purpose, guided only by the universalizing principle of its form. When we act as if our actions were to become universal law, we act as autonomous, free beings, subject only to the law we give ourselves. Hence another way of expressing the moral law becomes: act so as always to treat all rational entities, including oneself, as ends rather than means. We know this law *immediately*, and in knowing it we know our freedom as a rational entity. At the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant writes of the “awe and admiration” evoked by “the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me” (166); the moral law yields us a sublime feeling of transcending our finite imbrication in the world of sensory appearance.

Kant himself felt that an “immense gulf” separated “the domain of the concept of nature, the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, the supersensible,” even though “the concept of freedom” – the moral law – is clearly supposed to “actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws” (*Critique of Judgment* 14–15). In the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) he seeks to provide a bridge between these domains by examining the conditions of possibility of the power of judgment itself. Kant distinguishes between “determinative” judgment (in which we subordinate a particular case to a general rule) and “reflective” judgment (in which, the rule not being given in advance, we “ascend from the particular in nature to the universal”) (19). The *Critique of Judgment* considers two kinds of reflective judgment: aesthetic judgments of taste and teleological judgments. Judgments of taste disclose a purely subjective necessity and universality: the judgment “this is beautiful” implies universal assent (as opposed to the judgment “I like this,” which does not), even though aesthetic judgments have no objectivity, since they appeal to no concept, and are disinterested in the sense of having no investment in the actual existence of the object being judged. They refer back only to the activity of judgment itself. The experience of the beautiful conveys the pleasurable feeling of a harmony among our own cognitive faculties and between those faculties and nature; the experience of the sublime “expands the soul” and prepares for the moral law (135). The other kind of reflective judgment that Kant considers is teleological judgment. Teleological judgments legitimately extend our knowledge of nature when we judge natural purposiveness *as if* it were objective. We thereby discover God as the intent we must presuppose in order to comprehend nature as a unity. Thus both aesthetic and teleological judgment lead us – if on complex and at times uncertain paths – toward the “transition from our way of thinking in terms of principles of nature to our way of thinking in terms of principles of freedom” (15).

### **German Idealism: Fichte, Schelling, Hegel**

It would be hard to overstate the importance of Kant’s critical philosophy for philosophically minded German (and, increasingly, European) writers from the late 1780s onward. (And though in this context we are focusing only on the critical

project, it must be added that Kant was the author of extremely influential texts on many other subjects: enlightenment, cosmopolitanism, anthropology, the university, peace and war.) In German-speaking Europe, important responses to, arguments with, and affirmations and criticisms of Kant proliferate during the closing years of the eighteenth century in the work of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Solomon Maimon, Moses Mendelssohn, Karl Leonhard Reinhold, and Gottlob Ernst Schulze. I will here focus on the emergence of early German idealism in the writings of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, and Hegel. In passing, though, we should note that Kant's aesthetics received important recasting in various texts by Schiller, above all in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (1794), a treatise that laid the groundwork for later writings on aesthetic culture such as Matthew Arnold's.

Fichte, who first came to fame as the author of an anonymous pamphlet so Kantian in its approach that it was briefly attributed to Kant, always saw his work as remaining true to the spirit of Kantian critical philosophy. That said, he effected a dramatic departure from Kant (who, though initially supportive of Fichte, eventually withdrew his approval). Among the philosophical problems that Kant bequeathed to his immediate heirs, two in particular inspired debate: how to reconcile human freedom with natural necessity, and how to reconcile the strictures of critical philosophy with the limits it claimed to be able to set itself. (If causality is a mere category of the understanding, by what right do we posit the existence of a "thing in itself," a *Ding an sich* that would be the unknowable "cause" of knowable phenomena?) Fichte, who taught at Jena with great success from 1794 to 1799, published his first version of his own systematic philosophy, which he called *Wissenschaftslehre* ("Doctrine of Science") during the 1794–1795 school year. (He revised his exposition of his system in subsequent years, and continued to make substantial revisions to his approach until his death in 1814; but the first version concerns us here, as the text that the Jena Romantics read with interest, and with which they took issue.) In the 1794 version, titled *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte, influenced in various ways by several of Kant's critics, discarded the *Ding an sich*, and emphasized as the necessary starting point of all philosophy the affirmation of freedom as the "I." It is crucial to note that this "I" is not an empirical I, but is rather, according to Fichte, the condition of possibility of empirical consciousness. This transcendental I posits itself immediately as self-identity; its reflection on itself is equally a constitutive act. (In the idiom of speech act theory, one could say that the I's cognition of itself is simultaneously a performance of itself.) And in the very act of positing itself, the I has *also* posited that which it is not, the Not-I; for no I can exist in the absence of limits that define it. Out of this primordial dialectic Fichte unfolds a philosophical system – one that claims to have located freedom as the condition of possibility of coherent phenomenal experience.

Fichte's influence was massive during his six years in Jena (1794–1799), though he was more successful in inspiring argument than in founding a coherent school. His most immediate philosophical heir was the extraordinarily precocious Schelling, who had been classmates and friends with Hegel and Hölderlin (both five years older

than he) at the Protestant seminary in Tübingen, and who at the age of twenty was already publishing significant philosophical texts. Despite its overtly Fichtean title, Schelling's *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* (1795) was already registering a concern for the "not-I" – or rather, for a thinking of being that would go beyond the "I" and its "not-I" – that was to shape his approach to philosophy. Influenced by Hölderlin, Schelling sought ways to avoid the problem of the *Ding an sich* while registering nature's difference from the knowing mind. To this end he developed, in his *Naturphilosophie* of the later 1790s, a theory of productive nature (that is, of nature as a subject in its own right rather than simply as the object of a subject's knowledge). Schelling's subsequent *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) displays the influence of Novalis and Schlegel – with whom Schelling became acquainted during his years of teaching at Jena from 1798 to 1803 – in its recourse to the work of art as the fulfillment of philosophy itself: art "knows" its own imbrication in the unknowable. The unknowable is one of Schelling's persistent themes throughout his long career. Among his most enduring works is *On the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809), which, though it falls outside the Jena era, deserves mention as a text that has elicited powerful interpretations from Heidegger to the present day (see Clark, Žižek and von Schelling). In this text Schelling characterizes the origin as a non-ground (*Ungrund*) about which nothing can be said, and writes hauntingly of "the sadness which adheres to all finite life, and inasmuch as there is even in God himself a condition at least relatively independent, there is in him, too, a source of sadness. . . . From it comes the veil of sadness which is spread over the whole of nature, the deep indestructible melancholy of all life" (79).

It remains to say a word about the most systematic and ultimately by far the most influential of the German idealists, Hegel. Hegel plays no role in the story of early German Romanticism, a fact that helps me justify the brevity with which I summarize his work here – though any broad survey of "philosophy and Romanticism" obviously needs to pay at least some attention to Hegel, who rivals Kant as one of the most important figures in the history of Western philosophy. By the precocious standards of his circle, Hegel was a slow starter. His first published philosophical work, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (1801), resulted in his suffering for many years the indignity of being regarded as a follower of the considerably younger Schelling. With the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807: a text he famously completed just as Napoleon was seizing Jena in 1806), Hegel began to develop his mature system of philosophy. Hegel's great achievement is to have placed philosophy within history in order to absorb history into philosophy. The *Phenomenology*, often characterized as a philosophical *Bildungsroman*, narrates a dialectical progress that begins with the seeming immediacy of sense certainty (I point to an object; I say "this"). This apparently concrete moment, however, devolves into utter abstraction and generality ("this" balloons into emptiness), requiring a further movement of negation, and so on. The power of determinate negation drives the narrative forward through the travails of self-consciousness (which demands recognition from another self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology's* famous "lordship and bondage" episode) toward social being, and

ultimately the culmination of history in absolute knowledge. The Kantian problem of the *Ding an sich* is devoured in the restless movement of a negativity that always already transgresses the constitutive limits it generates. The *Phenomenology* is early Hegel; it has been massively influential and has attracted many strong readings (see, for example, Comay), though of course any serious study of Hegelian philosophy as a whole would require one to engage the more systematic work of his later period. In the present context, however, we may restrict ourselves to recalling Hegel's hostility to the Jena Romantics in his posthumously published *Aesthetics* (1835). For it is now time to turn to the Romantics themselves, in order to sketch briefly the interventions and differences they made in the story of 1790s post-Kantian philosophy.

### Early German Romanticism: Schlegel, Novalis, Hölderlin

It was once common to dismiss the Jena Romantic writers Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis as philosophical dilettantes; but scholars such as Ernst Behler, Hans Eichner, Dieter Henrich, and Manfred Frank have established Schlegel and Novalis, along with Hölderlin (whose literary work, so intensely engaged by Martin Heidegger, has long been treated with philosophical respect) as major if eccentric and fugitive figures in the post-Kantian philosophical renaissance. Henrich and Frank propose a "constellation" approach to the Romantics, teasing out their philosophical positions from their correspondence and unpublished papers as well as their public writings. "Constellation" is an appropriate metaphor: these writers enjoyed richly intellectual relationships both with each other and their immediate circle, and with the philosophical world, and aspired to a collectively mediated philosophy (*Symphilosophie*). As noted above, Hölderlin knew Hegel and Schelling from the Tübingen seminary; though he was never part of the Jena circle around the Schlegels, he was in Jena in 1795, attended Fichte's lectures, and met Novalis. Novalis, for his part, had had the Kantian philosopher Carl Schmid as a tutor, and had studied in 1790–1791 with Fichte's precursor in the philosophy chair at Jena, Karl Reinhold (who taught Kantian philosophy at Jena from 1789 to 1794); he was well prepared to respond carefully and critically to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* in 1794–1795. Friedrich Schlegel came to Jena in 1796 to join his older brother August Wilhelm and study philosophy; they founded the journal *Athenäum*, which ran for two years (1798–1800) and published some of the most famous of the Jena romantics' poems, essays, epigrams, and fragments. Tangential though it is to our topic, we might also note that the Jena circle has a claim to being Europe's first famous avant-garde literary group – in good part because the Schlegels at this point in their careers were leading interesting lives. In 1795, August married the brilliant firebrand Caroline Michaelis, famous for having participated in the short-lived revolution in Mainz; in 1797, Friedrich eloped with the already-married Dorothea Veit, daughter of Moses Mendelssohn (she divorced the banker Simon Veit in 1799, the same year that Friedrich brought out *Lucinde*, his scandalous *roman-à-clef* about the affair). In 1801 Caroline left August Schlegel for Friedrich Schelling (August subsequently enjoyed a long-lasting

relationship with Mme. de Staël). Hegel could count on memories of these lurid doings when, in his lectures on aesthetics in Berlin in the 1820s, he denounced the “worthless yearning natures” of the Jena Romantics – and of Friedrich Schlegel in particular, who “invented” Romantic irony, “the most inartistic of all principles” (68).

Hegel had reason to be anxious about Schlegel, whose writings on irony transformed the Fichtean philosophy of reflection into a dizzying spiral, a reflexive movement shadowed by incomprehensibility. Romantic irony can take the form of a recessively reflective consciousness; but as Walter Benjamin noted in his pathbreaking dissertation of 1920, Schlegel’s notion of irony is not simply subjectivizing. For Schlegel, irony also “takes hold of the material but also disregards the unity of poetic form. . . . The ironization of form consists in its freely willed destruction” (Benjamin 163). The formal expression of this destruction of form is the fragment. The Romantic fragment embodies the impossibility of the totality toward which it gestures. On the one hand, as Manfred Frank comments, the fragment “grants unity to chaos”; on the other hand, bound to its own particularity, it “creates not totality but rather an ensemble of individual positions, each of which goes against the other” (211). Its gesture of totalization reiterates the finite singularity of its own performance.

It is possible to stress, as the “constellation” school tends to do, the skepticism and realism of Hölderlin and the Jena Romantics. This approach has had the merit of demolishing the image of Schlegel as a dissolute prankster and Novalis as an ethereal dreamer; it also draws attention to an unquestionably important dimension of the Romantic critique of Fichte. As Schlegel puts it, “In Fichte’s philosophy something creeps in that is not I, nor comes from the I, and which is also not merely not-I” (Schlegel 18: 25). Or as Novalis writes in the first fragment of *Blüthenstaub* (*Pollen*) (written in 1797–1798, and published in *Athenäum*), “Everywhere we seek the unconditioned, but find only things” (23). The Romantics, whose observations often overlap with positions taken by Schelling during these years, remain attentive to the stubborn resistance of “things” to conceptual dominance, and frequently emphasize the inability of consciousness to know its own ground or being. Hölderlin’s fragment “Urtheil und Seyn” (“Judgment and Being,” 1795) plays on an evocative false etymology in order to thematize judgment as division (*Ur-teil*), thereby stressing the difference between being as original unity and the divisive act of being’s apprehension. Hölderlin, Novalis, and Schlegel all treat the idealist attempt to ground thought in a first principle with a degree of skepticism. And they all grant the work of art a certain privileged access to the primordial philosophical scene in which being withdraws from intelligibility. Their notion of the nature of the work of art develops in and through their intense engagement with the idealist adventure in thought. Art, knowing the force of unknowability, brings to an epitome the project of reflective philosophy; as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue, the artwork in its absoluteness “aggravates and radicalizes the thinking of totality and the Subject” (15). Yet this “literary absolute” not only stresses the inaccessibility of being; it also disturbs the inner workings of reflection.

## Legacies

Thanks in good part to the work of scholars such as Henrich and Frank, it has become indisputable that the German Romantics (meaning here Schlegel, Novalis, and Hölderlin in particular) rigorously critique the reflective model of Fichte's early versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (occasionally with considerable irreverence, as when Schlegel translates Fichtean philosophy into an idiom of sexual innuendo in a notorious section of his novel *Lucinde*). The precise nature of that critique, however, remains in dispute. Frank's emphasis on the Romantic theme of a skeptically motivated striving toward a reinstated "thing in itself" arguably underestimates the radicalism of the Romantic critique. A famous remark of Schlegel's from 1800 (not published during his lifetime) reads: "Irony is a permanent parabasis [*permanente Parekbase*]" (Schlegel 18: 85). Parabasis, which translates as stepping beside or beyond (it has a rarer meaning of "error" or "illusion," and in New Testament Greek it means "transgression"), is a term from Attic Old Comedy: it refers to points in the drama when the action is interrupted, the actors leave the stage, and the chorus, taking off its masks, steps forward to address the audience. (Parabasis is a recurrent motif in dramas by Schlegel's close friend, Ludwig Tieck.) A permanent parabasis would be sheer paradox – a continuous interruption. It is conceptually impossible; unlike Frank's model of infinite striving, it disarticulates reflection from within. A number of Schlegel's writings about irony put emphasis on a rupture at the heart of reflective, dialectical, or subjective recursivity, as in the following remark targeting the great German theme and figure of *Bildung* (shaping, formation, education): "*Bildung* is antithetical synthesis, and completion to the point of irony. – The inner being of a person who has achieved a certain height and universality of *Bildung* is a continuing chain of the most monstrous revolutions [*ungeheuersten Revolutionen*]" (Schlegel 18: 82). Such moments provide sustenance for Winfried Menninghaus's claim that Schlegel anticipates "the poststructuralist metacritique" (25), at least to the extent that we take "metacritique" in Schlegelian fashion to signal an unaccountable, uncontrollable, supplement within reflection – that is, the ironic spiral of a "revolution" that never revolves back to itself as self-understanding, thereby revealing something "monstrous" in the very medium or fabric of reflection itself.

Read in this way, the Romantics disclose a "literary absolute" that "aggravates and radicalizes the thinking of totality and the Subject" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 15) to the point that "totality" and "the Subject" threaten to become the illusory afterimage of a fundamental rupture, discontinuity, or difference. Samuel Weber thus writes of a moment in Hölderlin similar to those moments in Schlegel's work that I gloss above: "In Hölderlin's insistence on the need 'to pay attention to each thing,' repetition replaces reflection, but does not abolish it. Repetition, in the sense of transformative recurrence, is what arises when reflection is no longer governed by the homogeneity and unity of a Self" (18). This is also to say that, at the crossroads of philosophy and literature, the early German Romantics not only theorized a fully modern idea of "literature"; in so doing they also unleashed,

as Hegel suspected, the entrancing and threatening specter of “theory” as the monstrous concatenation of philosophy-as-literature. Inevitably, an ambivalent romance with theory became, at a certain point in its development, part of the drama of “Romanticism” as a field of study in the university. And that in turn has meant that philosophy and Romanticism continue to enjoy and suffer their strange elective affinity.

See IMAGINATION; NARRATIVE; POETICS; SUBLIME.

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# Religion

*Michael Tomko*

The French Revolution has long been considered not only the defining historical event that shaped Romanticism but also an exemplary instance of secularization. In what the English Catholic lawyer and man of letters Charles Butler referred to as the “un-catholicizing of the calendar” (232), the French Republic’s newly invented system of days, months, and years attempted in 1793 to do away with the traditional progression of saints’ feasts and Christian holidays that had paced French life. On November 10, 1793, the “Goddess of Reason” processed to the altar of the Cathedral of Notre Dame to mark the first celebration of the “Fête de la Raison.” Yet the role of religion is more complex than these secular substitutions would at first suggest, particularly in the way the Revolution was received in Britain. In a speech commemorating Britain’s Glorious Revolution of 1688, the Unitarian minister Richard Price greeted the events of 1789 with religious awe, proclaiming, in the words Simeon had used for the Christ child, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation” (Price 49, quoting Luke 2: 29–30). The non-conforming Price saw the Revolution not as the launching of modernity but as a belated French Reformation that mirrored Britain’s rejection of Roman Catholicism. Price’s oration prompted the powerful counterrevolutionary polemic of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), which also resounded with religious rhetoric. Burke, who was himself an Anglican but one with family ties to Irish Catholicism, rails against Price as un-English and un-Christian and derisively and repeatedly notes that the address took place at the dissenting chapel of London’s “Old Jewry” (93). Even the reception of the revolutionary debate was marked by persistent religious controversy. In James Gillray’s *Smelling out a Rat or the Atheistical Revolutionist Disturbed in his Midnight Calculations* (1790), the satirical political cartoonist shows the spiritual form of Burke – often caricatured as a Jesuit

priest by the press – swooping in with Cross and Crown on Price in his study where he displays a commemorative picture of Charles I's 1649 beheading by the Puritan Revolutionaries of the English Civil War.

The Revolution controversy is just one example of the way that religion saturated British life between 1780 and 1830. Contrary to accounts of religion's increasing isolation in the Romantic period, the conflict between Price and Burke demonstrates the type of pervasiveness emphasized by J. C. D. Clark in *English Society, 1660–1832* (2000):

From the perspective of the present, we are apt to treat religion as a specialized activity within the realm of private opinion, and to see connections between “religious” and “secular” phenomena as, at best, esoteric and tenuous ones. From the Reformation to the nineteenth century, however, Christianity was characterized by a drive to engage with and work through the material realm in a way which implied no essential difference of kind between the two. (29)

The established Anglican Church, which was constitutionally allied with the British state, was at the center of this social world in which “no uncrossable gulf separated the seen from the unseen” (29–30). Much of the history of the Romantic period was shaped by reactions to this predominance by those it disenfranchised: Protestant Dissenters who rejected Anglicanism's more traditional theological doctrines and its preservation of the ecclesiastical authority of bishops; Catholics in Ireland and England who remained loyal to Rome; secularists who wanted to break the confessional apparatus of the state; and Jews and other non-Christians who struggled to find their place in British society. Within Anglicanism itself, the challenging evangelical spirit of the Methodist movement eventually led to its break from the Established Church after John Wesley's 1791 death. Evangelicals who remained within the Anglican fold were politically active and influential. Along with Quakers such as Thomas Clarkson, Evangelicals led by William Wilberforce spearheaded the abolition campaign that successfully banned the slave trade in 1807. The Evangelical Hannah More attacked Tom Paine's irreligion in the wake of the French Revolution, and, around the time of the 1819 Peterloo Massacre, the government persecuted the radical Richard Carlile on charges of “seditious libel and blasphemy” for republishing Paine's skeptical works. Radicals and Dissenters often collaborated in pushing for parliamentary reform, and their most prominent causes were the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (which until 1828 discriminated against all religious nonconformists) and Catholic Emancipation (which would allow Catholics to sit in Parliament). Before its passage in 1829, the latter dominated Irish and British politics in the 1820s and was often linked to the parallel campaign for Jewish Emancipation. To this domestic imbroglio should be added imperial encounters with Muslim, Hindu, and Caribbean religious practices as well as persistent international rivalries with the Catholic powers of Spain and France. Both at home and abroad, the Romantic period in Britain was formed, deformed, and reformed by religion.

