Table of Contents

- About the Contributors
- "Introduction: Passion in a Barren Field"
- Elizabeth Fay, University of Massachusetts, Boston
- Essay
- "Thinking about the Other in Romantic Love"
- Adela Pinch, University of Michigan
- Essay
- "Hemans, Heber, and Superstition and Revelation"
- Nanora Sweet, University of Missouri-St. Louis
- Essay
- "Passion and Romantic Poetics"
- Jeffrey C. Robinson, University of Colorado at Boulder
- Essay
- "Romantic Anger and Byron's Curse"
- Andrew M. Stauffer, University of Virginia
- Essay
- "Re-collecting Spontaneous Overflows: Romantic Passions, the Sublime, and Mesmerism"
- Charles J. Rzepka, Boston University
- Essay

Romantic Passions

About the Contributors

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Romantic Passions

Introduction: Passion in a Barren Field

Elizabeth Fay, University of Massachusetts, Boston

1. Critical attention to the emotions, either as love (romantic love, as in the Shakespearian sonnet tradition), as passion (the great human passions, as in Joanna Baillie's dramatic definition), or as sex (whether hetero or homo/lesbian), has never had much force in Romantic studies. The paradox of why there is no love in Romantic period poetry has always been explained by the great poets' obsession with the heady mix of politics and aesthetics that produced poems about the French Revolution and the sublime. Rather than talk about love, poets such as Wordsworth and Keats tended to talk about why love is no longer possible, while Byron applied love to the tragic mode to show the cosmic sadness of his byronic heroes, and Coleridge and Shelley explored love as a better path to the self and the divine. All these poets provided a superior alternative to human love with their exploration of the sublime and its relevance to man's intellectual and spiritual transcendence of political and social blockages, reversions, and other setbacks to progressiveness. Our criticism has tended to follow the Arnoldian line of an emotional investment *in* the literature of the Romantics combined with an intellectual detachment *from* it.

2. Necessarily, it is even uncertain at this point how we should define either Romantic love or passion. Romantic poems, quite simply, are not love poems. Romantic poets, at least those of the canon, do not make love to women in their passionate pleas, but instead make love to nature and natural objects. As Emerson notes, on the other side of the Atlantic and somewhat later, "I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty." Wordsworth makes some clearer distinctions concerning this phenomenon in his analysis of the "Affections," the aesthetic categories that translate emotional responses to nature into something quite different from interpersonal love. How we think about the intellectualized affects versus the more real but difficult issue of P.B. Shelley's love triangles, Byron's infamous relations with men and women, Hazlitt's infatuation with Sarah Walker and Coleridge's with Sarah Hutchinson, still leaves us with little to say about how love itself was considered during the period, or what it meant to be impassioned or emotional.

3. Even when women writers of the period were recently recuperated from dusty library shelves and reinserted into the topography of Romanticism, their combined literary efforts on the question of love and the emotions did not alter how the critical apparatus of Romantic studies was applied. Despite the recovery of quantitatively significant numbers of marginalized or lost texts of women writers, scholars did not draw new parameters around Romanticism, but instead drew out works by these women that might be considered Romantic under the old terms. Even for well-known writers this stasis effectively confined what we could learn. For instance, despite the irrefutable fact that Jane Austen spelled her Romantic aesthetic around the question of love, the fact itself only served to propel studies of her work in two directions: assertions that she was not a Romantic writer, or assertions that the questions of finance, manners, and spatial limitation were more central to her thought and her representation of the age than questions of romantic love.

4. Now, however, scholars have begun reassessing the larger body of literary works by both women and men of the period to see what larger parameters can be constructed. This has given rise to the study of sensibility, as well as the study of orientalism, alternative sexualities, gender politics, the theatre, the Gothic, and other culturally representative subjects. It is not clear, however, from this new research that women writers were any more interested in love as a subject in itself than were the men. In part this

may be because we still have not posed the question outright, what of love in the Romantic period? Yet what have the works scholars are now examining shown us? Works that do treat love, such as Mary Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon*, seem to indicate a frustration with the possibilities of love to overcome gendered socio-political inequities much in the same way that male poets use love to show the same for socio-political injustices on a larger scale. Even Austen's Elizabeth Bennet gives up on the question of love quite early, saying in response to an invitation to the Lake District, "Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are men to rocks and mountains?"