Despite this historical prevalence, there is a long-standing debate in romantic studies about the relevance of religion for understanding Romanticism. Romantic criticism oscillates between making the dismissal of religion the *sine qua non* for the emergence of Romantic literature and viewing Romanticism as inextricably bound up with religious sensibilities, discourses, and communities. In his 1924 article parsing the varieties of Romanticisms, A. O. Lovejoy delineates one conception, particularly prevalent in Germany, that was “essentially Christian” (246). Yet when René Wellek attempted to gather together the crusts from Lovejoy’s analysis, his 1949 synthesis leaves behind any remnants of religion or subsumes them into the unifying categories of “imagination, symbol, myth, and organic nature” (“Romanticism” 220). Yet in studying this secularized “central creed” (Wellek, “Romanticism” 220) in the work of Blake, an otherwise skeptical young Thomas Merton identified with the “rebellion of the lover of the living God” and eventually became a Trappist monk and one of the twentieth century’s most prominent spiritual writers (97). While T. E. Hulme famously derided Romanticism as “spilt religion” (118), the critic and Christian writer C. S. Lewis urged his readers in a 1943 essay to follow its “bright drops on the floor” to “taste the cup itself” (16), an example of Romanticism as a “dialectic of Desire” with a divine culmination (15). These divergent approaches have in common a need to explain two significant, but contrasting, elements that appear in Romantic literature, especially within the canonical sextet of major Romantic poets in England. The critical strand abjecting religion regards the ubiquity of ostensibly theological diction not as evidence of any spiritual revival, but as confirmation that, in secular modernity, literature has essentially superseded religion’s provision of profound thought and deep feeling. The other position, however, sees the persistence of devotional language as a testament to a deep-seated quest for transcendence, despite the Romantics’ immanent emphasis on human life and nature.

This antimony is too rooted in Romantic studies to be resolved in this essay. It goes beyond twentieth-century criticism into the reception of the Romantics in the Victorian period. John Henry Newman read Robert Southey’s Islamic epic *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and became convinced he had a “mission” (24–25); while the utilitarian materialist John Stuart Mill turned to S. T. Coleridge, despite the poet’s lifelong theological peripatetic, as symbolic of what the modern mind needed to counterbalance the cold but necessary calculations of Jeremy Bentham. When Matthew Arnold argued that the study of literature needed to take over Christianity’s role of moral and social formation because the “fact is failing” religion (161), he recommended opening the book of Wordsworth instead. Given Arnold’s influence in institutionalizing English studies, these initial religious sinuosities in Romantic studies may have partially contributed to the persistently complicated status of scholarly studies of “religion and literature.”<sup>1</sup> This essay will seek to illuminate the most recent manifestations of religion in Romantic studies, beginning with the model of secularization that emerged in the wake of M. H. Abrams’s *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971). This dominant narrative, however, has been challenged recently by a wave of New Historicist criticism that has exhumed Romanticism’s

emergence within and engagement with the discourses and politics of public religion in the period. Finally, I ask whether this critical moment, in which historicist criticism has unsettled the historical secularization narrative, can present new theoretical insights into the conjunction of religion and Romanticism. The concluding section introduces recent developments in post-secular theology and in theory's "religious turn" in order to reconsider the theological reach of this essay's touchstone text, *Hellas* (1822) by P. B. Shelley – a poet beloved both by Francis Thompson, the English Catholic poet and author of "The Hound of Heaven," and by Bertrand Russell, the analytical philosopher and author of "Why I am not a Christian."

### Romanticism, Secularization, and "Natural Magic"

A brief review of the foundational debate between Lovejoy and Wellek can illustrate why a historical narrative of secularization, which holds that scientific and technological modernization necessarily and inevitably leads to a crisis and decline in religious belief for society and the individual, played such an important role in Romantic studies.<sup>2</sup> Lovejoy was adamant that one of Romanticism's meanings consisted of "characteristically Christian modes of thought and feeling – of a mystical and otherworldly type of religion and a sense of the moral struggle as the distinctive fact in human experience" (247–248). Wellek, however, scours any residue of religion from the European landscape of Romanticism. When he points to the "undeniable fact that romanticism in Germany . . . affected all human endeavors – philosophy, politics, philology, history, science, and all the other arts," he elides any mention of religion ("Concept" 166). In his discussion of the seminal text of post-Revolutionary French theological aesthetics, *La Génie du Christianisme* (1802), Wellek renders Chateaubriand a "mythologist and symbolist *par excellence*" (170). In labelling Gérard de Nerval as the "most mystical, 'supernatural,' of the French romantics" ("Concept" 176), he evokes but also undermines a "supernatural" within distancing quotation marks. Critics following Wellek's relegation of studying Romantic religion to an "undeserved status" ("Romanticism" 221) thus faced a dilemma: how to explain encounters with religious diction and tropes in texts when the dominant framework of Romanticism had, by definition, disallowed reference to religion?

Wellek's containment of a Romantic "supernatural" anticipates the way that a secularization narrative, which found its culminating articulation in Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism*, could help to resolve this paradox. Abrams's title borrows its phrase from Thomas Carlyle and emulates Wordsworth's passing Jehovah's throne "unalarmed" to enter into the "Mind of Man" (ll. 24–25). This aesthetic that sought to "naturalize the supernatural and . . . humanize the divine" drew on the legacy of Christian Europe but translated its "theological concepts, images, and plot patterns" to a search for happiness in the natural, finite world (Abrams, *Natural* 68, 65). In addition to explaining the discrepancy over religion between Lovejoy and

Wellek, the work's secularization narrative provided a powerful structural model for describing an extensive cultural movement. Abrams outlines a unified, compelling version of Romanticism that is thoughtful enough to transform the European cultural inheritance, capacious enough to encompass Blake's engravings in London and Hegel's spiritual phenomenology in Jena, and dynamic enough to speak to readers across centuries. While the philosophic and poetic project of secularizing religion, according to Abrams, was galvanized by the French Revolution and subsequent "immanence of chaos" (68), it yields a Romanticism that transcends this history into a quasi-spiritual sphere.

The secularization narrative in *Natural Supernaturalism* takes its warrant from the Romantics themselves. Its critical apparatus proceeds, as Abrams writes, "in Wordsworth's terms" (65). Before outlining an argument formed around Wordsworth's "Prospectus to *The Recluse*," the book opens by quoting Shelley's claim that contemporary literature had arisen from a "new birth" in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), another meta-level theoretical text offering a Romantic self-definition. This circularity accounts for some of the explanatory power of Abrams's categories, especially for a work like *Hellas* that self-consciously engages religion and literature. Coming after Shelley's *annus mirabilis* and before the haunting *The Triumph of Life*, *Hellas* occupies an awkward place within Shelley's corpus. On the one hand, it shows continuity with works such as *Prometheus Unbound* (1819) in rewriting a classical Greek play (Aeschylus' *Persians*) according to Shelley's own thought and mature poetic style. On the other hand, it also seems uncharacteristically topical. Shelley confesses his allusions to the Greek War of Independence are based on "newspaper erudition" (431). *Hellas* also aims to "make news" – to redirect European foreign policy in support of the Greek cause and to rekindle a spirit of liberty at home in Britain. Despite the interventionist stance articulated in the preface, materials in the play itself, however, align with the type of transcendence of politics into the imagination that Abrams hailed. In the play's key scene, Mahmud, the Ottoman Emperor denounced by the chorus of enslaved Greek women, has a monitory historical vision of the Fall of Constantinople. Coupled with the declaration of his own empire's mutability by the phantom of his imperial predecessor, this vatic episode shakes his confidence and more importantly dispels his own will to power. In the resulting *metanoia*, or conversion, he realizes there is "Woe both to those that suffer and inflict" (l. 898) and leaves his throne room to attempt to subdue his own army's "drunkenness of triumph" that is only the "Victory" of "poor slaves" (ll. 929–930).

Shelley's grand political desideratum – the abdication of a throne that will remain unfilled – is accomplished through the type of poetic act, a secularized prophecy as outlined by Abrams, that Shelley himself describes in *A Defence of Poetry*. The Jewish magi Ahaseurus who conjures the pivotal vision explicitly disavows any supernatural status above ordinary humanity, and Shelley refers to the vision in the notes as "natural magic" (*Hellas* 463n6). Yet his elevated power of "thought" enables him to "make the future present" through these insubstantial visions of a historical panorama and the poetic soliloquy of the long-deceased Mahmud the Second (l. 740, 759). The wisdom

of Ahaseurus is clearly the wisdom of the poet and his re-creations, acts of poetry. The section frequently reads as a paraphrase of the *Defence*: “The coming age is shadowed on the past/As on a glass”; “Dodona’s forest to an acorn’s cup/Is that which has been, or will be, to that/Which is”; “The Past/Now stands before thee like an Incarnation/Of the To-come” (ll. 805–806, 793–795, 852–854). This crucial moment can thus be read as the intervention of the naturalized prophet whose bardic imagination reshapes the mental outlook of the characters and reader. The next stage of history – the incarnated “To-come” in the words of *Hellas* or the “new birth” of the *Defence* – follows a historical secularization narrative:

Islam must fall, but we will reign together  
Over its ruins in the world of death –  
And if the trunk be dry, yet shall the seed  
Unfold itself even in the shape of that  
Which gathers birth in its decay . . . (887–891)

Romantic Orientalism marks this speech, which narrates the organic decay of the age of religion and the hopeful emergence of a new age. Yet the European Reformation underwrites this prediction of the “fall of Islam.” This scene recalls the return of the ghost of Hamlet’s father Claudius from purgatory, which, as Stephen Greenblatt has argued in *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001), conjured up all the political and theological associations of the Papist “Old Religion” for its Early Modern audience. This historical interlay thus signals an overarching historical narrative of necessary and welcome religious decline – whether of medieval Catholicism, Islam, or nineteenth-century institutional Christianity.

Abrams would claim that the Romantics’ version of “natural supernaturalism” as exemplified in *Hellas* enables a move beyond political and social history, a transcendence which itself is reliant upon an intellectual history of religious secularization:

But since they lived, inescapably, after the Enlightenment, Romantic writers revived these ancient matters with a difference: they undertook to save the overview of human history and destiny, the experiential paradigms, and the cardinal values of their religious heritage, by reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent, for the time being. (*Natural* 66)

What can be thought and said by Romanticism is strictly, “inescapably,” dictated by the Enlightenment, whose progress in this account necessarily removed all possibility of any religious claims to truth. Romanticism’s salvaged sacredness is thus for its specific time in history and only “for the time being.” It represents a temporary synthesis of new and old needed to sustain European culture through a transitional phase until the high argument of Miltonic prophecy can securely give way to the more mundane sufficiencies of a Wallace Stevens, who is also hailed as a Romantic inheritor by Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman in their early, influential work.

Bloom's *The Visionary Company* (1961), which is dedicated to Abrams, and Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787–1814* (1964) both predate *Natural Supernaturalism*, but the structure of their arguments implicitly relies on the secularization narrative propounded in Abrams's work. This is particularly striking in the case of Bloom who advances that there "is no more important point to be made about English Romantic poetry" than its roots in the "tradition of Protestant dissent" and the "nonconformist vision that descended from the Left Wing of England's Puritan movement" (*Visionary* xvii). Given the strength of this claim, it is particularly remarkable how strongly the book, in turn, disavows any sustained connection between the Romantics and nonconformity, religious dissent, and Protestantism. The opening of the first chapter thunders away against the notion that the Romantics may have had any meaningful religious belief or ties to any religious communities (5). The half-gods go so that Bloom's vision of imaginative prophecy can arrive, with a "way of seeing, and of living, a more human life" (xxiii–xxiv). The secularization narrative underwrites Bloom's invocation and subsequent repudiation of the Protestant tradition and his uncompromising division of "supernatural religion" and "natural passion" (xxv). Bloom's idiosyncratic formulation of secularization focuses on the Romantics' shared need to overcome the Puritanical John Milton in order to emerge as strong poets. Life to Milton's Protestantism would be death to the Romantics.

A similar progression characterizes Hartman's critical work. Hartman is rightly associated with the deconstructionist movement, sometimes grouped as the Yale School in Romantic studies, but there has also rightly been a sense that this poststructuralist label has not been comprehensive enough to contain Hartman's variegated writing and quicksilver mind. Hartman's engagement with religion is one such excessive element. *Wordsworth's Poetry* features religious discourse from its mysterious epigraph on God and nature from 1 Kings (vii); to its description of the "consecration," "devotion," and "worship" involved in Wordsworth's poetry (35–36); to the influential framing of Wordsworth's poetic growth within the *via negativa*, or negative theology, of Christian mysticism (33–69). As is evident in Hartman's definition of "apocalypse," this theological language, however, is itself framed by the same sense as Welck's contained, secularized "supernatural":

By "apocalyptic," as in "apocalyptic imagination," I intend the Apocalypse of St. John (the Book of Revelation), and, more generally, the kind of imagination that is concerned with the supernatural and especially the Last Things. The term may also describe a mind which actively desires the inauguration of a totally new epoch, whether preceding or following the end of days. (x)

The religious element of the term may come first here, but the inner and mental apocalypse effectively subsumes the historical and biblical senses. While this model of secularization grants Hartman the hermeneutic freedom that enables his now-canonical readings, it may also have limited, or at least contained, his line of inquiry in some ways. For instance, the major premise of Wordsworth's *via naturaliter negativa*, or natural negative way, is that nature baffles the poet's quest to find

ultimate meaning in nature itself. The darkening of the poet's vision turns him toward the powers of his own imagination and thus prompts a journey that ultimately culminates in a mystical union of imagination and nature. On the one hand, Hartman describes the negative way being brought on "gradually, mercifully" (41), implying that nature possesses an agency with sufficient reason to gradate carefully and sufficient will to commiserate effectively. On the other hand, Hartman also describes how the poet "is fostered," "is warned," and "is weaned" by nature (42), a recurrent use of the passive voice that attributes passivity to nature. I highlight this paradox not to critique Hartman's reading (which follows Wordsworth in this respect), but rather to show that the *via naturaliter negativa* naturally opens up into theological questions that are beyond the delimited framework of *Wordsworth's Poetry*. While Bloom's and Hartman's scholarship is often linked to the Yale School's Derridean readings of Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (Bloom 1979), it may be that the 1981 *festschrift* for Abrams, *High Romantic Argument*, is as significant as a representative text. While *High Romantic Argument* shows the gulf fixed between poststructuralists like Jonathan Culler and Abrams's resilient stance as a self-described "unreconstructed humanist" (Abrams "Reply," 174), Hartman's praise for Abrams's provision of a secularization narrative for Romantic studies passes without controversy ("Poetics" 34–37). This tacit approval of the handling of the "supernatural" demonstrates not a diminution of its importance, but rather a widespread acceptance of secularization as a critical assumption.

### **"Of Christianity and Civilization": New Historicism and Religious Politics**

The critical consensus on secularization proved durable. Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) pointedly criticized many standard views in Romantic studies, including their tendency to follow Romanticism's "self-representations" and to applaud the Romantics' evasive "displacement" of the socioeconomic sphere as transcendence (1). Yet McGann's critique left much of the prevailing interpretative model intact. The six, male poets of English Romanticism were still transforming traditional devotional language into an apotheosis of the poetic imagination. *Contra* Abrams, Hartman, and Bloom, however, McGann adversely assesses this move and chastens successive generations of scholars for their "uncritical absorption" of it (1). Yet McGann's anti-religious language itself perpetuates the secularizing perspective of the "priests and clerics of Romanticism" (1). Robert Ryan's *The Romantic Reformation* (1997) broke from this critical orthodoxy. Rather than seeing the Romantics as necessarily working outside of, or against, religion in a presumed post-Enlightenment framework, he links their own discourses to ongoing religious controversies within the Romantic period. Ryan writes,

Instead of lamenting Romanticism as a political retreat, then, one may more usefully see it as a creative and effective engagement in the contemporary religious crisis, an



engagement that was perceived as having far-reaching consequences in the political order. (5)

Ryan may still see the “engagement” of the canonical poets as similar to the secularization that Abrams outlines, but he importantly recognizes the living nerve struck by religion and literature in an age when the alliance of Church and State was still at the heart of British public life. Ryan’s term “religious politics” not only located Romanticism amid dynamic debates within religion but also pointed to the political and social implications of religion in the Romantic period. This reconfiguration of a central trope of Romanticism – the poetic appeal to religious language and concepts such as prophecy or the Apocalypse – has had far-reaching consequences in Romantic studies by transforming our understanding of how Romantic literary works are structured by those contexts and inspirations.

Within this revision, Jon Mee’s work on the discourses and practitioners of “enthusiasm” – a long-established label for radical religious and political Protestant dissenters and nonconformists – has been one of the most fruitful and comprehensive. Contrary to the secularization narrative, Mee’s work does not assume that religion had obsolesced in Romantic-era Britain or that the Romantics were somehow elevated above whatever vestiges might anachronistically remain. Mee’s *Dangerous Enthusiasm* (1992) puts Blake into the streets where he was intermingling with congregations and sects whose religiously derived antinomian morals and recalcitrant political energies threatened the Anglican Establishment. Mee’s *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation* (2003) extends his recovery of this potent context beyond Blake to reveal the ambivalent engagement of the Romantics with the powers of enthusiasm. In discourses that stretch back to Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper) and David Hume, religious enthusiasm was consistently denounced as fanaticism, a self-involved false inspiration that fed on corporeal emotion and demagogic furor. Yet even the skeptical Hume and Shaftesbury were not ready to dismiss the energies of such groups as the Huguenots or the Scottish Congregationalists, because an individual or society lacking such inspiration would fall into either lethargy or priestly domination. Both thinkers thus sought modes of regulating – both harnessing and containing – enthusiasm into moderated sensibility or peaceable civil liberty. Enthusiasts like Citizen Lee – dedicated to “king-killing” but distrustful of the secular London Corresponding Society’s anti-Christianity – persisted into the Romantic period and so did the anxious fascination with them. Mee argues that while Blake thinks and acts like an unreserved enthusiast, his fellow “Romantics” Wordsworth and Coleridge share a genealogy with Shaftesbury and Hume and turn to the literary as a way to weave a circle thrice around the enthusiast. This remained a risky enterprise, however, as the spontaneity and overflow of poetic enthusiasm always threatened to defy resolution into tranquillity and to erupt with the radical potential of its religious analogue.

As in Mee’s work, Romantic religion has proven to be a copula between the world of the aesthetic and the world of the political. Mark Canuel in *Religion,*

*Toleration, and British Writing* (2002), for instance, examines the way Romantic literature engaged with “religious toleration” as one of the “Romantic period’s most compelling occasions for exploring the extent of, and limits upon, the liberality of liberal government” (2). In covering Romantic-period issues ranging from the move to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts to the campaign for Catholic Emancipation, Canuel’s work demonstrates the way religion has broadened the political relevance of Romanticism beyond the French Revolution. Daniel E. White’s *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (2006) and my own *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question* (2011) have pursued these areas in more depth, looking at the ways that attractions to and anxieties about these religious communities on the extremes of the Anglican Establishment’s *via media* shaped the forms of Romantic literature and the course of Romantic-period cultural history. This expansion has also beneficially revised the Romantic canon and map. Religion was a key component of the thought, writing, and interventions of the Unitarian woman poet Anna Letitia Barbauld, who features prominently in the works of Mee and White as well as in Colin Jager’s *Book of God* (2007). Reconciling religious difference was one of the goals in the national tales of the Anglo-Irish novelist Sydney Owenson, as Ina Ferris has shown in *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (2002). Julia M. Wright has followed the implications even further geographically and chronologically in tracing the ways that religion played a part in the British imperial sway over both Ireland and India in *Ireland, India, and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2007). While the recognition that religion is a critical category for cultural analysis of the Romantic period is certainly not responsible alone for these changes, it has contributed significantly to remaking a Romanticism that includes more women writers, broader geographies, and multiple genres.