5. The essays collected in this volume of *Praxis* are intended to begin a dialogue that draws together the issues raised by women writers through their consciousness about gender and their tradition-inscribed relation to love. These issues work as a counter to the transcendence of love implicit in theories of the sublime. Not every area of recent scholarship could be represented by the essays that follow, however readers familiar with seminal works such as Joan DeJean's study of Sapphism, Eve Sedgwick's article on sensibility as sexuality in Austen, Louis Crompton's study of Byron and homosexuality, Lillian Faderman's study of lesbianism and "Romantic friendship," and Elizabeth Mavor's study of the Ladies of Llangollen, will be able to realize how we can even begin thinking about love and passion within the context of what had previously been an ascetic Romanticism.

6. Most specifically, the renewed interest in sensibility, even more than that for Sapphism and Romantic friendship, has reopened the question of Romantic love. This summer an extended and impassioned exchange took place on the NASSR listserv concerning issues of how to teach poetry, how to teach women poets, and how to think about the relation between emotions and poetry. Nan Sweet's essay, which focuses on the delicate relation between passion and asceticism by discussing Hemans's exploration of "a Near Eastern religion of son-sacrifice attended by a fertile array of feminine feeling" and the Tory Anglican who disapproved such exploration, draws some of its fire from that listserv discussion to which she contributed heatedly. For such a discussion to take place, the concepts and practice of sensibility as an accepted discourse arena had to already be in place. As several contributors in the exchange noted early on, Jerome McGann's recent study of sensibility, among other new works on the subject, determined the ground for this particular arena. Similarly, Jeffrey Robinson describes his own project on the emotions as a way to broaden and contextualize our understanding of sensibility's relation to Romantic passion.

7. Adela Pinch discusses "Romantic Love" as a question of epistemology that helps think through how we might now consider the subject. Andrew Stauffer provides an alternative view for us by analyzing anger, and by extension, the little considered emotion of hate in the case of Byron. Anger and hatred, like "the ugly" in discussions of the sublime and the beautiful, provide useful counters to any discussion predicated on sexual politics, romantic fantasy, and the human emotional register.

8. Finally, Charles Rzepka provides a study of the sublime that usefully poses a counter to the critical tradition regarding it. If the sublime is most often associated with Burke's ideas of death and blockage, Rzepka shows how Mesmer's magnetic treatment was designed to open the flow of emotions, thus leading to transport--an idea that intrigued Coleridge and that significantly impacted his work.

Romantic Passions

Thinking about the Other in Romantic Love

Adela Pinch, University of Michigan

Desire is like a thought which thinks more than it thinks, or more than what it thinks. --Emmanuel Levinas

1

1. Lovers spend a lot of time thinking. What they think about, of course, is the one they love. But in the Romantic tradition, I hope to show, thinking about the beloved other is attended with all kinds of questions. Is it a special kind of thinking? How and when and ought it be done? Is being alone with your thoughts about a person akin to being with him or her? How does thinking about the other establish relation, proximity or distance, and how does it construct or construe the beloved's presence, or absence? Does it bestow the lover with knowledge, consolation, or power? In particular, is it possible that the act of thinking about another person can in and of itself constitute a form of damage to the other's identity or integrity? That the problems of thinking about the other in romantic love can come to seem ethical--veering around questions of projection, violation, respect--as well as epistemological, is the burden of this essay; and my argument is that the Romantic (capital R) and the romantic (little r) are conjoined in the ethics of thinking. I will begin with some thoughts about the place of love in discussions of Romantic (capital R) epistemology, focusing on Shelley; then briefly test these ideas against Shelley's love poetry; and then pursue the consequences of these ideas for later Romantics (both capital R and little r), both nineteenth-century poets and contemporary philosophers.

2. For some critics, romantic love provides a solution to Romanticism's central epistemological dilemma: the relationship between mind and object. For example, in her arresting reading of "Mont Blanc," Frances Ferguson recast Shelley's poem as a love song to the mountain. She did so in order not only to highlight the poem's languages of personification and address, but also, more importantly, to alter our sense of the epistemology that informs Romantic speculation: from an epistemology correlated with ontology, to an epistemology correlated with love. She explains:

    > In the one account--that which continually seeks to align epistemology with ontology so that one's knowing always struggles to coincide with the real existence of what one knows--the adequacy of one's ability to know is always suspect. In the other account--that which aligns epistemology with love--emotional profligacy that continually postulates and assumes the existence of an interlocutor supplants any notion of matching one's knowledge with things as they really are. (Ferguson, 207)

    In this view, Romanticism--conceived of as a form of understanding--is a language of love. Love language effects a transference that is the condition of possibility for any relation, for intelligibility itself. Through romantic love, Romanticism rests its claims to have transcended an empiricist skepticism.

3. But if Romanticism's claims to understand the other involve an epistemology of love, the explicitly erotic stance towards the other--precisely by seeming to have solved one set of terms--raises another set of problems. We can perhaps begin to see them in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, in its compulsive search to determine what or who the beloved object *is*, to name and rename her, a search that quickly reveals the

structure of desire and the movement of figurative language to be one and the same.(1) While for some readers this poem's achievement lies in its aspiration toward an endlessly transferential, erotic language that totally detaches itself from the beloved as other or as referent, it's important to recognize that Shelley also conceives of his attempt to *think* Emily as a crisis: "Ah, woe is me! / What have I dared? where am I lifted? how / Shall I descend, and perish not?" (*Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ll. 124-26).(2) If *Epipsychidion* truly defines poetic language as (as it does at the end) the "flowers of thought" (l. 385), then one thing the poem may underscore is that thinking about the beloved, and knowing her, may be inversely or diametrically related. Desire wages war with the desire to know. What we might notice if we focused further on the role of thinking in *Epipsychidion* is that the poem seems worried about the possibility that thinking is a kind of zero-sum game or economy of scarcity whereby one person's thinking can only occur at the expense of another's.(3) At the beginning of the poem Shelley invokes Emily's own heart as striving,

> 'Till those bright plumes of thought, in which arrayed
> It over-soared this low and worldly shade,
> Lie shattered; (ll. 15-17)

Why should the poem begin with the shattering of the beloved's thoughts? Perhaps the feminist argument we'd want to make here--that Shelley is part of a poetic tradition in which the masculine poetic subject must cast the feminine as shattered or scattered object in order to speak (4) --can only be explained by a more basic point: that romantic love may always involve a struggle over who gets to think about whom.

4. For love poets in the Romantic tradition--say, poets of the generation after Shelley--these kinds of issues are specifically cast as ethical as well as formal dilemmas. My examples will be drawn from Victorian sonnet sequences by women. Rather than seeing these sonnet sequences as quaint confluences of the Pre-Raphaelite revival of Dante and Petrarch with Victorian sentimentality and domesticity, I'd like to make some more ambitious claims about them. The sonnet is of course always about the problem of thinking, construing, hailing the other. In our understanding, the sonnet seems to be the very *shape* of thought: in its dense, patterned form it exteriorizes thought; and "I think" or "I thought" is the perfect iamb. Exteriorizing thought, the sonnet de-psychologizes it, materializes it, alienates it from the thinker as subject by placing any given sonnet about the beloved other in a syntagmatic relation to all other thoughts about other beloved others. In so doing, it puts the problem of thinking about others into a realm other than that of psychology, or even epistemology, or skepticism about other minds. Victorian sonnet sequences seem particularly self-conscious about their own status as practices of meditation. They make use of both romantic love and Romantic aesthetics to work out the larger philosophical and political stakes of negotiating social relations. (5)

5. We might take our cue from Christina Rossetti's sequence, *Monna Innominata*, which makes clear that what lovers *do* is sit around thinking ("Thinking of you," one sonnet simply begins [9.1]). Here is the first sonnet:

> Come back to me, who wait and watch for you:--
> Or come not yet, for it is over then,
> And long it is before you come again,
> So far between my pleasures are and few.
> While, when you come not, what I do I do
> Thinking "Now is when he comes," my sweetest "when":
> For one man is my world of all the men
> This wide world holds; O love, my world is you.
> Howbeit, to meet you grows almost a pang