This transformation has also cast canonical writers in a new light. *Hellas* shows Shelley’s awareness of the relevance of religious discourse in his contemporary world and his willingness to engage in “romantic religious politics.” In other words, the lyric drama is active in that register of religious ideas, culture, and institutions to which Abrams-era criticism was generally deaf but to which Canuel, Mee, White, and others have recently called attention. *Hellas*’s Christian language *should* clang for those who have read Shelley’s “The Necessity of Atheism” (1811) or who remember his provocative comments about “that detestable religion, the Christian” that shocked Wordsworth at the Immortal Dinner (Holmes 361). Nevertheless, *Hellas* unfurls a reading of history that centers on the advent of Jesus Christ:

A Power from the unknown God,  
A Promethean Conqueror, came;  
Like a triumphal path he trod  
The thorns of death and shame.  
A mortal shape to him  
Was like the vapour dim

Which the orient planet animates with light;  
 Hell, Sin, and Slavery came  
 Like bloodhounds mild and tame,  
 Nor preyed, until their Lord had taken flight;  
 The moon of Mahomet  
 Arose, and it shall set,  
 While blazoned as on Heaven's immortal noon  
 The cross leads generations on. (211–224)

This is, of course, a dramatic speech, not authorial prose, that originates from the Greek women of the chorus and thus voices, as Shelley himself notes, the “popular notions of Christianity” (462n2). Nevertheless, its complicated portrait of Christ’s humanity and divinity, if not its closing triumphalism, is shaped by Shelley’s own Platonism rather than any recognizable “popular” Anglicanism, Protestantism, or Catholicism. It also takes up themes that appear in his 1817 essay “On Christianity” and allusively links them to the protagonist of *Prometheus Unbound*. The preface makes similar claims without the dramatic apparatus by denouncing the Ottoman empire as the enemy of the interconnected virtues “of domestic happiness, of Christianity and civilization” (432). Why is Shelley’s “more favourable if strictly qualified view of Christianity” (Leader and O’Neill 805n548) articulated here? From a historical vantage, this discourse was meant to rally the Christian nationalism of Britons, whose power Linda Colley has highlighted in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (1992), to the cause of their Greek co-religionists. Writing in *The Examiner* while Shelley is composing *Hellas*, Leigh Hunt urges his English readers to view aid to the Greeks as “paying our duty as men, and vindicating our professions as Christians” (“Proposal” 689) and reprints an article from *The Times* asserting that the “Christian community cannot . . . be indifferent to the appeal which is made by the civilized Greeks” (“Greeks” 627). Alongside Hunt’s surprising profession of “our” Christianity, Shelley’s *Hellas* may feature natural supernaturalism, but it ultimately makes a more complicated intervention in public debate involving the “Christian community.”

The most extensive theoretical reflection on this complex inscription of religious discourses within the Romantic “Spirit of the Age” has come in Jager’s *Book of God*. His study, which focuses on Romanticism’s interconnection with arguments from design in British nineteenth-century natural theology, seeks to “challenge an interpretation of the period in which religion gives way to a secularized modernity posited as inevitable” (xi). Drawing on recent studies in the sociology of religion, Jager’s work suggests that the fact is failing the secularization narrative. In this revisionist account, Western Europe has been the exception to the general global trend of increased religiosity accompanying modernization. More pertinent for Romantic studies is the evidence suggesting that religious participation in the first half of England’s nineteenth century actually increased, a historical pattern incongruous with standard intellectual histories (27). In light of this, Jager calls for a reconceptualization of secularization that highlights

“multiple modernities” and “differentiation,” or redistribution of religion’s roles across society:

Thus if secularization is understood not as a loss of belief but rather as an example of the differentiation that characterizes modernity – a differentiation that necessarily entails neither religious decline nor the privatization of religion as a form of feeling or emotion – then we can start to analyze our own investment in secularization as that which underwrites and legitimates romanticism. (1)

Jager’s approach to secularization parallels his interpretation of design as a form of rhetoric that seeks to present a persuasive, moving worldview in a time when neither the theological tradition nor the materialist account of nature, human life, and the cosmos holds absolute sway. In such a contested, indeterminate moment of unfolding modernities, the religious discourses of *Hellas* find their important if still uneasy place.

Yet even though Romantic religious politics explain much about the religious discourse in *Hellas*, the text’s theological dimension cannot be reduced to a purely pragmatic contemporary intervention. First, summoning Christian sympathies would seem redundant when Shelley makes such a strong appeal to a common European identity founded on Hellenism. This secular rallying cry begins with the preface’s claim that Europe’s legal, literary, and artistic heritage renders everyone “Greeks” (431) and ends with the unveiling of “another Athens,” a “brighter Hellas” that replaces the New Jerusalem of the Apocalypse (1.1084, 1066). Second, the prudence involved in using Christian discourse as a cover story to advance a secular social agenda seems inconsistent with the overall spirit of Shelley’s text. The preface makes no self-defensive gestures with its denunciation of “the privileged gangs of murders and swindlers, called Sovereigns,” which Ollier cut to protect Shelley and himself, and it boldly critiques the “holy alliance,” whose ideology could not have been more un-Promethean (432). In general, silence about religion would certainly have been the wisest tactic in the wake of Carlyle’s prosecution. Jager has argued that theological arguments for design arise in supposedly secular times as persistent attempts “to address basic questions of meaning, purpose, and intention” (218). In other words, while the secularization narrative represents such philosophical and theological questions about humanity, the world, and God as resolutely settled, even “secular” poets and thinkers like Shelley could still be earnestly wrestling with them. Broadly speaking, the overlooking of these open questions in Romantic studies may be due in part to a reliance on reductive Enlightenment models of religion that were intended to close these considerations. To the degree that Romanticism engages Enlightenment views of religion, sometimes critically and sometimes sympathetically, it may be that the analytical tools provided by post-Enlightenment religious thinking are needed to understand more fully the Romantic relation to religion. A post-Enlightenment theology – often referred to as post-secular or postmodern theology – has only emerged in recent years, however, as the modes of inquiry derived from poststructuralism and phenomenology have helped to revitalize such

aspects of theology as mystery, awe, faith, the ethical response to the Other, and the close reading praxis of *lectio divina*.<sup>3</sup> Recently, Alain Badiou has returned to St. Paul; Terry Eagleton weighed the connections of faith, reason, and revolution; and Slavoj Žižek debated the meaning of Christianity with John Milbank, the champion of the theological movement Radical Orthodoxy. Such recent developments in post-secular thought may thus present an appropriate time to reexamine the theological and philosophical elements of Romanticism that were preempted by the secularization narrative. In the closing section, in addition to introducing two major figures of post-secular theory, Jean-Luc Marion and Jean-Luc Nancy, I will briefly consider the particular implications of their thought for rereading the theological dimensions of *Hellas*.

### **“That Broken Shrine”: Marion, Nancy, and Post-Secular Romanticisms**

In *Shelley's Process* (1988), Jerrold Hogle elucidates the paradox of Shelley as “a poet who disavows God in most of His ancient and Christian forms” but whose work is filled with talk of a Power or Spirit that is “so godlike” and “so persistently biblical” (7, 6). Hogle resolves the antimony by linking Shelley’s “God” to an interactively internal and communal process that projects, but also constantly revises values and commitments, and that finds its exemplary expression in Shelley’s agile, recursive style. In the remainder of this essay, I want to suggest another resolution of Hogle’s antimony. Specifically, I will argue first that Shelley in some ways anticipates two prominent lines of thought in the work of the French Catholic phenomenologist and theologian Jean-Luc Marion. First, Marion critiques “conceptual idolatry,” or a reduction of theology’s God to a metaphysical “god” by thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, who then go on to claim victory over metaphysics. Second, Marion makes a concomitant commitment to the political and aesthetic power of *eros* to overcome such reductive idolatry. In these ways, Marion’s idoloclasm can help to explain Shelley’s unlikely but persistent fascination with Christianity.

Marion is currently a professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne and the Committee of Social Thought at the University of Chicago. The French thinker is a student of Louis Althusser, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida, and was one of the primary interlocutors in Derrida’s later “religious turn.” From his beginning work on René Descartes, Marion has had the unusual distinction of being recognized as one of the leading voices in continental philosophy, postmodern theology, and phenomenology, and he is considered equally provocative in each field. One of the central arguments in *Dieu sans l'être. Hors-texte* (1982), translated in 1991 as *God Without Being*, is that modern thought has repeatedly mishandled the question of God, especially when supposedly offering its resolution. The basic argument is that the “God” overthrown by Nietzsche, passed in silence by Wittgenstein, and sublimated to Being by Heidegger was only the “God” constructed by abstract metaphysics. This “conceptual idol of metaphysics” is problematic both religiously

and philosophically because it is (1) instrumentally manipulated to provide a ground or foundation for an epistemological or political agenda, (2) an imposition on God of the subject's own self-projection in all its limiting strengths and weaknesses, (3) a reduction of God to a being among beings, and (4) a prioritization of the concepts of being and social morality over radiating goodness and love. To renounce "the conceptual idol" is to "renounce comprehending the incomprehensible" and the "attempt to conceive it" and instead to announce the alternative hope of "receiving" the incomprehensible "in its own excessiveness" (Marion 22–23). Thinking such "excess" – a key term for Marion – occurs in what one commentator has described as a postmodern "pilgrimage" (Horner x) that proceeds past metaphysics, onto-theology, and Heidegger's attempt to overcome metaphysics and then reopens an alternative "space of reflection on God and the Good" deriving from Plato, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Bonaventure (Tracy xiv). "God is Love" – this is the ultimate trajectory for Marion's thought, for "love excludes the idol or, better, includes it by subverting it" (Marion 48).

I would like to suggest that elements of Shelley's thought and writing, including aspects of *Hellas*, anticipate Marion's resistance to "metaphysical idolatry" and stand within the alternative tradition of Platonist erotic theology. In the essay "On Christianity," Shelley remarks of representations of God: "Where indefiniteness ends idolatry and anthropomorphism begin" (252). For Shelley, Christ's teachings break, not make, idols, as seen in the rewriting of Milton's "nativity ode" in *Hellas*:

The Powers of earth and air  
Fled from the folding star of Bethlehem;  
Apollo, Pan, and Love –  
And even Olympian Jove –  
Grew weak, for killing Truth had glared on them. (230–234)

The "Truth" here is what God is not, the articulation of a God under the sign of distance, the destitution of mythic idols. Shelley takes up the theme again, turning to Paul's debate in the Athenian Areopagus, the Hill of Mars, with its theological discussion of the statue of the "unknown God":

In sacred Athens, near the fane  
Of Wisdom, Pity's altar stood.  
Serve not the unknown God in vain,  
But pay that broken shrine again,  
Love for hate and tears for blood! (733–737)

The return to the altar of the unknown God abjures the possibility that the Power or Spirit can be captured conceptually. It is crucial to the moral theme of the work, which is the breaking of a retributive cycle of hate and tears. But why and how? And how does this relate to the play's *raison d'être*, the Greek War of Independence? For Shelley, the altar of the unknown God provides the counterpoint to the "thrones and

idols” that would inevitably demand awe and submission (l. 263). The real problem of this play is not how to dethrone Mahmud, but lies in the concluding image of the preface in which a revolutionary “enemy” awaits the “moment” when it can overcome vulnerable European monarchs and “wrest the bloody sceptres from their grasp” (l. 432). The open question is not whether the old powers will fall, but what will happen after their fall. Will their awful thrones be replaced with another idol wielding those scepters anew or can the Greek spirit remain true to the “unknown God”?

For *Hellas*, the central dramatic tension is what happens, politically and formally, once Mahmud leaves the stage, once the scepter leaves his hand. The resolution is a formal transformation in the play. Mahmud does not return, nor do any of the other characters. In fact, what Aristotle would term the “action” of the play is lost. Instead, the choral framework returns, though seemingly without the particular grounding in the characters of Greek women. More significantly, until the closing refrain, the chorus is divided into the two semi-choruses, who dialogue with one another in lyric antiphons. This dialogic form itself offers an uncapturable aesthetic of love, and this formal change supersedes the scepter and throne without installing a new idol or a new “holy alliance.” After Mahmud’s fall, the text does not conceptualize a new age nor remain silent to avoid idolatry. Rather *Hellas* strives for the loving excess that Marion describes as the best path beyond metaphysical idolatry. As Marion writes: “Love is not spoken, in the end, it is made. Only then can discourse be reborn, but as an enjoyment, a jubilation, a praise” (107). This praise is also an indictment of the “voice without” – the reportage of brutal current events – that interrupts the semi-choral exchanges. This contemporary experience of history is now bracketed by the voices of love. History, the historical moment inhabited by Shelley’s own readers, is now being gazed at, examined, and judged from the choral elevation – a reversal of the gaze in the play’s opening. History awaits a moment when it might move from a “voice without” to a participatory “voice among” the loving choruses – a fullness of *agape* that the closing chorus gestures toward, without substantiating, at a distance. This rapture both emanates from Shelley’s engagement with romantic religious politics and also seeks to exceed it.

Does this make *Hellas* a religious text and Shelley a religious poet? It is difficult to answer this question within the terms traditionally available within Romantic studies. This reading may indeed see Shelley as pursuing the question of God, of a search for the “unknown God” beyond the metaphysical and political idols of the “gods” in a way that Marion has outlined. On the other hand, these same sections in *Hellas* also plausibly suggest Jean-Luc Nancy’s recent exploration of Christianity’s “escheat” – a term for an estate that passes back to the public when its owner dies without heir. In *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (2005), Nancy argues that the spiritual, moral, and political inheritance that reverts to the community after the presumed fruitless death of Christianity is a “resource” that lies “in project or in promise” and that has been “hidden beneath Christianity, beneath monotheism, and beneath the West” (34–35). Nancy sees this primarily as

Christianity's dialectical tendency to open up "the other of the world" (10). This emphasis on "Christianity without Christianity" recalls Hunt's praise in his articles on the Greek Revolution of the "philosophical part of Christianity, as distinguished from the dogmas that have hitherto been confounded with and perverted it" ("Greeks" 631). Nancy's humanistic reclaiming of Christianity's perpetual promise for a world "othered," transfigured and transformed, could also be read as a theological rendering of Shelley's literary eschatology in *Hellas*:

Saturn and Love their long repose  
 Shall burst, more bright and good  
 Than all who fell, than One who rose,  
 Than many unsubdued;  
 Not gold, not blood their altar dowers  
 But votive tears and symbol flowers. (1090–1095)

On the one hand, Nancy's promissory post-Christianity maintains a Shelleyan hostility to religion and what he sees as its "dangers" to "thought, to law, to freedom, and to human dignity" (2). On the other hand, Marion moves from a critique of postmodern conceptual idolatry to a guarded approach to divine icons and the Eucharist as sites for mystical encounter. Amid the "broken shrine" of Marion's idoloclasm and the immanent eschatology of Nancy's newly flowering Athenian "altar," a post-secular approach to Shelley can do much to restore fundamental questions about "meaning, purpose, and intention." It may, however, only accentuate, not resolve, the history of ambivalence over religion in Romantic studies.

See HISTORIOGRAPHY; IDEOLOGY; NARRATIVE; NATION AND EMPIRE; PHILOSOPHY; POETICS.

### Notes

- 1 For a discussion of the major questions raised by the study of religion and literature generally, see the contributions to the Summer 2009 special issue of *Religion and Literature* edited by Susannah Monta.
- 2 Despite the prominence of the secularization narrative in Romantic studies, there have been important critical works focusing on the legacy and sources of romantic religion and literature. Though outside the scope of my discussion, these include Stephen Prickett's *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Wordsworth and Coleridge in the Victorian Church* (1976), David Jasper's *Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker* (1985), and J. Robert Barth's *Romanticism and Transcendence* (2003).
- 3 For an introduction to this body of thought, see Philip Blond's *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (1998) and Graham Ward's *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (2005).



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## Science

*Theresa M. Kelley*

In 1833 William Whewell coined the term *scientist* to refer to someone who relied on Lord Bacon's inductive, experimental method, partly in response to the complaint of Samuel Taylor Coleridge that the term *philosopher*, as in "natural philosopher" (what we would now call a scientist), had become "too wide and too lofty" (Whewell, "Address"). Whewell's definition is curiously belated: scientific inquiry and a public culture attentive to it had been ongoing at least since the late seventeenth century and perhaps before that (see Cesalpino, Valenza). For Romantic-era readers, that is, those to whom Whewell offered his definition, the nature and workings of science were widely discussed in popular as well as scientific journals. Along with their contemporaries, Romantic poets were well informed about current scientific inquiry; some made sustained use of scientific ideas, finding in them the means to shape poetic figures that were provocatively linked to a view of matter and nature offered by contemporary scientific inquiry (see de Almeida, Heringman, Richardson, Sha). Nor was scientific inquiry limited to the polite classes, as they were usually called. Working-class naturalists and amateur chemists had long conducted inquiries. Beginning in the 1820s the physicist and social reformer Michael Faraday organized classes to standardize and extend scientific knowledge to the working classes (Jenkins 5–6, 36; Secord).

The experimental and theoretical work that gradually developed from these scientific practices constitutes the arresting core of Romantic science as a professional and public inquiry pitched to recognize the possibility of imaginary and imagined physical worlds. By distinguishing what we would now call science from *scientia*, meaning knowledge in general, Whewell did far more than claim that scientific inquiry is a separate and more rigorous branch of knowledge, although he certainly did that. For the version of "science" Whewell offers is far more positivist

and narrowly empiricist than Romantic-era scientific practice as well as theory. Although he granted the usefulness of hypothesis – that is, theoretical speculation in advance of experimental outcomes – he insisted that experiment and induction should lead scientific inquiry, at least in the early stages of a given science. Hypothesis ought to, he averred, come much later (*Philosophy* 1: 19–36; 2: 276–288). Yet among his contemporaries, practicing scientists and their reading public worried that scientific evidence – facts and observations – might engulf reliable hypotheses and conclusions, which had to be made and remade in ways which suggested that hypothesizing before and after experiment was the main game in town. Others argued for a unified theory of science and nature in which the human might, or might not, dominate. Still others wrestled with the possibility that non-sensible explanations and worlds might better accommodate the understanding of space and time that takes shape during the long Romantic era from about 1790 to 1840 and perhaps slightly beyond (Rudwick 326–327).

The internal complexity of this array of scientific inquiry is well canvassed in recent collections of essays, beginning with *Romanticism and the Sciences* (1990) and *Romanticism in Science* (1994). These and other works cited in this essay have shown that Romantic science both matters and concerns matter in ways that earlier bromides about the Romantic rejection of science did not envision. German *Naturphilosophie*, once dismissed as an idealist project wholly committed to the idea of a vital soul animating all matter, is now understood to represent a contentious, diffuse set of inquiries that include mechanist as well as vitalist hypotheses and the claim that both operate complexly in bodies and matter (Beiser, *German Idealism* 483–509). The scientific writing of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, once dismissed with faint praise for offering intriguing but ungrounded metaphors, is more often now investigated for its nuanced and original approach to botany, morphology, and theories of color in a body of work that extends from the 1780s to 1830 (Zemplén 196–197). The still-emergent reconsideration of Romantic science emphasizes these inquiries and their affiliations: the history of organic nature and forms of life together with inorganic “life” forms in chemistry and geology; the ambition to systematize knowledge and reluctant acknowledgment of the difficulty of that project; and deep time and space as defining features of cosmological and geophysical inquiry.

The examination of forms of life is perhaps the first scientific inquiry to work its way across the disciplinary regimes of Romantic science. Before 1800, scientists were convinced that Galvanic or electrical current was present only in living bodies – or, more radically, that this current is what brought inanimate matter into life, as it does for Victor Frankenstein’s monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). But the discovery of electric current and chemical polarities more generally in inorganic matter transformed the scientific conversation by undermining the very category of organic life that scholars continue to foreground, without necessarily acknowledging its complicating relation to the anorganic (Richards 11–14, 143–144; Gigante 38–40). The Romantic extension of earlier classificatory projects, together, at least initially, with a Linnaean nomenclature to anchor them, is soon brought up short by

two possibilities: either that tetralogical forms or beings might be outliers that would destabilize the systematic project, or, more fundamentally, that there would emerge no systematic capable of encompassing all available evidence, let alone new conceptual analyses of existing data. As Romantic astronomy, physics, geology, and chemistry invited notice of non-living forms that change over time, and discovered repeated evidence of change occurring both over time and across space, Romantic knowledge formation necessarily expands beyond the limits of classificatory protocols and ambitions (Rudwick 506). The notion that space was less than fixed, that it might buckle and fold in unexpected ways and over vast reaches of time, put still more pressure on the authority of Euclidean geometry, which for two millennia had been taken to be emblematic of an eternal truth about nature. This certainty, so valuable that Newton used Euclidean theorems as the form of proof in his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1678), though he had at first established its conclusions algebraically, began to work loose by 1792, as first Karl Friedrich Gauss, then Bernhard Reimann posed unanswered and unanswerable questions about Euclidean axioms, prompted in part by speculation that space, big space, might not be mappable in ways that would coincide with Euclidean proofs about straight lines and triangles.

What makes these inquiries compelling is the degree to which they articulate a more nuanced account of the relation between experiment and theory, which a narrowly positivist empiricism was equipped to sustain. Goethe's color theory offers a case in point. Arguing against Newton's theory of prismatic color, Goethe noted that Newton's evidence includes visual information (in the copper plate engravings that reproduce Newton's findings) about the margins between prismatic colors that he does not include among his conclusions, a point of special interest to Goethe, whose theory emphasizes the role of colored margins that diminish or muddy adjacent prismatic colors. This critique exposes a theoretical concern that modern philosophers of science have emphasized: scientific hypotheses make selections among data in ways that may ignore evidence others will identify as significant rather than ancillary (Zemplén 197, quoting Neurath 23). Whereas Whewell's definition supposes that matter, experiment, and scientific conclusion are a seamless package, Romantic writing about science repeatedly discovers a productive instability between desire for systematic certainty and a recognition of methodological questions challenging that desire. Romantic science does not so much create this instability as inherit it from more than a century of experiment and inquiry concerning nature.

### Organic Life and Beyond

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the insistence of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel that "organic nature has no history" made sense only on Hegel's terms (*Phenomenology* 178). If consciousness is, as he argues, what joins spirit to individuality, then nature lacks this needed middle term, whatever other signs of

putative life it may possess. By 1800 nature seemed to most others to be in possession of a very long history, so long that James Hutton described the earth as having “no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end” (1: 200). For many thinkers nature also seemed to have a life insofar as it produced many forms that lived, grew, and died, both plant and animal. Hegel’s insistence to the contrary puts human self-consciousness at its center. Scientific thought about nature and life was far less unified on this point. Indeed, the history of thinking experimentally about the material nature of living plants and animals was already more than a century old. Over time the question of natural processes involved in living forms repeatedly toggled between mechanical and vitalist explanations, without necessarily marking an absolute divide between the two. What has often been characterized as Romantic vitalism misses the degree to which Romantics were more often convinced that both processes were present and often as wary as their predecessors about making more than heuristic claims about animate forces. The debate about whether movement and other putative signs of life were irritable (hence mechanical) or sensible (hence similar to the sense experience of animated beings) registers the onset of a speculative strain and restraint that continues in Romantic inquiry about life forms.

The long eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century debate about what each term means and whether one is a subset of the other was driven by experimental and methodological questions such as “How can we know living matter?” “What is the nature of matter?” and “How should we understand the link between body and mind?” Dominique Boury tracks the influence of Albrecht von Haller on subsequent eighteenth-century thought about sensibility and irritability and notes the impact of this debate in successive editions of the *Encyclopédie*. Whereas the first edition of this work included relevant articles by Théophile de Bordeu and other Montpellier College of Medicine writers whose views were more vitalist than Haller’s, for later editions Denis Diderot turned to Haller, who wrote the 1778 article on “Irritabilité” for the *Encyclopédie*, and others who focused on sensibility and movement as distinct from irritable response. Yet in *D’Alembert’s Dream*, written by 1769 but published only posthumously, Diderot has d’Alembert declare that living matter is so all encompassing that distinctions among the kingdoms of nature are at best transient: “All beings circulate from one to another; as do all species . . . everything is in perpetual flux . . . Every animal is more or less man; every mineral is more or less plant; every plant is more or less animal. Nothing in nature is fixed, precise” (Diderot 311; my translation).

Bordeu’s account of sensibility as it arises from irritability is more circumspect. He argues that the sensibility of glands involves neural functions that are unified in structure and homogeneous in function. Influenced by Georg Stahl’s insistence a century before that living matter had an *anima sensitiva*, Bordeu rejects this ontological claim but retains the notion of a self-preserving force in matter, a force generated by its inner organization (Wolfe and Terada 539; Hankins 124). So understood, sensibility is a quality of living matter that seeks to preserve and develop the life of the organism. Invoking the directed functionality of a swarm of bees to illustrate this claim, he insists that sensibility inhabits an organized, self-preserving,

and developing material life but admits that precisely how this happens is difficult to explain:

Here too is one of those metaphors that must be permitted us; those who consider these questions know how difficult it is to be clear in speaking about the force that directs, with so much justice, a thousand singular movements of the body of man and its parts, such that one does not know which terms one must use to express, for example, certain movements of plants and even certain mineral properties.

He adds that “however it may be, one can say that all living parts are directed by a conserving force that is ever on the watch; might it be in some way the essence of a part of matter, or a necessary attribute of its combinations.” Just here he stops himself, invoking again the problem suggested by his earlier insertions of phrases like “so to speak”: “Suddenly again, we claim to conceptualize things by offering metaphoric expressions, comparisons.” Then, quite remarkably, he adds that all this follows the plan of his 1742 work, which he then repeats, in its original Latin, to indicate the heads and sections of his earlier argument about sensation, motion, circulation, and respiration. There too Bordeu yokes “evident sensation” and “hidden movements” (373–374; my translation).

Eighteenth-century speculation about irritability and sensibility informs early Romantic investigation of life and nature. Diderot’s “d’Alembert” arrives at a version of the highly speculative vitalism that later tempts German *Naturphilosophie* writers in different degrees. Much as Bordeu had insisted that sensibility and irritability are in some sense material forces, Goethe later supposes that some combination of mechanical development and vital powers was at issue in the organization and development of plants as well as animals. In his 1790 *Memoirs on Irritability*, Christoph Girtanner argues that oxygen, then just discovered, is the principle of irritability, life, and its “genius or organization” (cited in de Almeida 69). The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1810) manages to have it both ways. The entry on “Irritability” declares that it is a property of muscles and nerves, hence distinct from sensibility, whereas the entry on “Physiology” says that “irritability partakes of and is a (lower) form of sensibility,” a position that echoes much earlier efforts to split the difference between them. In the essay *Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790), Goethe argues that the processes of plant development involve extraordinary if also mechanical processes at different stages in the plant’s development. Even his 1798 “The Metamorphosis of Plants,” a love poem and as such seemingly licensed to offer a more figurative account of plant development, uses a less speculative diction than do some of its modern translations.

As Bordeu had been, Goethe is cautious about claiming what or where or who the vital agent is, relying by turns on a diffuse notion of a female Nature or the language of chemical affinities as a more precisely defined example of polarity in which mechanical and vital processes work in relay. In a highly attentive reprise of Goethe’s *Metamorphosis* essay that he reworks in successive versions of his *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel works hard to discount the notion that plants are vital and capable of

self-development, insisting, for example, that each stage of plant development is distinct from the next, cut off and ended, such that the whole plant displays no sustained purposive being such that it can be said to have life. The traits he identifies with animal life – sensibility, irritability, and reproduction – are ones he also claims plants do not have because they do not demonstrate the self-determined fulfillment that Hegel assigns, in increasing degrees, to animals and humans (357; see Kelley).

Yet by the end of the eighteenth century all these traits – even some version of self-determined fulfillment – were frequently attributed to plants as well as animals. Plants may have entered the picture by a side alley, nudged into position by the debate in the 1740s about the water hydra or polyp, at the time thought to be a zoophyte, that is, an animal with plant-like characteristics. Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, who had noted that they reproduced by budding, thought they were plants. The experiments of Abraham Trembley, in which he cut the polyp up only to find that its parts could regenerate the whole organism, led him to discover as well that polyps caught food in their tentacles, delivered it to their stomachs, and could touch and move with a primitive, footlike extension (Hankins 331). Clearly polyps were animals and not plants, albeit a very low animal form, yet the subsequent fascination with zoophytes or putative zoophytes indicates that once the possibility that plants and animals might not be distinct had been posited, it would not go away.

### *Naturphilosophie*

In 1798 Friedrich Schlegel claimed that there was nothing mechanical about nature, that it is the world soul, organic and self-organized (*Van der Weltseele* 349; cited in Beiser, *German* 517). Modern discussions of the German *Naturphilosophie* writers have too frequently assumed that Schlegel spoke for all his Jena contemporaries: the older Goethe, Hegel, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm, Joseph Schelling, and even Hans Christian Ørsted, who didn't arrive in Jena until 1806. Yet these writers differed and some deferred, notably Hegel and Goethe, from Schlegel's idealist program, or at least from the idealist program that subsequent commentators ascribe to Schlegel (Beiser, *Romantic* 106–120). These divergences can be mapped in part in terms of the reluctant admission of Immanuel Kant in his third *Critique* (1790) that organisms develop in ways that, rationally considered, appear to be inner directed, not compelled from without: “things, as natural ends, are organized beings [*organsierte Wesen*]” (*Critical Judgment* 244 [hereafter *CJ*]; *Kritik der Urteilskraft* 735 [hereafter *KU*]). Although some *Naturphilosophie* writers took this phrase to mean that organized beings are alive, however different their form of life from that of animals and plants, Kant is wary of this claim, although he nearly makes it himself. He cautions repeatedly that the notion of the organisms as “organized beings” is a regulative or “as if” supposition, not one that is constitutive in the sense that it might be understood as a claim based on sure knowledge. Even so, his claim marks a quite new direction in philosophical thinking about nature, including his. In *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* he had warned about



the dangers of “hylozoism,” the claim that life inheres in matter (Bowie 31–32). Yet four years later in the third *Critique*, Kant comes close to making this claim when he argues that organic development cannot be explained wholly in terms of mechanical processes any more than it can by appealing to a physico-theological belief in divine design and the uses of nature (*CJ* 240–241; *KU* 730–731).

Humans, Kant wryly notes, may have ideas of what plants (and animals) are for, but those ideas are unrelated to the purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) by which nature’s particulars grow as individuals and even as members of species and genera, an orientation toward ends that has nothing intrinsically to do with external design (*CJ* 243, 248; *KU* 733, 740–741). Like the objects of aesthetic judgments, the teleology of organic beings exhibits a purposiveness without purpose (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*) in the sense that organisms cannot be assigned a purpose beyond that of their own inner-directedness. Briefly attracted to think about nature as an analogue to art, he suggests that the more apt analogue might be to “life” (*Leben*), then decides that he has gone too far, for to claim that this “inscrutable property of nature” is “*an analogue of life*” would require conjoining to matter “an alien principle,” that is, soul (*CJ* 65; *KU* 735). To do so would return to hylozoism by another route. However qualified and tentative all this is, Kant here deliberates with some care about questions and hypotheses that had been widely discussed for nearly a half century (Huneman 10).

Writing about how organisms develop as individuals and as contributing members of species and genera, using the example of a tree, Kant’s admiration for the human classification of animals and plants is matched, and at times outrun, by his notice of what he calls “the self-help of nature,” whereby a tree may heal itself against external injury, producing in some cases malformation or defects while sustaining the life of the individual and contributing to the reproduction of its species (*CJ* 243–244; *KU* 732–734). But he goes further still, insisting that chance and contingency are logically necessary for claiming that forces beyond “blind mechanism” direct organic development. With impeccable logic, Kant insists, against the claim that nothing happens by chance, that it is chance or contingency all the way down, that if we see in the world organic forms that cannot be controlled by blind mechanism, we must in that event admit the necessity (a nice turn of argument) of contingency, since without it we have nothing to say about teleology as the logic of ends, for this notion is meaningless without the possibility that they might be different ends (*CJ* 248; *KU* 740–741).

Schlegel and other *Naturphilosophie* writers who share Kant’s conclusions transform his regulative principle that we ought to proceed as if organisms have inner-purposiveness into a constitutive claim about what nature is. This swerve from Kant decisively sets the idealist impulse in *Naturphilosophie* on its own philosophical course. Not content to suppose that some organic principle is at work alongside mechanical processes of the kind being discovered in chemistry, physics, and biological life, Schlegel insisted further that mechanical processes are themselves directed and supervised by an organic spirit and, still further, that the difference between spirit or mind and nature or matter was one of degree not essential kind.

(In his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* [1797: 41, 53], Schelling grants the notion of a life-force only when it is understood as embodied in and by a polarity of forces that is modeled on principles of physics and chemistry [37]. Although his account of plant development echoes Kant's third *Critique*, Schelling is primarily concerned with the chemical processes suggested by how they take in oxygen and respond to their environment.) Lorenz Oken offers a more specific map of the work of synthesis in *Lehrbuch der Naturphilosophie* (1809–1811), which links organic and inorganic nature via analogies that are either constructed, in the sense that they link objects with those that significantly precede them, or directed by the *naturphilosophische* method, which attends to “correspondences between part and whole in the cosmos” (Jardine 45–46). Echoing this claim in “The Aeolian Harp,” the speaker of Coleridge's 1798 poem soon moves edgily away from its speculative reach, calling it an effusion from “Philosophy's aye-babbling stream” (l.57).

The 1792 discovery by Luigi Galvani of what was thereafter called the Galvanic pile, essentially the existence of an electric current, appeared to demonstrate that an electrical force, inherent in all animal bodies, was in fact the long-specified source of vitality. Galvani's original experiment with frogs' legs was repeated thousands of times by subsequent experimenters. Alexander von Humboldt conducted the same experiment on 3,000 frogs. This circuitry was widely understood to show that fluidity, which in turn later became understood as a basic chemical reactivity, was the basis of life or what the Germans named *Lebenskraft*. As Andrew Piper's analysis of these rapid shifts in experimental thought makes clear, what mattered increasingly was not the closed circuitry of the body but its instability, registered in cycles of work and exhaustion, expansion and contraction. The arc of chemical life always threatened to exceed itself, a possibility implied by the way that Victor Frankenstein's monster exceeds normal parameters once he is galvanized into life. The Scots physician John Brown argued in 1780 that the term “excitability” referred to a cycle of exhaustion and animation that was fundamental to life (Brown 1: 266).

In 1800 Alessandro Volta used parallel columns of alternating metals activated by a moist conductor to produce an electrical current – his Voltaic or as it was then called Galvanic “pile” – to prove that galvanism was a property of metals as well. The outcome of this discovery is surprising: it did not so much put an end to belief in the relation between life and electric current as suggest the possibility that the anorganic realm might have the same life force. If, afterward, it was chemical reactions and substances all the way down, right through the living body, this outcome derives ultimately from the long inquiry into forms of life whereby, as Schelling would argue, the chemical becomes the contact point between matter and life (*Ideen* 1: 6, 149; see Piper, Golinski 203–218).

In the decades before and just after Volta's discovery, material properties and discoveries prompted an array of Romantic reconsiderations that reflect tendencies that had long been in play. Some, including Humphry Davy, pursued a quasi-idealist view of inner powers in chemical compounds, at precisely the moment when his contemporary John Dalton was weighing the specific gravity of atoms (Abbri 36–42). Between them they split the difference that animates Romantic scientific inquiry as it

toggles between an idealist or supersensible intuition and material evidence. Although scholars have often identified Goethe with idealism or even what Richards calls an “absolute idealist-realism,” Goethe himself is more cautious, preferring to align something as apparently ideal as the idea of an “Urplanze” with both organic and, as he grew older, anorganic or chemical properties (Richards 408; Goldstein 16).

Experimental inquiry on polarity, electricity, and finally electromagnetism to which Davy, Faraday, and Ørsted contributed in the early decades of the nineteenth century is one aspect of a wider, more speculative inquiry about polarity, defined broadly as the relationship (viewed or postulated) between poles of force or current in bodies and inorganic materials. Similar to the idea of a *Bildungstrieb* or developing drive in plants which Johann Friedrich Blumenbach proposed, polarity operates variously as either a material (here chemical) property of matter or, at another extreme, a speculative idea or figure for processes that produced, or appeared to produce, material results without being themselves experimentally visible (see Lenoir 17–53). Taking issue with the implied anthropomorphism Blumenbach introduces by replacing Wolff’s term *Kraft* (force) with *Trieb* (drive), Goethe charges that a word like “drive” is, as Goldstein puts it, “an anthropomorphic trick” that conjures an agon between actor and object (Goethe, “Formative” 35–36, *Bildungstrieb*; Goldstein 6–7). Thomas Pfau’s insistence that Goethe’s capacity to see an *Urpflanze* in the developing life of plants is a phenomenological project directed by an idea misses the degree to which Goethe was nonetheless reluctant to idealize or hypothesize in ways that pull away from matter. In proclaiming, as he did in Sicily in 1786 or sometime soon after, that “All is Leaf,” Goethe seems to have thought this less an idea that stood alone than a botanical insight that came to him quite suddenly and remained convincing as he looked for decades thereafter at plant development.

As the work of speculative thought and poetic figure, the tentative work of analogy in Goethe’s botanical writing is pointedly at issue everywhere in Romanticism but especially so in scientific inquiry, where the advantages and liabilities of speculative idea and figure cannot be held apart from inquiry, despite Whewell’s programmatic defense of experiment as the real work of science. The scientific analogies vary – polarity, metamorphosis, *Bildungstrieb*, *Wechselwirkung* (interdependence or, as we would now put it, ecology) – but the question that impels the long eighteenth-century debate about irritability and sensibility becomes more expansive and more pressing as Romantic scientific writers seek an adequate language to characterize development and relation in anorganic as well as organic nature (see Müller).

## Classification and Systematics

In 1833, the year von Humboldt published his monumental *Cosmos*, he wrote a friend: “I have the mad idea to portray the whole material world, all that we know now of the phenomena of the universe and the Earth, from the nebulae of stars to the geography of mosses on granite rocks, all in one work” (cited in Stearn 116; see also Dear 39–66). Unquestionably aware that the German expatriate William Herschel

and his sister Caroline Herschel had catalogued more than 500 nebulae in the 1780s, Humboldt imagined that he might catalogue everything above and below. He had begun much earlier, during his travels through South America with Aimé Bonpland from 1799 to 1804. Standing at the foot of the Andean volcano Chimborazo and climbing to its peak at 18,096 feet, Humboldt used that supra-alpine geography to plot the incidence of plant groups at different altitudes, from the summit of the volcano to the sea. He published the chart as an elephant folio size, hand-colored frontispiece for *Essai sur la Géographie des Plantes* (1806).

Humboldt's may be the boldest expression of the systematic and classificatory ambition of the Romantic era, which George Eliot depicts at its nadir when Mr. Brooks, living in the fictional Romantic era of Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–1872), remarks to Casaubon:

“I began a long while ago to collect documents. They want arranging, but when a question has struck me, I have written to somebody and got an answer. I have documents at my back. But now, how do you arrange your documents?”

“In pigeon-holes partly,” said Mr. Casaubon, with rather a startled air of effort. (19)

This exchange unwittingly satirizes nearly a century of scientific inquiry that was mostly devoted to Linnaeus's taxonomic project: to arrange all of nature, with or without pigeonholes, so that each species had a name and a location in a vast framework. Echoing that ambitious program in 1833, Humboldt apparently still believed it could be done. Especially in England, where Continental arguments against Linnaeus took hold much later, Romantic scientific inquiry depended on Linnaean classificatory practices and nomenclature for flora and fauna, so much so that its protocols were assumed to be relevant to geology, mineralogy, and astronomical inquiry – hence the Herschels' painstaking catalogue of nebulae.

The penchant for Linnaean-isms could wander still farther afield, as wayward figures are wont to do. A 1796 article in the *Monthly Review* describes a new botanic institution near Dublin in which botany and agriculture would be joined, as they typically were in botanic gardens around the world. Besides a “Hortus Linnaeensis” of plants, shrubs, and trees “arranged according to its class, order, genus and species,” the plan included “the Cattle Garden,” for the various agricultural animals (not plants for animal consumption); The Sheep Division, or *Hortus Ovinus*, and, among others, The Swine Division, or *Hortus Suinus* (Anon. 208–210). Whatever else the curious nomenclature of this Irish project suggests, it presents the Linnaean binomial in terms that make what was to have been an authoritative, legislated system of naming into something more pliable. William Cullen's *Nosology* (1800), a systematic arrangement of diseases into four large classes, assigns binomial Latin names (the work first appeared in Latin) to diseases. Faraday and Whewell coined names derived from Greek and other sources (not necessarily binomials) to identify newly discovered chemical compounds (Jenkins 130–136).