Because the pang of parting comes so soon;
My hope hangs waning, waxing like a moon
Between the heavenly days on which we meet:
Ah me, but where are now the songs I sang
When life was sweet because you called them sweet? (*Pre-Raphaelites*, 144) (6)

6. What interests me here is not simply the sonnet's extension of the "parting is such sweet sorrow" idea so that the beloved's absence turns out to be genuinely preferable to his presence (7); more important is how Rossetti focuses that space of absence as a lover's *practice*: "While, when you come not, *what I do I do*." What the lover does, what defines her practice as a lover, is thinking. That the poem conceives of thought as practice or action--rather than as a particular content--is stressed by its highlighting of abstract markers of time at the expense of substantives: the prominence, for example, particularly as end rhymes, of "then," when," "again." In lines 6 through 8, the "you"--the beloved--gets assimilated to a "when": notice how the line endings set up a kind of apposition between "my sweetest 'when'," "of all the men," and "you." The assimilation of the beloved to a "when" also underscores the poem's revelation of thinking as productive practice rather than as, say, a reflection of a pre-existing object: the lover's thinking calls the beloved into being ("when") with the act of the poem.

7. *Monna Innominata*'s way of thinking about thinking about the other is very much indebted to the sonnet sequence that Rossetti is writing in response to: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, which is of course exhibit A in almost any discussion of nineteenth-century romance.(8) Like Rossetti's sequence, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is obsessed with figuring out the place of thinking in romantic love (and like Shelley's *Epipsychidion* ends by offering itself to the beloved as the "flowers of thought" (*Works*, 223, sonnet 44)(9); and it too explores the problems of thinking about the other. How is thinking a problem in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*? Let me count the ways. First, the opening sonnet immediately establishes the lover as thinker--lover as nerd, really. "I thought," she begins, "once how Theocritus had sung"--and casts love--in the form of a spirit who appears behind her and yanks her by the hair--as a violation of her scholarly and introspective musings. Love interrupts a certain kind of nerdy thinking, an idea that comes up again in sonnet 34 where the speaker confesses that when the beloved calls her by her childhood pet name, she responds more slowly than she did as a child: "When I answer now / I drop a grave thought" (34.9-10). Thinking makes one almost unfit for love; it would seem to make the project of the sequence that of learning to assimilate thinking with loving.

8. Second, when the poet does transfer her thoughts to the world of love ("The face of all the world is changed, I think" [7.1]), thinking comes to seem both a way of solving the problem of what it means to be in relation to another, and a problem *for* relation. The sequence as a whole is an anxious meditation on what relation is: it ruminates on questions of proximity and distance, questions that are ultimately about what kind of "being-with" a person it is to have them in one's thoughts. That is, I would argue that the sequence's obsession with spatial relations, with questions of scale and size, with measuring which of the two lovers is greater, smaller, higher, lower, nearer, or further than the other, is in itself a symptom of the poem's meditation, on a more phenomenological level, on what it might mean to have a person, literally, in one's mind.(10) What, Barrett Browning wants to know, does it mean to turn a person into a thought? Is fitting a person to one's mental space to miniaturize, or to aggrandize him?

9. Third, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* raises the ethical stakes of such meditations by putting into play the tensions among thinking, knowing, and loving, never truly assimilating any one term to the others. (11) Things come to a crisis in sonnet 29, where the poet is struck by self-consciousness about her own thinking:

I think of thee!--my thoughts do twine and bud

About thee, as will vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.
Yet, oh my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee
Drop heavily down--burst, shattered, everywhere!
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee--I am too near thee.

While the imagery here--the clinging vines, the strong tree--and some of the sentiments might at first confirm our suspicions that *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is an embarassing sequence of poems, it helps if we focus on this sonnet's strange violence towards thought and on its emphasis on thought *as* violence that chokes and conceals its object. That this violence towards thought is the *Sonnets*' Romantic legacy is signalled by its echo of the image from the beginning of *Epipsychidion*: the shattering of thought. Here, as there, is a funny economy in which one lover's thoughts have to be stripped away for love to happen. To utter "I do not think of thee" is to use the sonnet-form's modes of address, which establishes both proximity and distance, to perform a thinking of the other that is the opposite of thought. I hope this poem helps make my point that both Romantic and Victorian love poetry often manifests a strange ambivalence about the very act of thinking, fantasizing, speculating about the beloved: worrying that the sheer act of having the beloved *in mind* is a form of damage to him or her. The kind of worrying I'm identifying is to be distinguished from the epistemological worry Ferguson saw Shelley shifting away from in the passage I discussed at the beginning of this essay: a worry about *misrepresenting* the object of one's affections. Nor is it a worry that the thinking, loving subject might do him or herself wrong by ruminating obsessively about the object of his or her affections. It is rather an ethical ambivalence about the act itself of thinking about the other.

10. Finally, I'd like to suggest that this peculiar feature of Romantic love may have a long and interesting legacy, not only as it shapes and is shaped by these nineteenth-century poems, but also because this worry about the ethics of thinking about the other may have lodged itself in some contemporary philosophies of love, ethics and alterity. For Emmanuel Levinas, the erotic relation to the other often stands as the highest example of the search to establish a truly ethical relation: the relation that respects and responds to the other's absolute alterity. (12) On the one hand, Levinas takes care to distinguish his modern understanding of love from Romantic (capital R) ideas about romantic love: the notion that love is a commingling of two beings into one, is, he says, a "false romantic idea "(*Ethique et infini*, 58). Emphasizing the lovers' utter alterity to each other, Levinas' lovers' discourse defies the Platonism that is part of, say, Shelley's programmatic take on love, in *Epipsychidion* and elsewhere. But on the other hand, Levinas' writings on the ethics of eros harbor a by-now familiar ambivalence about thinking, as they strive to define a mode of mental attention, proximity, or being-for the other that does not authorize itself as knowledge. To be in love, in his view, is to be in a state of not-knowing in relation to the beloved; for knowledge of the other inevitably partakes of the logic of identity, a making-intelligible by making the same; it is thus a violation of the beloved's alterity. The condition of being-for the other is the condition for the emergence of the intentionality of thought (*Totality and Infinity*, 261); but at the center of Levinas' understanding of eros are the vicissitudes of a mental proximity that does not presume to know. This is the aporia or impossibility that in some sense founds the struggle for ethical relation. It is an impossibility that bossily demands that we totally reimagine what it would mean to think about the one we love, lest thinking itself threatens to become our own worst enemy. The

thought that love may be akin to its opposites--agression, violation--is no surprise to anybody; it's the oldest idea in the book. But perhaps tracing this particular strain of Romantic love--and its literary formations--can help us understand the conditions under which *thinking itself* can come to seem scary.

Notes

1. See Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros*. back

2. All references are to the Reiman and Powers edition. back

3. See Sharon Cameron's understanding of the inter-personal economies of consciousness among Henry James's characters and narrators in *Thinking in Henry James*, 171. My own thinking is somewhat indebted to Cameron's. For the purposes of this paper, "thinking" is defined as a practice, as a mental action, a category that would include imagining, fantasizing, as well as having ideas about an object. back

4. See for example Vickers. back

5. On Victorian aesthetics' articulation of sexual relations as a way of focusing on philosophical and social questions, see Armstrong. back

6. All references are to this edition. back

7. See Barthes on the object's double status in the lover's discourse: always "absent as referent," yet present as object as allocution, of the lover's address (15). back

8. On the canonization of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* as the apotheosis of nineteenth-century romantic love, see Lootens, 116-157. back

9. All references are to the Preston edition of the poetical works. back

10. See for example sonnets 3, 4, 5, 7, and 16. back

11. On the poem's treatment of knowing, see for example sonnets 17 and 20. back

12. The question of the relation between eros and ethics in Levinas is a vexed one; for a reading which stresses the changing relationship between the two over the course of his career, see Chanter, 170-224; see also Bauman, 108-109. The primary texts here are Part IV and the "Preface" of *Time and the Other*, 29-37 and 80-94; "The Ambiguity of Love" and "Phenomenology of Eros" in *Totality and Infinity*, 254-66; and *Ethics and Infinity*. back