Yet nearly as soon as Linnaeus's works began to appear in print in the early and middle decades of the eighteenth century, many challenged the adequacy of its

classificatory system. Linnaeus had been clear that his system of plants, the first he published, was “artificial” in the sense that he relied on differences in reproductive parts of plants to categorize them into twenty-four classes determined by the number and position of male stamina, and within those orders determined by the number and position of the female pistilia (Linnaeus, *Philosophia* 219). By the 1790s, French naturalists began to develop a systematic that was, they said, “natural” in two ways: it used the leading morphological traits of flowering plants to establish plant groups or families and it recognized auxiliary taxonomic relations or affines (Larson 32). Theoretical maps and models proliferated in attempts to record successive hypotheses about classes and intra-class affines until and even slightly after Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) made development, change, and adaptation the driving principle of classificatory schema.

Although the Linnaean system remained popular, especially in England, well into the nineteenth century (amateur botanists begin to use the Natural System in one of its iterations only in the 1830s and 1840s), naturalists disputed or mocked it. Buffon had argued that Linnaean zoological classification provided risible, clear evidence that there could be no adequate systematic and eventually put it aside (Sloan). Then and now, challenges to systematics never reach end game: taxonomists continue to refine categories and the systematic that govern them. But the cumulative effect of such challenges put in question the possibility of absolute or complete knowledge, even in works in which the project was the systematic description of an entire family of plants (see Baillon 280; cited in Stevens n.p.). Naturalists, among others, asked whether, for example, the term “species” could mean anything. Charles Darwin’s famous remark that the term means what his educated naturalist colleagues said it meant handily ducks the question (Darwin, *Natural Selection* 98). At issue in the debate about the status of species is a philosophical problem at the heart of Romantic thinking about individuals and categories. If a species was to be identified by the specific (unavoidable pun) plant or animal used to represent its type or set of shared traits, from the outset the species as a category required some fudging of its relation to individual plants or animals. By this sleight of hand, tetralogical or putatively “monstrous” plants or animals were excluded, yet they remained instructive as counter-evidence that paradoxically confirmed the “species” in question. Disease or poison, as Georges Canguilhem would later observe, could be understood as that which negates, or stands at odds with, the healthy body. Thus what is unclassifiable becomes logically essential because it insures the legitimacy of the category from which it is excluded (Canguilhem 234–256; de Almeida 6–10; Sha 23).

### Geology and Geometry: Time and Space

Romantic inquiry about what would eventually yield to a radically altered understanding of time and space also began with the classificatory project that Humboldt still believed he could accomplish in 1833. Here too, but with a different outcome,

the classificatory project implodes or erupts from within its terms. As geologists attempt to map rocks into a system and hierarchy with a putatively fixed and global character, those efforts produce anomalies, irregularities, and instabilities that taken together break open and out of a biblical timeline from creation to the present. Thinking about the immensity and depth of space as the Herschels and others attempted to measure and classify its parts invited mathematical doubts about the adequacy of Euclidean geometry for measuring a vast, curved space. At the very end of the Romantic era, the very idea of absolute space seemed to Bernhard Reimann inadequate or perhaps irrelevant given the minutely articulated, relational spaces or manifolds of a geometry of space or spaces.

Long before Charles Lyell published the *Principles of Geology* in 1832, geological and fossil investigations had begun to specify the deep time of the earth to a degree that James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth* could not have done, precisely in part because it had asserted the eternal sameness of geological events in which one vast catastrophe soon succeeded another. The more geologists identified distinctive fossil records and rock formations, the more difficult it was to make classification the primary work at hand. Fossil inquiry led, among other outcomes, to George Cuvier's eventual conviction that some species had become extinct, a revolutionary hypothesis at a time when the eternity of species was still a cherished conviction. Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, for example, explained (away) the apparent extinction of species by arguing that a continuous transformation of species occurs unevenly across species, such that some species have changed and others have yet to do so, yet all were created at the time of Creation (Rudwick 527, 566). Here too, the effort to classify rocks and fossils embedded in rock, as did Horace-Bénédict de Saussure in the Alps and William Smith in his hand-colored stratigraphic map of England (1815), provided evidence that could not be easily generalized into a global classification, nor did that evidence "fit" various, truncated timelines of creation history. Cuvier's hope that geological inquiry might "burst the limits of time" as astronomy had burst the limits of space understands both time and space not as boxes to be easily filled and measured but as entities whose expansive reality works against known systems.

At first the Herschels conducted astronomic inquiry as a classificatory project prompted by a chance sweep of the heavens that led to their discovery of the planet Uranus. For years afterward, they worked at night to identify nebulae and the process of their formation and decay, until they had counted a little over 500. Then they stopped and William Herschel went on to other projects (Hoskin 307, 313). What made the Herschels' discoveries so remarkable was not the revelation of deep space – Western, Arabic, Indian, and Chinese astronomy since and before Galileo had made this claim – but rather the extent to which new telescopes and mathematical precision could say much more about astral and planetary bodies (Dear 60–61). The learned and popular reception of this achievement mixed triumph with epistemological caution. Mary Somerville declares that "however profoundly we may penetrate the depths of space, there still remain innumerable systems" more vast than those already discovered (4). William Herschel's son John specifies, perhaps

more bluntly than any other Romantic scientist, the difficult relation between data and hypothesis:

But to ascend to the origin of things, and speculate on the creation, is not the business of the natural philosopher. An humbler field is sufficient for him in the endeavour to discover, as far as our faculties will permit, what *are* these primary qualities originally and unalterably impressed on matter, and to discover the *spirit* of the laws of nature, [or] if such a step be beyond our faculties; and the essential qualities of the material agents be really *occult*, or incapable of being expressed in any form intelligible to our understandings, at least to approach as near to their comprehension as the nature of the case will allow; and devise such forms of words as shall include and *represent* the greatest possible multitude and variety of phenomena. (Herschel 6–7; cited in Jenkins 47)

From clause to clause, the younger Herschel builds, or compounds, a view of scientific inquiry in which not knowing for certain is the governing rubric. Not fully knowing the spirit of nature, or whether material agents might in the end be occult means tacking as close to “their comprehension as the nature of the case will allow,” a circumlocution which conveys rough approximation, not scientific certainty. As every scientist since Linnaeus had concluded, thus Herschel urges finding words that might adequately represent phenomena.

John Herschel’s double insistence on the need to reckon with material agents and the difficult work of hypothesizing what they demonstrate reappears in Romantic mathematics and physics. Dissatisfaction with the notion that action might occur at a distance (the problem that Newton reluctantly solved by hypothesizing the presence of “ether” as an unseen conduit in space) and electrochemical discovery shaped investigation of the possibility that waves or lines of force transmitted electricity and light. For Faraday, whose investigations of magnetism and electricity inaugurated nineteenth-century physics, these waves or lines of force constitute matter and space (Jenkins 200–202). In his early investigation of the possibility that a non-Euclidean geometry would account for how straight lines behave in the curved space of the heavens, Karl Friedrich Gauss asked repeatedly what the true nature of space might be. Whereas earlier mathematicians and physicists, including Newton, at least in print, had insisted that Euclid’s *Elements* embodied the certain knowledge of a coherent system, Gauss and later Reimann insisted that key Euclidean theorems (180 degrees is the sum of the angles of all triangles; parallel lines would never meet) might not be true in the curvatures of deep space (Jenkins 159; Bottazzini 19–22). All the more arresting is the suggestion that Reimann arrived at the notion of the manifolds of space as a relational instead of absolute geometry in his effort to fulfill his own *Naturphilosophie* project – that is, to identify a mathematics that could describe the laws that govern all natural phenomena (Bottazzini and Tazzioli 3–5; Plotnitsky 117–120). What is arresting about all these investigations is the repeated interaction between complex hypotheses and material evidence and experiment that defies the more single-minded view of scientific induction that Whewell advanced in the name of modern science.

## Conclusion

Across the domains of inquiry canvassed in this essay, Romantic writing on science is by turns familiar and strange. Its overarching genealogy is familiar: vast reaches of space and time succeed classificatory projects in ways that recall, in a quite different key, the imaginative and imaginary worlds of William Blake, P. B. Shelley, and John Keats. What is unexpected is the highly material focus of so much Romantic inquiry, well beyond the purview of positivist empiricism. The care with which Goethe and others negotiate the relation between matter and analogy, hypothesis and speculation – whether animal, vegetable, mineral, cellular, geological, or imagined as the curvature of space – conveys a more difficult and interesting understanding of scientific inquiry than Whewell's definition made available to later generations. The ongoing reappraisal of Romantic science glimpses a way of thinking about and doing science that should, once again, convey what is commanding in Romanticism's complex reading of its scientific and philosophical modernity.

See MEDICINE; NARRATIVE; PHILOSOPHY; POETICS; PSYCHOLOGY; RELIGION; SENSIBILITY.

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## Medicine

*James Robert Allard*

Early in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Victor Frankenstein tells of encounters he had with two professors upon his arrival at the university in Ingolstadt. Learning that Frankenstein's passions were sparked by readings in Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, Professor Krempe laments that "every instant . . . wasted on those books is utterly and entirely lost," since they contain nothing but "exploded systems and useless names," and Frankenstein is dismissed with a list of books relevant to "this enlightened and scientific age" and an invitation to attend "a course of lectures upon natural philosophy in its general relations" (29). Professor Waldman smiles when he hears the names but exclaims that "these were men to whose indefatigable zeal modern philosophers were indebted for most of the foundations of their knowledge" (31). Nevertheless, Waldman speaks of a profound disconnect between past and present: "The ancient teachers of this science . . . promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little," but they "have indeed performed miracles" (30). Frankenstein asks Waldman to provide a reading list, despite his earlier claim that he "did not feel much inclined to study the books"; similarly, he eagerly begins his scientific pursuits, despite his "contempt for the uses of modern natural philosophy" (29). In the end, Frankenstein's life's work is the result of neither a strict adherence to nor a wholesale rejection of any of the models with which he is presented but of the productive tension between them: on the one hand, a desire for the grand, original discovery fueled by the promise of science to effect world-altering changes, while, on the other, years of painstaking laboratory work that may result in success but at serious personal and even social cost.

This series of exchanges neatly encapsulates the complexities facing both medical theory and practice in the Romantic period and the study of them in our own, even

down to the multiplicity of disciplines and divisions that fall under the general heading medicine: Kempe is a natural philosopher and Waldman is a chemist, but both are invested in the search for what Frankenstein calls the “principle of life” (33). At the heart of Frankenstein’s tale, as in his studies, are tensions that prove as productive as they are confounding: between received wisdom and tradition on one side, and the desire to explode the limits of human understanding on the other; between those with “insider” knowledge and those at or beyond institutional borders; between texts or theoretical abstractions and material applications or practice; between religion and science, to name just a few. The story of Frankenstein is, in many ways, the story of medicine in the Romantic period, for in addition to specific work in what we would identify as medicine, the field was also significantly impacted by transformations in related disciplines that were themselves working to define their fields, including the work of Swedish natural historian Carl Linnaeus, inventor of the botanical taxonomical system still widely used today; French chemist Antoine Lavoisier, perhaps the most important continental scientist of the day; and German anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, founder of modern race theory. As professional, scientific medicine as a distinct if multifaceted entity becomes increasingly marked both by researches in the life or biological sciences and by more intense scrutiny by governing bodies, it becomes ever more specialized and prone to a kind of fracturing prompted by the proliferation of a variety of disciplinary boundaries and divisions even as many of its most accomplished practitioners hold, with Waldman, that the real “man of science” is one who has “not neglected the other branches of science” but who studies “every branch of natural philosophy” (31). Any survey of the medical history of the Romantic period must, like the nascent medical professionals themselves, find a way to navigate the difficulties inherent in the subject while finding a relatively stable place from which the work, and one’s place in it, can be most readily seen.

In recent years, following the “cultural turn” in literary studies, the study of medicine in all of its guises has come to occupy an important place in Romantic studies. This work comes not just from an interest in medicine or medical history for its own sake but also from recognizing what Romantic authors knew about medicine, whether through formal study or simply intellectual curiosity. Much of this work began in Keats studies, for Keats, as is well known, was part of the first class ever to study for the newly created Licence of the Society of Apothecaries (LSA) in 1815 before spending a year training to become a surgeon at the famous Guy’s Hospital in London, and scholars have long been interested in studying both the details of his training as well as the interplay of his medical knowledge and his poetic interests (see especially De Almeida; Roe, *John Keats*). But beyond Keats, we find varying degrees of interest in the intersections between literature and medicine across the Romantic period: Erasmus Darwin was an eminent physician–researcher and, as author of such poems as *The Botanic Garden* (1791), one of the most popular poets of the period; Joanna Baillie, sister to Matthew Baillie who served as physician extraordinary to George III, was well-versed enough in contemporary debates about mental health and illness to make their concerns a central feature of her influential theory of drama;

William Blake studied anatomy as an apprentice engraver and painter and at the Royal Academy; and novelist Frances Burney survived an un-anaesthetized radical mastectomy in 1811 and wrote a long, agonizing letter about the experience. In addition to these concrete connections to institutions and professional structures, medicine also had an abstract and thus perhaps more far-reaching and substantial impact on literary Romanticism by providing an ever-widening range of sometimes controversial but always powerful explanatory mechanisms for bodily and other natural phenomena. The numerous manifestations of medically inflected notions of sensibility in Romantic poetics that complicate the relation between mind and body, perhaps most concisely illustrated in what Paul Youngquist called Wordsworth's "Lyrical Bodies"; the anxieties concerning literal and metaphorical "infection" prompted, on the one hand, by the circulation of revolutionary ideas in the "body politic" – particularly prevalent in texts of the 1790s, from Edmund Burke's "diagnosing" of the ills of France to Mary Hays's dissections of various gendered institutions – and, on the other, by literary treatments of the dangers of the business of empire and its accompanying cultural exchanges, as Alan Bewell has detailed; the simple fact of the omnipresence of bodies and concern with "bodiliness" that permeates the period's writing, from persistent echoes of gothic's various bodily horrors to (returning to where we started) Wordsworth's always problematic "low and rustic life" consisting of idiot boys, mad mothers, and sick woodsmen – Romantic literary culture is everywhere marked by the complex presence of medicine and its attendant authorities and anxieties. This list could easily run the length of this essay, but the larger point is that professional medicine and its related sciences had by the beginning of the nineteenth century become such ubiquitous aspects of the day-to-day lives of people in Britain and across Western Europe that we must have at least some basic understanding of what Romantic Medicine might have looked like if we are to begin to have a more nuanced understanding of the period and its literature.

However, we must walk a line between abstraction and specificity, between the paired desires to see everything though only vaguely and out-of-focus and to see some small things somewhat more clearly – the very choices facing young Frankenstein upon his arrival at Ingolstadt. Both approaches have their merits, of course, but both likewise have their flaws, and the line we take between them often reflects more about our own moment and anxieties than it does about the stories we seek to tell. Since the early 1990s, several important studies have proposed influential ways of thinking about that line and about how to think about medicine and medical history from interdisciplinary perspectives productive for literary and cultural studies. Among the most important to treat medicine in some substantial way are works by Hermione de Almeida, Alan Bewell, Alan Richardson, Youngquist, and Sharon Ruston, as well as essay collections by Nicholas Roe, Christa Knellwoolf and Jane Goodall, and Tristanne Connolly and Steve Clark. For our purposes here, my plan is to construct a narrative that seeks at once to indicate some of the texts, figures, and moments in the period that have had a far-ranging impact on medical history writ large and to treat what we might call a "Romantic Medicine." In this context, "Romantic Medicine" means primarily two things. First, it seeks to view medicine

through the lens of some of the traditional aspects of literary Romanticism, particularly its emphasis on nature and the sublime, the vexed relation between reason and imagination, the promises and problems of revolution, and the rise of the “individual” and the associated cult of personality. Second, and obviously related, by thus working to treat a distinctly *Romantic Medicine*, the phrase serves to demarcate this particular historical narrative so as to make it most useful and relevant to students and teachers interested in this field of literary and cultural studies. With this rationale in mind, what follows is structured in three interrelated sections: the first examines the roots of “Romantic Medicine” in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment; the second treats some of the important controversies resulting from a Romantic interrogation of some of those Enlightenment principles, especially around the turn of the nineteenth century; and the third tracks the rise of the figure of the surgeon and the place of surgery in modern Western medicine, a trajectory that, in some important ways, parallels that of the Romantic poet and his legacy. I want to argue throughout that one of the most important shaping influences on medicine in the period, perhaps the greatest force driving the rapid advances in medical knowledge, theory, and practice, is the growing insistence that it become the fully legitimated authority over all things bodily: from dictating “proper” anatomical taxonomies to decoding sickness and disease to defining life itself, the story of medicine in the Romantic period, more than at any previous time, is the story of the emergence of the medical *establishment*.

### **The Scottish Enlightenment and Romantic Medicine**

At the most general level, the dramatic developments of the Scottish Enlightenment are in large part responsible for many of the developments in Romantic Medicine. To be sure, the art and science of healing have always been central human preoccupations, but the Enlightenment project fostered such a massive epistemic shift in all areas of scientific inquiry that medicine enjoyed an unprecedented renaissance. Keeping pace with the changes sweeping scientific and philosophic thinking across continental Europe, the Scottish context emphasized the practical applications of emerging scientific disciplines in an effort to foster improvements in both the individual and in society at large. In other words, in addition to theoretical advances in everything from anatomy to zoology, which served to expand the storehouse of human knowledge, Scottish researchers also placed heavy emphasis on further developing other areas of inquiry, such as law, political economy, and philosophy, which served to put that knowledge to work in the “real world” of lived experience. At the core of this work was an emphasis on what David Hume in his *Treatise on Human Nature* (1739) called the “Science of Man,” the goal of which was to improve the quality of human life. A full accounting of either the Scottish Enlightenment or of Hume’s work is, of course, well beyond the scope of this essay (see Broadie), but we do at least need to recognize that it was precisely the desire to further the all-encompassing “Science of Man” that would lead to an emphasis on those sciences



that most directly dealt with human life. These root concerns would prompt Adam Smith to write both *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), texts that seek to establish ways of promoting a greater sense of the “health” of our “inner selves” and in the body politic, and both proceed from both a scientific examination of the present state of things and strong sense of the present moment’s place in a broader historical narrative (see C. Lawrence).

But the interest in medicine was more than just incidental to these concerns with health in the abstract, and medicine itself as a scientific discipline and social institution consequently experienced tremendous changes in the wake of the Enlightenment. John Hunter and William Hunter, Scottish-born brothers and prominent instructors and practitioners, worked to bring the principles of the “Science of Man” to bear on the way medicine was taught, studied, and practiced. William was one of the foremost anatomists of the day, specializing in the emerging field of obstetrics – paving the way for the “man-midwife,” the professionally trained obstetrician who would soon replace the traditional female midwife – and what we would call orthopaedics; John, who began as William’s assistant during anatomical demonstrations, quickly became one of the preeminent surgeons of the day, and is now widely held to be the father of modern surgery (see Bynum and Porter). Both are regarded as innovators for ensuring that anatomy and surgery came to be seen as hard sciences, and the status of the Hunter brothers as pioneers is not only the result of their tireless, near-obsessive (even Frankenstein-like) work but also of their far-reaching reputation as teachers: almost every figure cited in treatments of Romantic Medicine was either a student of the Hunters or trained under others who were. It is, though, important to recognize that however influential these two figures may be, they did not “invent” Romantic Medicine. Indeed, in many respects the Hunters were caught up in a crusade that was already well underway. William carried out his early training and experiments in Scotland under physician William Cullen, author of important teaching texts such as *Institutions of Medicine* (1772) and *First Lines in the Practice of Physic* (1784) and one of the founders of the Royal Medical Society. Meanwhile, after assisting under his older brother, John completed much of his training under the English surgeon William Cheselden, who crafted the seminal *Anatomy of the Human Body* (1713) and who was one of the first surgeons appointed to the newly established St. George’s Hospital. As we can see, the desire to expand scientific medical knowledge was accompanied by an equally strong desire to incorporate that knowledge and those who possessed it into a coherent body, whether that body took the form of a professional society or a cohort of alumni, and those at the forefront of the profession sought to ensure a sense of both integrity and authority by fostering, protecting, and disseminating knowledge and wisdom on their own terms.

Edinburgh itself seems to become a protagonist in the story of medicine, as the university there became an epicenter of medical pedagogy and research. As we have seen in the Hunters’ “family tree,” many of the period’s preeminent figures trained there or trained under those who had, and several figures with Edinburgh connections have had lasting impacts on the science of medicine and at the same time have

come to occupy important places in Romantic Medicine, thanks largely to the “romance” of their storied works and careers, and have consequently attracted attention by literary and cultural critics. James Lind, for example, began his career as a surgeon’s mate in the Royal Navy in 1739, and upon retiring from the Navy a year later earned the MD and began practicing medicine in Edinburgh. Among his numerous professional accomplishments, Lind is best known for his experiments during his time in the Navy that led to the use of citrus fruits to aid in the prevention and cure of scurvy. John Brown studied medicine at Edinburgh under Cullen and authored the notorious *Elementa Medicinæ Brunonis* (1780; translated in 1795 as *Elements of Medicine*), a text that sought to replace all previous systems of medicine with his own highly, if briefly, popular system. Thomas Beddoes, father of dramatist and physician Thomas Lovell Beddoes, trained as a physician in Edinburgh, where he encountered Brown’s text, the translation of which he edited and saw to publication in 1795. Among his own voluminous writings is *Hygëia; Or Essays Moral and Medical, on the Causes Affecting the Personal State of Our Middling and Affluent Classes* (1802), a text that, as the subtitle indicates, epitomizes the notion of the “Science of Man.” Edward Jenner apprenticed as a surgeon under John Hunter and is known to history for his pioneering work in treating smallpox, at the time an often fatal illness that left survivors disfigured, with a vaccine made from cowpox. While he has come to be known as the founder of immunology, Jenner in his own lifetime was just as often the target of public scorn and caricature as of praise: as we will see below, work in any of the medical sciences often faced extraordinary public scrutiny, and researchers and practitioners were regularly the subject of hushed talk in public circles, talk ranging from amused bewilderment at the thought that one might suddenly sprout hooves after receiving the smallpox vaccine to outright horror at the thought of what anatomists would do with a body that found itself on their demonstration table. A great many more names could be added to this list, including Scottish physician and explorer Mungo Park, famed chemist and President of the Royal Society Humphry Davy, physician to P. B. Shelley and surgeon William Lawrence, and others discussed below. The key feature that links these figures, however, is not only their important achievements and Edinburgh pedigree but the fact that their work was also the source of much public and professional controversy: how medical professionals negotiated the minefield of opinion is just as much a part of Romantic Medicine as is the list of advances and the role of names who made them happen.

An integral part of understanding the stakes of these negotiations is understanding how contemporary authors narrated the history of medicine; indeed, history itself was understood in the period as one important “Science of Man.” Not surprisingly, many of the medical texts of the period open with some brief discussion of medical history, either as it relates to the specific topic of the text or as it relates to the philosophical controversy at its heart. But several dedicated histories of medicine appeared throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that point to the field’s desire to tell its own story, in its own words, to serve its own interests. Some take the form of group biographies: John Aiken’s *Biographical Memoirs of Medicine in*

*Great Britain From the Revival of Literature to the Time of Harvey* (1780) apologizes for its incompleteness – “Instead of a complete *Medical Biography of Great Britain*, [the author] has been obliged to confine himself to some *Biographical Memoirs of Medicine*; and these, instead of deriving from obscure and antient records, he has drawn only from sources opened *since the revival of literature*” (iii) – but in so doing highlights the vast scope, antiquity, and mystery of medical authority, whereas Benjamin Hutchinson’s *Biographia Medica* (1799) seeks more directly to establish a pantheon of medical genius, an act of personification that, as we will see, occupies an increasingly vital role in Romantic Medicine. Other histories take a wider approach, seeking to tell an institutional history that is less tied to any sense of individual accomplishment and personality than to a sense of antiquity and vital necessity. For example, in his *The History of Medicine, Surgery, and Anatomy, From the Creation of the World, to the Commencement of the Nineteenth Century* (1831), William Hamilton expressed dismay at the lack of attention to “the origin of a branch of knowledge, so conducive to the welfare and so essential to the preservation of the human race as the Art of Healing,” and suggests that the sustained treatment of medical history, which should be “preserved among men with a kind of religious veneration,” is as vital to the discipline as clinical and theoretical work (1: 1). Similarly, in closing his *Memoirs of Medicine* (1799), Richard Walker writes: “In taking leave of the subject, let imagination be indulged with conceiving the utmost perfection of human medicine, by a removal of all external hindrances, and an universal prevalence of the most enlightened practice, and there will still remain enough of bodily sickness in the world, greatly to impede and diminish the enjoyments both of sense and intellect, through the short and feverish dream of human life” (249–250). What these contemporary medical histories reveal is the anxiety associated with any institution as it seeks to establish its legitimate authority in the public imagination: such histories require the reader to accept that there is an institution whose history can be told, that the genius of its foremost practitioners is based on more than local celebrity, and that internal controversies were part and parcel of the way all important human endeavors were supposed to work. As efforts to advance the “Science of Man” proceeded, the anxieties, both within medical circles and in the public imagination, nurtured and were in turn nurtured by some of the very controversies these histories sought to deflect.

### **Contested Bodies: Conflict and Revolution**

It should come as no surprise that the rapid changes in medicine were accompanied by controversy: Thomas Kuhn long ago illustrated how scientific progress is not a slow, steady march toward Truth, but a messy struggle to move in any direction at all. When that progress involves the curing of disease and the healing of wounds, it would seem that those at the vanguard of research would be heralded as heroes and their work allowed to proceed with little interference. While that was sometimes the case, the popular perception of the nature of medical practice and research – an

inordinate amount of time spent with the sick whose health did not always improve; a disregard for human decency as they poked and prodded bodies; a lack of respect for the dignity of the flesh provided by God; even the prevalence of quack doctors with little or no training – often meant that the work, and the medical men themselves, were regarded with at best wariness, or at worst hostility. To make matters worse, the internal conflicts that attend any scientific endeavor, the intellectual debates concerning the merits and faults of ideas and the personality conflicts found in any group of experts, often spilled out in the public, whether in print, during clinical encounters, or, in at least one case, a two-day riot over a dispute concerning the theories of John Brown at the University of Göttingen in 1802 that ended only with the arrival of the cavalry. My purpose here is to highlight three key, overlapping issues that best illustrate the emergence of a Romantic Medicine: the decline of Galenic theory and the subsequent rise of more scientific systems of medicine, the hotly contested “vitality debate,” and the perhaps less visible but nevertheless revolutionary professionalization of medicine.

As with many areas of scientific inquiry, medicine is often guided by underlying systems of thought. The articulation of such systems, known then as nosology, sought to offer comprehensive explanations of how the body’s systems worked together to produce life and health and of how to identify, interrupt, and prevent the systemic breakdowns that caused illness and death. Predictably, in a period such as the Enlightenment, such theories were proposed and sometimes discarded with stunning rapidity. At the start of the eighteenth century, humoral theory, the notion that bodies and personalities were governed by the interplay of the four humors (blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm), first espoused by the Greek physician Hippocrates and later associated with the second-century Roman physician Galen, dominated medical thinking for more than a thousand years, until it was unseated by a host of competing governing theories in the eighteenth century (see Porter, *Greatest and Flesh*). The authority of humoral theory had been on the decline since the mid sixteenth century, when new detailed and updated anatomy texts began to appear following the publication of Andreas Vesalius’s *Di Corporis Fabrica Libri Septum* (1543), which offered an anatomy and physiology based on careful and repeated hands-on dissection rather than recourse to previous handbooks and guides. In the early days of the Enlightenment, however, humoral theory still held sway, both thanks to the still-strong perception of anatomy as a trade and since it was the inspiration for influential Dutch physician Herman Boerhaave’s nosology, detailed in his widely used *Institutiones Medicae* (1708). However, beginning with the work of English physician Robert Whytt, mentor to William Cullen, Boerhaave’s theory came under attack. Whytt argued that the system maintained by Boerhaave was insufficient to explain how the body, health, and disease worked and instead argued that some kind of unknown “vital force” external to the body, though not quite a Christian soul, had to be superadded to create life and thereafter managed to effect health and cure disease. As we shall see, others quickly took sides in this debate and gave rise to one of the greatest medical controversies of the day. But Whytt’s intervention did more than ignite a controversy, however profound it may have

been: his interrogations began the process of overturning a millennium of received medical wisdom and helped to pave the way for new systems.

Building on Whytt's work, particularly his *Essay on the Vital and Other Involuntary Motions of Animals* (1751), Cullen developed a detailed and widely circulated challenge to humoral theory – still fairly influential on the Continent in the hands of Boerhaave's star pupil Albrecht von Haller – and outlined a nosology based on anatomical research and extensive laboratory experiments. Such an approach, Cullen felt, was better than a reliance on past masters, even ones of undisputed genius and influence, but still required thoughtful justification:

I soon found that my doctrines were taken notice of as new and peculiar to myself, and were accordingly severely criticised by those who, having long before been trained up in the systems of Boerhaave, had continued to think that that system neither required any change, nor admitted of any amendment. . . . [T]herefore as soon as I was employed to teach a more complete System of the Practice of Physic, I judged it necessary to publish a Text book, not only for the benefit of my hearers, but that I might also have an opportunity of obtaining the opinion of the Public more at large, and thereby be enabled either to vindicate my doctrines, or be taught to correct them. (ix)

Cullen's need to publish a text to be used for teaching, his use of his powerful position at Edinburgh, and his appeal to the public at large, all underwritten by his efforts to shake the dust off centuries of (to his mind, at least) questionable thinking, is an important moment in the story of Romantic Medicine. We will return to this point at the end of this section, but a sketch of Cullen's theory will be useful here. Cullen based his theory on what he called a "new and peculiar" physiology, which he defined as "the conditions of the body and the mind necessary to life and health" (*Institutions* 7), and which emphasized the nervous system as a kind of mind-body bridge. Building that bridge allowed him to get out of the Galenic trap that required something mystical or divine to bring life to the mechanical body. Instead, "From what is now said of the excitement and collapse of the brain, it will appear, that we suppose LIFE, so far as it is corporeal, to consist in the excitement of the nervous system, and especially of the brain, which unites the different parts, and forms them into a whole" (101–102). Electrical impulses, in the form of an "ethereal fluid" (the source of which Cullen cunningly never identifies), were conducted by the nerves, and thus the nervous system, which connects and unites all parts of the body, and furthermore connects the body and the mind, are the key to life. We may hear echoes of Hume's "human nature" and Smith's "moral sentiments" in Cullen's "excitement" that helps to "unite," and interestingly enough the three were colleagues and friends. Indeed, all three are in different ways key figures in what is called the "culture of sensibility," shaped by a belief in the fundamental interconnectedness of bodies, from communal bodies to the bodies of individuals, that emerges from the interactions made manifest in the careful observation of and response to others (see Barker-Benfield). Cullen's detailed nosology with the nervous system at the center, his "medicalizing" of sensibility, would dominate British

medical thought for much of the rest of the eighteenth century; in fact, one of the most widely used texts of the period, *The Edinburgh Practice of Physic, Surgery, and Midwifery* (1803), was based largely on his system.

Cullen's theory, together with the elaborations and challenges of those who came after him, are crucial episodes in one of the most substantial and wide-ranging controversies of the period: the question of "vitality," or the source of life itself. To simplify, on one side of the debate were the "vitalists," who held that life was made possible by some kind of "vital principle" or "vital spark" separate from biological processes, a position that left room, for some, for the concept of the Christian soul and life as a divine gift; on the other side were the "mechanists," who held that the harmony of a body's systems, prodded as necessary by material stimuli, was all that was necessary for life, effectively obviating the need for any appeal to God or soul. Both sides had their vocal and powerful proponents: John Hunter somewhat surprisingly argued for the vitality of the blood, suggesting that the vital spark was somehow "superadded" to the blood and therefore something not intrinsic to the body's own mechanisms; and William Lawrence famously attacked the vitalist position of his friend and mentor John Abernethy (1764–1831) and argued from the materialist principle that life was only "the assemblage of all the functions" (6–7), a stance that earned him charges of blasphemy. John Brown, though for the most part taking the mechanist perspective, sidestepped the question altogether, suggesting that it was the province of philosophers and theologians, not medical men trained in the ways of science: "We know not what excitability is, or in what manner it is affected by the exciting powers. . . . Both upon this, and every other subject we must abide by facts; and carefully avoid the slippery question about causes, as being in general incomprehensible, and as having ever proved a venomous snake to philosophy" (1: 4–5). On the surface, Brown's strict observance of disciplinary boundaries and careful attention to detail would seem to provide a helpful middle ground. But it is perhaps telling that although some would initially find his theory compelling few would emulate his approach: it was between Brunonians and non-Brunonians that the Göttingen riots erupted, and later writers would belittle Brown and his theory as nothing more than sideshows: as early as 1799, Benjamin Hutchinson likened Brown to Sancho Panza (159), emphasizing his status as a sidekick and saying nothing at all of the Brunonian system, and by 1831 William Hamilton expressed his disappointment that the eminent name of Cullen was sullied by his association with that "ill-regulated genius John Brown" (279), whose work is now "chiefly regarded for the eccentricity of its doctrines" (282).

As the brief sketch of the stakes of the vitality debate indicates, *who* argues is as important as *what* they argue: the British Cullen squares off with continental giants; Hunter's theory of the blood attracts attention more as *Hunter's* theory than on its merits; the upstart Lawrence dares to challenge one of the foremost medical men of the day. Articulating what counted as proper medical authority, distinguishing who was qualified to claim it, and identifying who had a say in the process was one of the most profound and lasting efforts of Romantic Medicine. Just as the Scottish

Enlightenment's historical turn had a demonstrable impact on Romantic Medicine, so too did its concern with the law as one important aspect of the "Science of Man," and the increasing professionalization of medicine was perhaps the most significant way that medicine and law overlapped. Medical practitioners had long since coalesced into three governing bodies: the Royal College of Physicians, the oldest and most prestigious of the three, was chartered in 1518; the Company of Barber-Surgeons, formed in 1540, became the fully chartered Royal College of Surgeons in 1800; and the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries seceded from the Royal College of Physicians to form their own body in 1617. However, by the latter half of the eighteenth century in practical experience things were much less rigid. Certainly each group had its heavyweights, as well as histories and traditions that served to manifest a sense of separation and communal pride, and each was bound by a variety of statutes and charters marking their territory. But by the end of the eighteenth century, *The Edinburgh Practice of Physic, Surgery, and Midwifery* could make this claim:

The union of the different branches of medical practice in the present work, may appear to demand some apology, but when it is considered that the bulk of the profession (taking the profession collectively) are in the habit of practising *all at the same time* . . . ; that no medical man should be *ignorant* of that branch which he does *not* practise; and lastly, that the peculiar nature of some diseases renders it impossible to decide which of the branches it properly belongs to; we apprehend little can be objected to this part of our scheme. (1: vii)

While some of the old internal divisions were beginning to dissolve, the divide between expert and amateur was widening. In addition to the official chartering of training centers such as St. George's and Guy's Hospitals and the expansion and reorganization of some of the older institutions such as St. Bartholomew's and St. Thomas's in the eighteenth century, governing bodies sought to enforce (and in some ways both expand and limit) medical authority by moving to establish strict regulations covering everything from education and licensing to location and methods of practice. Thus, 1815 saw the passing of the Apothecaries Act requiring all apothecaries to hold the LSA designation, which could come only after they had, first, demonstrated expertise in several subjects and, second, completed six months of residency in hospital wards. In a move that all but announces the centrality of detailed, hands-on anatomical knowledge for all medical practitioners (and the ascendance of the scientific method the Hunters encouraged), the 1832 Anatomy Act granted medical schools the rights to "unclaimed bodies," notably of the poor, for use in teaching demonstrations. Finally, in 1858 the Medical Act created a formal register of all properly trained and fully licensed professionals in the nation. But in the meantime, these Acts, and the controversies that prompted them, were helping to give rise to the medical professional who would ultimately come to embody all that Western, scientific medicine stood for: the modern surgeon.

### **“A Sage,/A Humanist”: The Rise of the Surgeon**

For much of the eighteenth century, physicians enjoyed the pride of place among medical professionals: physick (or internal medicine, the diagnosis and treatment of disease) was regarded as a gentlemanly, prestigious pursuit, while surgery was still regarded as a trade learned by apprentices, owing to the long-standing tradition of the barber-surgeon and to the perception of surgery as manual labor. But the efforts of the Hunter brothers, especially as teachers, began the process of raising surgery to a level at least on a par with physick. At the same time, the continuing erosion of the internal boundaries separating the three groups and the process to establish a sense of all medical men as fully qualified professionals levels the various medical disciplines and specialities and keeps them focused on a single goal. As Astley Cooper, who studied under John Hunter and became perhaps the foremost surgeon in Britain, told students upon their arrival at St. Thomas’s teaching hospital, the study and practice of surgery required absolute dedication, but not single-mindedness:

The study of medicine is important to the surgeon: he should be able to prescribe with certainty – should well understand the great influence of local disease on the constitution, as well as the *origin* of local disease from constitutional derangement. Without such knowledge, he knows but half his duty . . . I do not mean to say that one profession is to be upheld at the expense of the other; far from it, indeed they should mutually assist in the great duty of preserving human existence. (5)

Surgery, it would seem, was beginning to take its place as a “Science of Man.” But the process was not an easy one, for as we have seen, while the work to remove professional barriers proceeded, popular perception proved much harder to combat. Anatomy and surgery had long histories, but the new norm of requiring extended periods of time poring over numerous bodies on the dissecting table to be able to perform well at the operating table created a new demand for specimens, both the living and the dead. Whether it was the taboo, the sacrilege, or simply the revulsion that accompanied the thought of dissecting corpses or opening up the bodies of the living, the public simply was not ready for medicine’s new and apparently voracious appetite for bodies. To make matters even worse, these long-held attitudes against this kind of work meant that bodies were difficult to come by, but specimens were necessary for the improvement of the art and science that would help the medical establishment combat those negative attitudes, so body-snatching and, worse, abduction and murder – the work of what were called “resurrection men” – were sharply on the rise by the end of the eighteenth century, serving to strengthen public enmity against anatomical and surgical work even as anatomical and surgical science continued to improve (see Richardson). Frankenstein, we might recall, spoke of the need to “observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body,” when he was “forced to spend days and nights in the vaults and charnel houses,” but any revulsion on the part of audiences (both Walton and the novel’s readers) is mitigated by his



insistence that education ensured that his “mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors,” and he never “trembled at a tale of superstition, or . . . feared the apparition of a spirit” (33–34). In the face of this controversy, however, which is neatly distilled in *Frankenstein’s* – and Shelley’s – treatment of “superstition,” a number of important figures rose to positions of great prominence, both within medical circles and in the public eye. Among the more famous names are: Henry Cline, who ensured that Hunterian methodology was the norm for countless generations of students; Cooper, Cline’s star pupil; John Abernethy, whose lectures were so well attended that a theater was built at Lincoln’s Inn Fields to accommodate them; and Abernethy’s protégé and later foe William Lawrence, who rose to become surgeon to Queen Victoria. This list could easily be expanded by several dozen, but the larger point is that the work and reputation of the Hunters would help their successors to overcome, or at least successfully negotiate, public suspicion to the point where surgeons were not only well-respected medical professionals but virtual celebrities, famous as much for their larger-than-life personae as for their expert reputations.