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Romantic Passions

Hemans, Heber, and *Superstition and Revelation*

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1. This essay offers a close reading of Felicia Hemans's fragment *Superstition and Revelation* (c. 1820), her abandoned syncretic account of early Christianity and its pagan origins. Subsequent comments by Hemans suggest that the poem might have been a centerpiece for her work. During her last illness she said of another projected religious poem *The Temple* that she regretted not finishing the "noble and complete work" worthy of "a British Poetess" (Chorley 2: 257-58). In our moment, when Hemans is being considered as a first- or second-rank Romantic poet, several useful ways of reading *Superstition and Revelation* suggest themselves. As long-time readers of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron, we might read Hemans's fragment alongside their syncretic experiments, for instance in *Prometheus Unbound* and *Manfred*. As new readers of Hemans, we might use this provocative fragment--and the scene of its fragmentation--as a means to understanding her purposefulness as a writer, her "intentions," we might say. This paper will combine elements of both ways of reading.

2. A number of Hemans's new readers do question, even seriously doubt, the purposefulness of her work as an artist, controversialist, or revisionist of culture. In commenting on her "Casabianca," Jerome McGann presumes that Hemans's poem was jingoist in a thoughtless, immature sort of way: "no, we don't know her intentions but we do know that she would be unlikely to say or argue anything that brought 'English military honor' into disrepute. She was a very good girl" ("Reading Hemans"). McGann's Bakhtinian method allows him to claim for "Casabianca" an "excellence" that "transcends the poem's all-but-declared morality." His theory is interesting and wide-ranging; but his readings of Hemans are after all based on a few lyrics, and Hemans was a writer of numerous long poems and sequences and of twenty concertedly annotated volumes. I question that we should concede all artistic claims, that we should defer all textual questions extra-textually, just yet.

3. As McGann's qualifier "all-but-declared" suggests, a number of us remain perplexed by Hemans's tone: some are certain that the cruel ironies in her materials inform and structure her rhetoric, and some are certain that they do not. David Latane's comment from the "Reading Hemans" thread incorporates this perplexity: "to presume a conscious strategy of 'savage irony' (Isobel Armstrong's phrase about the poem) doesn't fit with [the] picture we have of Hemans's poetic practice." Some of us are uncertain about the relationships between her texts and those she frequently echoes, while others question her textual methods. Again Latane: "the material which Hemans derives from her library (in this she is the female Southey) can be opposed to poems which derive more from experience." Are her echoes wholesale borrowings? We wonder. Are they intentional allusions? Effective ones? What, to use Latane's term, *is* Hemans's "poetic practice"? And what is her vision? This essay is a partial answer to these questions.

4. Hemans's memorialists (c. 1870; Trinder) have suggested a way of reading her that might, as a keynote, synthesize our tonal and textual questions into one artistic vision. In the double window dedicated to Hemans in St. Asaph Cathedral, the Biblical judge Deborah is depicted in her dual roles as general and adjudicator [figure 1]. The irony between these roles is real and irreducible, I think, just like the irony in Hemans's texts. Further, the allusion to Deborah is no mere copying of Hemans's work but an imaginative extension of its poetic method. After all, Hemans did not develop the figure of Deborah *per se* in her poetry. Rather, in a thoroughgoing study of the subject of woman, she rang changes on the feminine as dually expressive of perfume and poison, motherhoood and infanticide, immolation and

inoculation, violence and law.

5. *Superstition and Revelation* is as echoic--as allusive, if you will--as any text in Hemans. And as a poem on religion, it offers plenty of tonally charged material for us to consider. I will argue that this poem *and* the scene of its writing do form a valuable occasion for the study of Hemans's poetic purposes and practices. The poem was abandoned after receiving a thorough critique by Reginald Heber, poet, critic, and Anglican priest and later Bishop; Hemans's first personal associate in the *Quarterly Review* circle whose leader John Murray was already publishing her books. Heber's written comments appeared in Henry Chorley's *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans* a year after her death (1836).

6. The scene of writing at idyllic St. Asaph in North Wales belies the literary struggle that took place there circa 1820 between this ambitious priest and this equally ambitious poet. Hemans lived with her children and maternal family at Bronwylfa, which was commodiously situated along the footpath into this cathedral town [figure 2]; rebuilt after a fire in the 1860s]. Hemans would also have walked the picturesque path between Cathedral and Bishop's palace (where she did her franking!) [figure 3]. She would've known Heber during his stays at the Old Deanery, for he had married the daughter of the Dean, Dr. Shipley, and become a prebendary at St. Asaph [figure 4].