At the same time, the Romantic period’s celebration of the individual – what we might call in a literary context the Wordsworthian “I” – together with the attending celebrity fixation made possible by print culture, helped to foster the emergence of the surgeon as a sort of medical hero figure. Some medical men had long enjoyed a kind of celebrity, if confined largely to the somewhat insular professional circles or the limited communities of gratefully recovered patients and their families. By the end of the eighteenth century, the changing perception of the surgeon’s skills and capabilities, from the awe that he had access to mystic, even forbidden, knowledge to the wonder at the miracle of recovery from the pains of both injury or disease and surgery itself, served to elevate the surgeon to near-divine status. And it is no accident that surgeons would often manipulate that status to aid in their work. Cooper, for example, devoted much time in his lectures to emphasizing the need to manage one’s public image: “Patients generally form an opinion of a surgeon’s ability by his manner: if he be of a dry, morose turn, he is apt to alarm not only the patient, but his whole family; whereas, he who speaks kindly to them, and asks for particular information, is supposed to have more knowledge, and receives more respect” (2). Manifesting the professional competence necessary to complete the task at hand, making patients and their families see and respond to it, is fundamental to the successful operation. Similarly, believing in one’s own skills and committing to the absolute necessity of greatness – developing, that is, the ego associated with surgeons in popular culture – is likewise crucial:

The variety which of necessity occurs in the practice of the Surgeons – the facility afforded to them in their respective plans of treatment – the opportunities of improving the practice of Medical Surgery – of observing the results, general and comparative, of Operations of every description – and especially of prosecuting inquiries into Morbid Anatomy, by prompt examination of the dead body, and of parts removed by operation – are advantages which while they afford ample compensation for the

labours of clinical research, would allow no pretext for indifference in those, who, conscious of their value, were not influenced by an ardent desire to improve and impart them. (Cooper and Travers ix-x)

Successful surgery, and the advancement of surgical science, is about the *will* of the surgeon – the same sense of will we encounter, I would suggest, in *Frankenstein* and in the works of poets such as Wordsworth, Byron, and P. B. Shelley.

The creation of a medical pantheon much like the poetic one is thus a central feature of Romantic Medicine. In the preface to one of the many editions of the lectures of Cooper, his one-time pupil Frederick Tyrell notes that the principles’ “excellence and accuracy have been proved, not only by the extensive and successful practice of Sir Astley himself, but by the experience of several thousands of medical men who have received them from him, and by whom they have been propagated through all parts of the world in which surgery is practised as a science” (iii). Important to note here is that the basis for Tyrell’s claim is not the numbers of successful surgeries or the recovery rates of numerous patients (though, surely, such things are implied) but the initiation of “thousands of medical men” into the fold in which – and this is key – “surgery is practised as a science” and, in turn, their initiation of thousands more. When presented with a copy of this edition, Cooper observed that the text

contains a faithful account of the principles of Surgery, which, for forty years, I have been endeavouring to learn, and of the practice which, for thirty-two years, I have been in the habit of teaching, in that school which is proud to rank amongst its Lecturers in Surgery the names Cheselden, Sharp, Warner, Else, and last, although not least, of my most able and judicious preceptor and predecessor, Mr. Cline. (iv)

Here, too, Cooper’s own claims for the strength of the principles is not solely the sound science upon which they are based but the stamp of approval granted by the roster of masters and celebrities, a roster that now includes his own name. In the end, Romantic Medicine is as much about the characters and their stories as it is about the legacy of the theories and advances that have continuing relevance in medicine today.

If for no other reason, the fact that professional medicine as we would recognize it today comes into being at the same time as and, as I hope to have shown here, parallel to the emergence of what we can call the Romantic period in literary history suggests that we should take the idea of a Romantic Medicine seriously. This brief outline of some key elements of that idea shows that there were few areas in the “Science of Man” upon which medicine did not encroach and that some passing familiarity with medical history has become increasingly difficult to avoid. To return to where we began, *Frankenstein*’s final speech aptly illustrates the tremendous distance we have come:

“When younger,” said he, “I felt as if I were destined for some great enterprise. My feelings are profound; but I possessed a coolness of judgement that fitted me for

illustrious achievements. This sentiment of the worth of my nature supported me, when others would have been oppressed; for I deemed it criminal to throw away in useless grief those talents that might be useful to my fellow-creatures. When I reflected on the work I had completed, no less a one than the creation of a sensitive and rational animal, I could not rank myself with the herd of common projectors.” (179–180)

In the collision of imagination, sentiment, reason, commitment, and ego, we see the very personification of Romantic Medicine.

See AUTHOR; NARRATIVE; PHILOSOPHY; POETICS; RELIGION; SCIENCE.

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# Psychology

*Joel Faflak*

## I

Modern psychology emerges as a distinct science of the mind around the time of William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). This is not to say that before James no one studied the mind, about which the Romantics in particular had a great deal to say. For this fascination with psychology they can thank the eighteenth century, which one historian, citing the influence of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), calls "the century of psychology" (Vidal 90; original emphasis). Locke made thinking about the mind unthinkable without thinking about thought itself, a preoccupation that Romanticism continues and expands, especially by exploring the mind's more intractable qualities and processes. This exploration either generates or anticipates the modern disciplines of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, analytical psychology, experimental psychology, and the cognitive sciences or neuroscience, to name only a few. Romantic psychology is animated by a spirit of literary, scientific, and philosophical inquiry and advance that defines the period as what Richard Holmes calls an Age of Wonder. Yet besides further pioneering psychology, the Romantics also made us aware in turn of our responsibility for the mind's powers, especially when they exceeded the bounds of human understanding and control.

Such concerns are epitomized in S. T. Coleridge's use of the phrase "psychological curiosity" to describe his poem "Kubla Khan: or, A Vision in a Dream," written in 1797. Explaining the poem's composition in a preface appended to its 1816 publication, Coleridge describes reading an early orientalist narrative, Samuel Purchas's *Purchas his Pilgrimage* (1613) and taking an "anodyne" (opium) for a "slight indisposition" (dysentery). He then fell asleep while reading the following

passage: "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall" (*Coleridge's Poetry* 180). While asleep Coleridge dreamed a poem of 200–300 lines in which "images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort" (181). He awakened to write down the poem, only to be interrupted by "a person on business from Porlock." Returning to finish the poem, he could only salvage "some vague and dim recollection of the general purpose of the vision," which were like "images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter." Or as Coleridge notes, the "still surviving recollections in his mind" leave him to finish what "to-morrow is yet to come." This sense of prolepsis, drawn back ceaselessly to the poem's origins, speaks to the complex temporality mapped by the poem and its preface: publication; preface; the poem's fragmented completion; the interruption by the man from Porlock; the poem's initial writing; the dream; the vision that the dream recounts; the poem that the dream itself is dreaming; the psychic reality to which this vision refers; Coleridge's falling asleep; Coleridge's reading of Purchas. These facts trace a linear path between the dream's origin and its published outcome. Yet they also constitute a palimpsest of competing phenomena that overdetermine the poem's correspondence to reality and thus our own claims to "authentic" experience. Indeed, the poem's shifting temporal and spatial perspectives, like the influence of opium, figure psychic reality as a kind of shifting semiosis accessible only through its textual effects, which always leave the reader one remove from meaning itself.

The poem images this tension between succession and simultaneity as an inaccessible source, the breathing and panting "deep romantic chasm," "A savage place, as holy and enchanted / As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted / By woman wailing for her demon-lover!" (ll. 12, 14–16). This ambivalence (savage holiness, demonic enchantment, haunted enlightenment) is later given aesthetic form as a "dome of pleasure" or "shadow" that "Floated midway on the waves" (l. 31–32), which further exoticizes Purchas's description of the Khan's palace as a "sumptuous house of pleasure" that can be "removed from place to place" (350). Dematerialization and rematerialization signify an unstable, melancholic affect that attends the poem's unattainable and thus threatening embodiment of vision. Coleridge images this impossibility by recalling a previous vision of a "damsel with a dulcimer" (l. 37), an "Abyssinian maid" (l. 39) whose "song" (l. 43), *could* he "revive [it] within [him]" (l. 42), *would* inspire such "deep delight" (44) that he might, in fact, make real and whole through poetic vision "that dome in air" (l. 46). But attaining this vision would also mark him as a figure of "holy dread" (l. 52) from whose "flashing eyes" and "floating hair" (l. 50) society needs to be protected by "Weav[ing] a circle round him thrice" (l. 51). This final passage at once shapes and renders dangerously protean the poet's identity, marking him off from society.

The poem's "miracle of rare device" (l. 35) figures the shifting topography of the poet's drifting imagination, and thus the powerful and threatening mobility of mental processes, associations, and representations. We might read this fluid matrix

in terms of the distortions of Freud's dreamwork, first outlined in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). For Freud, as he notes in his later *Autobiographical Study*, dreams were an "example of the processes occurring in the deeper, unconscious layers of the mind, which differ considerably from the familiar normal processes of thought." Once the "preconscious material of thought" has been condensed and its "psychical emphasis" displaced, it is "translated into visual images or *dramatized*, and completed by a deceptive *secondary revision*" (45). Dream interpretation thus reads beneath the dream's non-sensical, manifest form a latent or repressed meaning that will make sense of this non-sense, in this case the way in which opium abuse and its degenerative effects on Coleridge's life and career are symptomatic of some deeper psychic trauma. Coleridge himself coined the term "psycho-analytical" in an 1805 notebook entry (*Notebooks 2*: 2670), itself a remarkable symptom of the penetrating but labyrinthine cast of Coleridge's thought so aptly described by John Keats, Thomas De Quincey, and others. But Freudian dreamwork and dream interpretation seem too limiting for a discussion of Coleridge's poem. For one thing, the poem speaks of "Ancestral voices" (l. 30), which locate the subject's mind within a more expansive sense of the unconscious, anticipating the collective unconscious of Carl Jung's archetypal psychology. But the poem's sense of sublime distance seems to have less to do with such larger contexts than with, once again, a mutating topography in which the subject is unable to find his psychic bearings – or rather, a protean context that *constitutes* the psyche. To speak of this mind, Freud or Jung is only the beginning.

The third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1797) expresses a capacious Romantic understanding of dreams, which signify everything from spiritual prophecy to behavioral motivation to bodily vitality. That dreams are "common to mankind with the brutes" (6: 120), however, also yokes the human to brutish states of being, more specifically to the involuntary return of mental processes beyond consciousness and thus resistant to recollection and amendment. This *agon* of thought becomes known as the unconscious, a term very much in use by the nineteenth century, especially with the publication of Eduard von Hartmann's *Philosophie des Unbewussten* (1869), or *Philosophy of the Unconscious*. *Unbewusst* also translates as "the unknown," reflecting an earlier struggle to explain the mind's often troubling cognitive functioning before this underground or para-conscious activity was given a name. What is unconscious signifies what understanding sets aside within itself in order to function systematically or "normally," but it also refers to what lies beyond human comprehension, what Kant calls the *noumenon*, Shelley calls the "dark abyss of how little we know" (478), or the post-Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan will call the Real, which "resists symbolization absolutely" (66).

Something of this resistance informs Coleridge's use of the word "curiosity" to describe his poem's complex psychological experience, a word that warns us at the same time that it arrests our attention of the poem as a part that does not fit the whole. Opium aside, Coleridge also delayed publishing "Kubla Khan" because of public response to his 1798 *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*, which William Wordsworth famously moved to the end of the subsequent 1800, 1802, and 1805 editions of *Lyrical Ballads*. Readers (like Wordsworth himself) were disturbed by the

poem's archaisms, explicit gothicisms, and the mariner's apparent lack of (a) character. Anna Letitia Barbauld complained that the poem lacked a moral. The suggestion that a text can make the undesirable link between psychological instability and moral turpitude reflects a broader anxiety about the influence of literary texts. Such fears go back to Plato, but gain special force with the explosion of reading publics in the later eighteenth century. Wordsworth warns against the morbid effects of "sickly and stupid German tragedies" (*Poetical Works* 735) on the individual imagination. Somewhat less critically, Coleridge describes his public recitations of "Christabel" as a "species of Animal Magnetism, in which the enkindling Reciter, by perpetual comment of looks and tones, lends his own will and apprehensive faculty to his Auditors" to create the "excitement and temporary sympathy of feeling" (*Biographia* 2: 239). This ameliorative reaction is not unlike Wordsworth's promise that verse can harness the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling," which accompanies the poet's response to his environs, into "emotion recollected in tranquility," a quiet catharsis of memory shared among men as the common sense of an imaginative dialogue meant to evoke the ideals of democratic exchange (*Poetical Works* 740). Coleridge speaks of the "willing suspension of disbelief that constitutes poetic faith" (*Biographia* 2: 6), but this description also highlights the more troubling psychology of a suspended rationality or involuntary participation that indicates the kinds of dangerous incitement later attributed to Byron's verse.

Eighteenth-century natural science and moral philosophy promoted curiosity as one of the linchpins of scientific, political, and civil progress. Curiosity indicated an Enlightenment wonder about and sympathy with the world, which Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Politic Justice* (1793) idealizes through conversation as the medium of human understanding and communication. Rational exchange would make institutions obsolete, a hope Godwin explored the next year in *Things as They Are; or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). Revisiting the novel in his 1832 Preface to *Fleetwood*, Godwin argues that *Caleb Williams* was an "analysis of the private and internal operations of the mind, employing [his] metaphysical dissecting knife in tracing and laying bare the involutions of motive, and recording the gradually accumulating impulses" that informed his characters' behavior (*Caleb* 339). The result of this inner reconnaissance, however, is that curiosity turns "magnetical" (112); Caleb's desire to find out the secret of Falkland's inner life becomes a process of manipulative, coercive, and ultimately violent exchange. Curiosity also binds individuals together against their will; inextricable from the psychology that sustains it, curiosity indicates this psychology's unavoidably social nature. Put another way, Romanticism inherits the Enlightenment mind's desire to classify, assess, and understand "things as they are." But it also confronts how this mind becomes its own object of study. *This* observation leaves the subject without any Archimedean point outside of itself by which to objectify itself (the transcendental philosophy of Kant and later the Idealist philosophies of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel will address themselves to this problem). Human understanding requires at least two, which is why eighteenth-century theories of cognition subtend social theories of moral philosophy, sympathy, or sensibility.



The phrase “psychological curiosity” thus signifies the missed encounter of consciousness with the unconscious mind. As both psychic tragedy and fortunate fall, the interruption by the man from Porlock is an allegory for the mind’s inability to access its own unfolding operations. Coleridge’s preface attempts to aestheticize and thus universalize this otherwise personal and singular psychic experience by invoking the afflatus of poetic inspiration and thus the tropes of Romantic genius and imaginative power. But this limitless creative potentiality also suggests a dangerous psychological incitement. Coleridge’s dream at once emerges from and remobilizes specters of race, colonialism, and gender, which the poem appears to exorcise or alchemize through the imaginative experience of its purer poetic vision. As dream, the poem remains overdetermined by its own differences, an overdetermination exacerbated rather than explained by the preface. Like Thomas De Quincey’s 1821 *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, Coleridge’s text indicates a troubling slippage between body and mind, and between internal desires and social prohibition. This slippage characterizes a range of symptoms plaguing the Romantic mind and body politic: madness, hysteria, dreams, hallucination; religious enthusiasm, political radicalism, overweening imperialist ambition; the unsteadiness of political economy or economic expansion, the dangers of scientific exploration, the drunken immoderation of bodily and social habits; prophecy, apocalypse, the sublime, the limits of imagination. These are signs of a protean and unwieldy psychology of which the Romantics attempted to make sense. They often did so by helping, like science, to provide for this mind a distinct explanatory shape. But they also attempt to let the mind express its singular affective and cognitive dignity without imposing external models or hypotheses that would silence this voice. That is to say, like Shelley in *Julian and Maddalo* (1819) or Wordsworth in *The Prelude* (1850), the Romantics also risk sharing the mad person’s “fond anxiety” (*Prelude* 5: 160).

## II

Psychology has several derivations. One refers to “psyche” as the “immortal intellectual soul” (Vidal 91). This definition coincides with the first appearance of the word “psychology” in the sixteenth century, which “did not signal a new conceptual intent” but rather an effort to distinguish “between *anima* (the soul as life-principle joined to the body) and *de animus* (the rational, immortal, and immaterial soul, or ‘mind’ as opposed to body)” (91). From this latter designation emerged pneumatology – the study, theory, or doctrine of spirits or spiritual beings, a seventeenth-century branch of metaphysics that addressed the understanding of the human soul, and ultimately its relationship to God (a branch of pneumatology related to theology, especially in the later nineteenth century), through reason, distinct from the understanding of the human body and bodies. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries pneumatology also referred to the study of the physical properties of airs and gases. This etymology indicates an often conflicting range of

influences: divine/human, sacred/secular, immaterial/material, religious/scientific. This last pairing indicates the shift from matters of faith and belief to those of observation and validation, from the revelation of spiritual truths to a forensics that enjoins mental understanding and reflection. As Alexander Broadie notes, psychology's emergence from religious and spiritual concerns and discourses characterizes early psychology's understanding of the human mind as a "belief-forming mechanism whose purpose is to enable us to grasp truths. That is, such faculties as sense perception, memory and consciousness not only by their nature enable us to form beliefs, but also are reliable in the sense that they can be relied on to produce beliefs which are true" (61). This emphasis on belief also suggests how from early on the science or philosophy of mind, despite eighteenth-century materialism, addressed itself to *non*-empirical phenomena. The work of eighteenth-century proto-neuroscientists like Robert Whytt, Friedrich Hoffman, William Cullen, or John Brown hypothesized the mind-body relationship as a nervous circuitry that did the work of cognition. But medical science also took up this nervous body's mental, behavioral, and moral effects and affects. Discussing the emergence of the "unconscious" in the eighteenth century, Angus Nicholls and Martin Liebscher note that psychology accompanies the emergence of "the 'human,' understood not only as an empirical or biological organism but also as a thinking subject capable of self-reflection, self-definition, and therefore also of self-transformation" (3).

To emphasize *de animus* was thus to locate the work of spirit in the body, and eighteenth-century mind science was largely a physiological psychology. But studying the mind's labor on behalf of the body also produced questions about the higher existence of Mind itself and its reflective capacities, the human equivalent of a higher order governing one's rational perception of the world (i.e., the Mind of God). Mind was thus also the body's animating principle – the mind as psyche or soul that informs Keats's notion of life as a "vale of Soul-making" (249). In his "Ode to Psyche" Keats depicts Psyche as a newly minted symbol of the mind's psychology. "Soul-making" works by what Keats calls "*Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (43), perhaps Romanticism's most capacious definition of psychology. By implicitly negotiating between the biology and religion of mind, and by gesturing toward the broader shape one's life assumes, Keats yokes together body, mind, affect, and behavior in a relational matrix concerned less with identity or ego than with the dynamic psychology that informs this process.

The precursor for this relational subject, endlessly disposed toward the world in which she exists, is the rational, self-reflecting subject of an earlier philosophy. Locke saw the mind as a *tabula rasa*, receiving sense impressions from the external world, these impressions helping to form ideas, the most complex of which helped the subject to form his notions of the world. Thinkers like David Hume and David Hartley reworked Locke's model to emphasize the association between ideas. However much they sought to explain internal cognition, Locke and his heirs placed this explanation in the service of understanding how the mind constructed and thus related to external reality. In a chapter "On the Association of Ideas" added

to the fourth (1700) edition of his *Essay*, however, Locke worries that the “wrong Connexion [*sic*] in our Minds of *Ideas*, in themselves, loose and independent one of another, has such an influence, and is of so great a force to set us awry in our Actions, as well Moral as natural, Passions, Reasonings, and Notions themselves, that, perhaps, there is not any one thing that deserves more to be looked after” (2: 397). Hume makes Locke’s anxiety the source of his own skepticism that “there is no such idea” as a “self,” because “mankind . . . are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement” (*Treatise* 254). For Hume, “[t]he mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different” (253).

Hume’s skepticism expresses a broader eighteenth-century faith, in the wake of Bacon and Newton, that experience is the cornerstone of human understanding. In his *Essay* Locke says that the white page of the mind gathers all its “materials of Reason and Knowledge” from “*Experience*” (2: 104), and Hume in his Abstract to *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740) says that he is only “pretending . . . to explain the principles of human nature” (xvi). He “promises to draw no conclusions but where he is authorized by experience” (646). Hume’s lack of concern for the metaphysical status of external reality masks his inability to explain with certainty how “outside” gets “inside.” Hume cannot say for certain that the mind exists, though he does believe in the existence of mind as a “bundle” of sense impressions or “theatre” of mental functioning, which stages the idea of a mind at work processing these impressions. Later Scottish Common Sense philosophers like Dugald Stewart or Thomas Reid avoided Hume’s skepticism, but still held that, while they could affirm their observations of the mind’s functioning, they could not with any certainty explain what mind was.

In general the above thinkers emphasize the mind’s regulative rather than productive capacities, and thus privilege its voluntary or active powers above its involuntary, autonomous, or passive effects (Reid titles one of his works *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* [1788]). As Brodie argues, Stewart and Reid could entertain trains of thought that produced and sustained consciousness, but whereas Reid found “good empirical evidence” to explain the existence of these sensations, for Stewart they could not be “[brought] under scrutiny” (74, 73). For Stewart, this invisibility, like the earlier *petites perception* of Leibniz, was not threatening. Locke and Hume were not so certain. Locke speaks of the “violence” of imagination that threatens the subject’s external construction of the world, a threat that requires “all the Light we can let in upon our own Minds” to illuminate what is “Dark to our selves” (Locke 1: 43). For Hume the imagination allows us to “feign the continued existence of the perception of our senses, to remove the interruption; and run into the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*, to disguise the variation” (*Treatise* 254). Yet we must be careful not “to confound identity with relation” in this process, for the former would allow us to “join the head of a man to the body of a horse,” though “it is not in our power to believe, that such an animal has ever really existed” (*Enquiry* 31).

For Hume belief disciplines the volatility of fiction, in that through the habitual and customary experience of the mind's associationism one is able to form a "vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, . . . what the imagination alone is never able to attain" (32).

The apotheosis of an eighteenth-century faith in the mind's regulative powers was the transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) Kant distinguishes between the reproductive or empirical imagination, which he aligns with sensibility as perception or the production of sense impressions in the mind, and the productive imagination, which designates the mind's "transcendental function" (146). The productive imagination realizes the "synthesis of apprehension" as the "affinity of all appearances" (133), and so indicates how the mind is "grounded *a priori* on rules" that obey the logic of mental categories to then impose upon ideas the "formal and pure condition of sensibility" through the understanding's concepts or "schema" (145, 182). For Kant this internal logic, the source of which is ultimately unknowable but the uniformity of which we witness via cognition, ensures that empiricism remains under the control of the "abiding and unchanging 'I'" (146). Kant calls this "pure apperception," what Coleridge in his theory of the primary imagination, influenced by Kant's philosophy, will call "the infinite I AM" (*Biographia* 1: 304). Kant's commitment to the mind's regulative powers suggests Henri Ellenberger's point that the rise of psychology in the eighteenth century exemplified a concern with "mental hygiene . . . based on the training of the will and the subordination of the passions to reason" (197).

Emerging alongside this "mental hygiene," however, was a growing sense that the mind's obscurer drives were rather more constitutive of psychic reality, a Romantic suspicion of mental functioning that grows from an earlier empirical psychology. Hume insists upon the "spectating [of] one's mind" (*Treatise* 408), but distrusts sole reflection and "sides with the spectator's judgment as against the agent's" because of a "belief that within the field of human liberty the spectator's judgment about the mind of a third person is more properly scientific" than a personal belief "grounded in nothing more than . . . immediate feeling" (64). In a similar vein Kant sublimes the mind's ability to transcend its own operations by witnessing and thus accounting for them via the imagination. But his later *Critique of Judgement* (1790) and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) compromise this objectivity by attesting to a range of mental affects that arrested eighteenth-century thought. On one hand, Joseph Addison praises the imagination as being "conducive to Health" because it exerts a "kindly influence on the Body" that alleviates the work of understanding, which is often "attended with too violent a Labour of the Brain" (cited in Tillotson 335). On the other hand, Samuel Johnson disdains the metaphysical conceit as a "*Discordia concors*" by which the "most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together" (cited in Tillotson 1072, 1077). How earlier theories of imagination veer between health and disease reflects the dynamism of a more embodied imagination, epitomized in Edmund's Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), a key influence on Kant's thought. Burke's treatise symbolizes an emergent Romantic concern with

the imagination and its cognates as reflections of mental power, from the apotheosis of the mind's sublimity in Books Six or Fourteen of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, to Thomas De Quincey's orientalist psychodramas of imagination gone awry: *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, *The English Mail Coach* (1844), and *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845).

As the Romantics moved past an eighteenth-century concern with the mind as a purely functional or regulative apparatus, they encountered its more profound powers of creation, recreation, prophecy, and apocalypse. The period's various theories of imagination besides Kant's, Coleridge's, or Wordsworth's reflect this capacity, from Joanna Baillie's introductory discourse on *The Plays of the Passions* (1798), to the gigantic forms of Blake's illuminated poems, Keats's letters, and De Quincey's distinction between the literatures of knowledge and power. Perhaps the most salient distinction here is that between P. B. Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Whereas the former glorifies the mind for its at once metaphysical and socially restorative drive, the latter reads this Prometheanism as a type of Satanic apocalypse in which the mind presumes beyond its human limits. In this divine insanity of human understanding, the novel seems to say, one should hope, to paraphrase Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, that the hiding places of power close before we approach them.

This is also to say that Romantic psychology, as reflected in Romantic obsession with the imagination, had a strongly political valence. Between P. B. Shelley's social utopianism or Godwin's political justice and the warning about exceeding the limits of enlightenment in Mary Shelley's novel or Godwin's fiction, we can read both the benevolent and manipulative social effects of psychology. Early in the eighteenth century Anthony Astley Cooper, arguing that there are "certain humours in mankind" that must "have vent," just as "in reason . . . there are heterogeneous particles which must be thrown off by fermentation" (93), worried about the "contagion of enthusiasm" that might result from an uncontrolled sympathy. He thus prescribes that the "only way to save men's sense, or preserve wit at all in the world, is to give liberty to wit" (93, 95) in the interchange between subjects. As James Engell notes, sympathy in the later eighteenth century was fundamentally moral, "an instrument of virtue . . . and an act of the imagination permitting the self to identify with others" (24). Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) inverts Hobbesian self-interest as a moral transference in which a subject "will be more likely to prevail if he can interest [his brethren's] self-love in his favour" (Smith 22). Here psychology takes a distinctly social direction that indicates, especially when confronting the specters of revolution and the increasing complexity and unwieldiness of populations, fears of political or religious enthusiasms that need to be curbed for the sake of a properly functioning body politic. Discussing post-1789 traumas in British politics (the Treason Trials, Gagging Acts, threats against the King's person), John Barrell argues that the period confronted in the protean nature of the law as a tool of sociopolitical legislation and control the arbitrariness of the human mind itself, which is why "aesthetics was anxious to pass the concept [of imagination] over to psychiatry" (7). The French medical doctor Philippe Pinel

famously unchained the inmates at the Bicêtre mad asylum in Paris in 1795 and in 1792 the Tuke Brothers began the Quaker retreat at York. Both events, directed toward the alleviation of mental illness, symbolized a post-Revolutionary spirit of human benevolence and social progress. The scene of psychiatry itself, modeled on the clinical practice of Pinel, William Pargeter, and others, was based on the exchange of thoughts and feelings between patient and doctor (a prototype of later dynamic psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy) and thus figured larger ideals of sympathy as the basis of civil society.

But the emergence of what one might call the psychiatric consciousness of Romantic psychology also came at a price. We have already noted how sympathy goes wrong in Godwin's early fiction, which error he explores in later novels such as *St. Leon* (1799) and *Mandeville* (1819). In *Romantic Psychoanalysis* (2007) I examine various scenes of psychic exchange that stage at once the fearless psychic exploration and sociopolitical manipulation of individual minds. Gender emerges as a key factor in this process, and women writers themselves offer a particularly vital contribution to the developing psychology of the Romantic period, from the acute observation of social setting and custom in Jane Austen's novels or Dorothy Wordsworth's journals to the subtle affective and mental discriminations of Mary Tighe's *Psyche; or, The Legend of Love* (1805). More often than not, the psychology represented by feminist Romantic writers evolved from an intense exploration of the socially and behaviorally repressive and corrosive effects of gender, from Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy* (1795) and Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), both of which explore the limits of psychological autonomy; to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), which materializes these limits as a forced psychiatric confinement; to Mary Shelley's *Matilda* (1819), in which the price of psychological liberty is death.

Each in its own way, the above texts stage the mind's epistemologically unknown, psychologically unconscious, and sociopolitically unwieldy cognates, what P. B. Shelley in his final fragment, *The Triumph of Life* terms "thoughts which must remain untold" (l. 21). This phrase signifies at once the inability to read the mind and a social prohibition against exposing the innermost workings of thought and desire. Psychiatric theory and practice evolve through the explosion of asylums and the evolution of asylum practice, and through the dissemination of psychological knowledge via medical treatises and other print forms. But the reality, as psychiatric historian Andrew Scull has argued, was that madness ultimately resisted diagnosis and cure, or that the emergence of psychology as a distinct object of inquiry multiplied psychopathological phenomena for study as much as it defined and classified the scourge of madness itself, a public sphere expansion that aligns with Michel Foucault's critique of psychiatry in *A History of Madness* (1961; first full English translation in 2006). Literature at once accompanied and reflected upon this growth in psychological interest. Medical doctors like Erasmus Darwin, James Beattie, Thomas Beddoes, and Thomas Brown were also creative writers who used verse to disseminate their knowledge of minds and bodies within the public sphere (see Faubert). But as James Allard shows in his essay on Romantic Medicine in this

volume, such public documents were as much about publicizing the authority of doctors and their profession as they were about producing diagnoses and cures.

### III

Alan Richardson's *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (2002) was among the first studies to remind us that there was a far more productive discursive and cultural interplay between literature, medical science, and early brain science (what we would now term cognitive science or neuroscience) than we had previously understood. This complex imbrication at once generated and challenged its own revolutionary discoveries and explanations. Such exchanges were possible because, as David Knight argues, the Romantic sciences still "lacked sharp and natural frontiers," and disciplinary boundaries were as yet indistinct. Instead, "the realm of science, governed by reason," was distinguished from "practice, or rule of thumb; and apostles of science hoped to replace habit by reason in the affairs of life" (13–14). As Andrea Henderson notes, central to the contest of empirical faculties in the Romantic period was a sense of the subject's "core," and thus of her mind, as "the centre of movement or circulation, a place of dangerous fluidity" (9). Both Richardson and Henderson, by locating the mind indeterminately between an internal or interiorized private space and an external public sphere, indicate how Romantic criticism itself has gone through several stages of reconsidering the mind's centrality to a study of both Romantic psychology and Romantic literature.

Early reaction to this dynamic and often vertiginous Romantic mind, however, very much determined how later criticism was to understand Romanticism for some time. The time's science and literature reflected the times, of course. George III's ongoing bouts of madness wrote the period's psychology large as a mind never at one with itself, an apt reflection of the often vertiginous position of Romantic revolution and reaction between the two empires. The darkly erotic psychology of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) or William Hazlitt's later *Liber Amoris* (1819), not to mention the schizophrenic religious psychology of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1823) or the uncanny and proto-psychoanalytic character of most Romantic gothic literature in general (see Castle, Williams, Punter), produced a vision of the Romantic mind greatly in need of mental hygiene. Matthew Arnold's famous assessment of Romanticism as a period that thought far too much, but did not act enough, defined the Romantics as mind-obsessed, internalized to such an extent that they could not move forward, a type of cautionary tale for Victorian notions of social progress. That the Romantics were godparents to the later Symbolist or Decadent movements did not help the critical cause.

Early in the twentieth century, T. E. Hulme assessed the Romantic achievement as "spilt religion" (118). This pejorative perpetuates earlier fears of religious enthusiasm that go back to the origins of pre-Romantic psychology in spirituality and theology, as well as suggests that Romantic psychology was hedonistic and

amoral (again, Byron was an especially dangerous figure here). Despite endless self-explorations and self-discoveries (and the considerable body of scientific and literary knowledge that opened the Romantic mind to future expansion), the Romantics were never properly self-explanatory. Again we come up against an implicitly Victorian sense that a productive citizen's social and moral behavior should be predicated on intense, but never obsessive, self-examination. A. O. Lovejoy's "discrimination of Romanticisms" implicitly figured the Romantic mind as a multiple personality without a mental governor or coherent theory of its own mind (in the way that the post-Romantics could point to a more singular Victorian "temper"), an excess always in need of containment. Only with the emergence of Romantic studies proper, especially in post-World War II American and Canadian academies, did the reinvestigation and recuperation of Romantic psychology begin in earnest, as in early psychological approaches to Romanticism like those of C. M. Bowra's *The Romantic Imagination* (1948). Exemplary of this approach is Northrop Frye's idea of the mind of Romantic literature as helping to map a broader archetypal or mythographic schema and M. H. Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), which relocates Romantic psychology with a post-Christian redemptive schema. For Abrams, Romantic literature, particular its poetry (paradigmatically in Wordsworth's 1814 Prospectus to *The Recluse*), naturalizes the mind's singular creative, quasi-divine potential through the power of its mythopoeic imagination to overcome political and social disillusionment and to transcend the narrowness of Enlightenment materialism and rationalism.

In the 1980s deconstruction and new historicism submitted this paradigmatic mind to critical scrutiny. Whereas deconstruction re-thought Romantic literature as a process of "restless self-examination" (Rajan 25), often exclusively through its textual forms, new historicism, charging deconstruction (rather carelessly) with a lack of sensitivity to historical process, attended to the historical pressures and processes overlooked by an earlier criticism (including that of the Romantics themselves) mystified by its own practice. This Romantic ideology (to use Jerome McGann's term) took special aim at an over-reliance on Coleridge's "German" idealization of Romantic consciousness, which was said to occlude the critical gaze from the heterogeneous range of Romantic "psychologies." McGann's purpose was not itself at first psychological (though both his and Rajan's subsequent work is, his on the poetics of sensibility, hers on the phenomenology of the Romantic subject), but the result has been a productive reassessment of Romantic theories of mind, mental science, and psychological process. The somewhat earlier criticism of Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman, both of whom flirted with deconstruction, anticipates this later "demystification" of the Romantic transcendental imagination by examining the *agon* of how this mind, in its attempt to move past the natural determinism of mind inherent in pre-Romantic empirical psychology, is often halted by an excess of self-consciousness en route to its idealist return to a self without self. If deconstruction, especially through the work of Paul de Man, saw this mind as rather death driven, if not absent altogether, eventually Romantic studies has reconfigured the mind in more ideological and cultural terms, again in order to historicize



Romanticism's own stake in constructing "a self-made mind, full of newly constructed depths" (Siskin 13). The result of this shift is a re-evaluation of Romanticism's connection to modern theories of consciousness, dreams, and the unconscious in the work of Henderson or Richardson noted above, Douglas Wilson, and David Punter, or in the sophisticated psychoanalytical criticism of Mary Jacobus. Their work has a more hybrid critical vision that reflects the period's own polymathic, rather than obsessive or single-minded, approach to mind and psyche.

Four recent studies stand out here. Julie Carlson's *England's First Family of Writers* (2007) explores Romanticism's tumultuous history through the psychology or unfolding psychodrama of the Godwin–Shelley Circle. In *Romantic Moods* (2005) Thomas Pfau traces Romantic psychology through post-Revolutionary moods (that embody themselves both successively and palimpsestically) from post-Revolutionary trauma, to Napoleonic paranoia, to post-Napoleonic melancholy. This final mood roughly equates to a Regency period torn between self-discipline and excess, a schizophrenia cured with the ascension of Victoria and the Second British Empire (although, ironically, for much of the later Victorian period Victoria herself was confronted by a different form of madness: the often paralyzing melancholy that followed from the death of Prince Albert). Richard C. Sha's *Perverse Romanticism: Aesthetics and Sexuality in Britain, 1750–1832* (2009) explores in Romantic literature and culture the at once contradictory and transformational relationship between bodies, gender, sexuality, and the aesthetic as part of a broader Romantic social psychology. And finally, Jacques Khalip's *Anonymous Life: Romanticism and Dispossession* (2009) takes on both assumptions about a self-possessed Romantic mind and their critique in order to examine a Romantic psychological invisibility that runs counter to Enlightenment notions of disclosure and transparency.

#### IV

In the earlier distinction between pneumatology and psychology one notes the shift from plural to singular, from studying spirits or spiritual beings to defining a generic entity known as "mind" or "the mind." This shift reflects the taxonomic drive of post-Enlightenment thought to explain exhaustively the mind's physical attributes, intellectual capabilities, and behavioral or social effects. Similar to attempts to classify and understand the natural world, however, the idealism of his endeavor faltered when confronted by the often maddening diversity of psychic phenomena, from madness itself; to hysteria, somnambulism, hallucination, dreams, and the like; to psychology's complex ties to the broadest experiences of human cognition and interaction, from emotion, sensibility, sentiment, and sympathy, to religious and political congregation and enthusiasm. Complicating this process was the fact that the very object of study was the same instrument employed in psychological study. If the laws of Newtonian science, which also influenced eighteenth-century

psychology, dictated how one saw the physical universe, the observational paradigm of Baconian science, which valued direct observation and experimental induction over logical deduction from first principles or scientific hypotheses, introduced the human subject herself into the laboratory. How this subject “saw” herself entailed the work of sympathy, one foundation of social democracy and its inherent belief in civil society: the balance of affective, economic, and political forces toward the greatest possible good, a metaphysics of civility and equality, of productive and equitable exchange in order to ensure the wealth of nations. Psychology – both the study of the mind itself and the curiosity that subtended this study – names our basic affective disposition toward others: our ability, as Smith says, if not to experience, at least to imagine the suffering of others and thus help to alleviate this suffering as something we would not want to be visited upon ourselves. As David Marshall has suggested, however, sympathy is more aesthetically imaginative than genuinely empathic, a flaw in curiosity explored above in Godwin’s fiction.

If the emergent paradigm of psychology was the morally useful man, an idea that has a long provenance in eighteenth-century moral philosophy, natural science, and political economy, the early nineteenth century begins the process of naming this figure’s social utility, a term aligned with an eventual Victorian concern with moral hygiene and the mental physiology of an evolving brain science and psychiatric practice. One of the results of this development at the end of the nineteenth century was psychoanalysis, which emerged, ironically, to deal with the kinds of neurotic or psychopathological behaviors produced by the otherwise productive restraints an earlier psychiatry or mental physiology had put into place. Also behind Freud is a century of science working hard to exorcise the ghosts of religion. By attempting to explain the work of spirit in terms of mind, and thus to make the mind’s energy answerable to science, the mental materialism that informed early psychology became a lightning rod for the vitalism debates of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In these debates, which raged well into the Victorian era, attempts to explain the life of the mind veer between religion (submitting the mind’s powers to God), science (mapping the mind’s biology or physiology), and literature (narrating the mind’s *Bildung*). Yet despite such explanatory efforts, this mental life ends up having a life and mind of its own. Put another way, at once binding and radicalizing all three positions is the troubling emergence of a further discipline – psychology – which William James advocates for a new century. But he does so only by utterly leaving behind any talk of “soul” or “the soul,” and thus by insisting upon a scientific materialism that Freud in his own way advocated unequivocally, and against his own most radical insights, as Jung or Lacan were to argue (albeit in rather different ways).

We might end by saying that the emergence of psychology indicates a Cartesian split – between explaining the mind in terms of physiology and classifying and assessing its attributes in spiritual or, well, psychological terms – that we have still to overcome. Psychology emerges to establish and account for the empirical basis of the mind’s existence, and yet in doing so confronts the mind as an entity often resistant to scientific or philosophical inquiry. As a period that marks the further gestation of

psychology on its way to becoming the modern discipline we now understand it to be, Romanticism thus concerns us because it is Romantic literature, perhaps more than Romantic science or philosophy, that addresses the human mind, not only as an entity demanding further definition and explanation, but more profoundly as a heterogeneous, multifaceted, and often unwieldy phenomenon of human experience, a complexity with which modern psychology, whether psychiatric, psychoanalytic, or otherwise, has wrestled with ever since. In 1912, as he sailed into New York Harbor en route to Clark University, where he had been invited to give the Terry Lectures, Freud turned to Jung, his traveling companion and (still at that time) heir apparent, and wondered if they were not bringing the plague of psychoanalysis to a new land. One might argue that Romanticism bequeathed psychology to us in a not dissimilar manner a century earlier. Romantic literature stages a mind in need of understanding and elicits a desire *for* self-understanding that has perplexed the human sciences, among which psychology eventually took its place, ever since. Coleridge's "psychological curiosity" thus at once announces the extent to which psychology had become, as the cliché goes, the new religion, and disparages it for the psychic disease it threatened to prolong, a Romantic curiosity we have yet, if ever, to satisfy.

See IMAGINATION; MEDICINE; NARRATIVE; PHILOSOPHY; POETICS; RELIGION; SCIENCE.

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