7. Idyllic circumstances aside, when the zealous Heber applied a Tory religious orthodoxy to Hemans's work-in-progress, he produced such a persistent misreading of her work that we cannot be surprised to see her abandon it. As important, Heber misread her work so consistently that his designs form a guide to her contrasting ones. His orthodox disciplining of her experimentation reveals what was suppressed--the work that might have been a tonal center for her work. Looked at in another way, this episode presents a case of misdirected creative writing feedback, a familiar and contemporary scene of writing for us. The contretemps between Hemans and Heber over *Superstition and Revelation* dramatizes the pitfalls of class and gender difference in the creative writing workshop then as now.

8. It is something of a critical accident, I want to say, for me to be contributing to a discussion of Romantic *feeling* or emotions or "passions" ("melancholy," "loss," even "sentiment" itself). It's true that I'm interested in performative "ways of reading," in *tone* itself, and in a poet whose tone remains perplexing, and whose affect feels excessive, to many readers. It's also true that I'm committed to working with Germaine de Stäel's similarly-toned oeuvre in this period, including the crucial work *De l'Influence des Passions*. But in their most recent books, my co-contributors do a great deal more with feeling than I do. Elizabeth Fay, Jerome McGann, and Adela Pinch have argued in various ways that we know feeling from its performances and their records; that feeling makes history and does so in the form of literature; that feeling, not law (*pace* Foucault), shapes the literature of history and the history of literature. These critics anchor their work synchronically in the later eighteenth century, the "age of sensibility," and then move from there into a diachronic history of feeling: I would add Julie Ellison and her *Delicate Subjects* (and subsequent work in the "Cato's Tears" project) to this group. These critics press eighteenth-century "sensibility" forward until it becomes "sentiment" (McGann) or psychoanalysis (Pinch, Fay) or feminism (Ellison, McGann). For these critics, emotions bring the "differences" of fashion, culture, and medium--and of gender, class, and race--into a canonical history that seems to them too often too much "the same."

9. While I cannot disagree with their elegant work, I myself assume rather than foreground the nature of "feeling." As I work on the contentious scene of writing and reading between Hemans and Heber, I construe *feeling* first and foremost as the ambition and striving that characterize authorship, a striving toward self-definition that is self-evidently and specifically bourgeois. I do register, and historicize, the feelings in this scene. Kenneth Burke taught us long ago that there was a "grammar" to our "motives." Were I to test a theory of emotion with my practice, Burke's very literate "dramatistics" could well be it. Burke's rhetoric was a grammar and not a history of motives, yet its grounding in the Renaissance

court(ier)ship of Shakespeare's sonnets suggests how readily we might use it to historicize authorial motives. In the encounter that I will depict between Reginald Heber (Oxford-educated Anglican cleric) and Felicia Hemans (daughter of mercantile Liverpool and sister to transatlantic Unitarianism), a remnant of "court culture" clashes with middle-class authorship in a rhetorical drama that might extend what Burke has set forth. (Here of course I echo the vocabulary that Gary Kelly developed for us in *Revolutionary Feminism*.) At moments, as we'll see, Heber's disciplining of Hemans comes to look more Sadean than courtly--with Hemans fortunately not masochistic enough to continue the game. And thus Foucault comes in after all for his test (but that is another day).

10. As I read Hemans's poetic fragment within the scene of its writing, I construe its emotive rhetoric, but also its emotional landscape. And here perhaps I come closer to my fellow critics in these papers, using such language as "affection" or the feelings of the "exile" or what I once spoke of as 'a fertile array of feminine feeling.' But my intention is not to instantiate feeling in any way, or to essentialize it as "feminine," or even, as McGann does in his treatments of Hemans in *The Poetics of Sensibility*, to convert feeling into a historical or cultural materiality. Rather, my practice will be to take feelings performed within Hemans's text as metonyms which should be linked with material causes, historical implications, and (important in a poem about religion) cultural practices.

11. We pick up our tale of Hemans's religious writing in 1820. She has just published *The Skeptic*, an attack on certain unnamed skeptic poets, clearly Byron and Shelley, and Byron especially. I suggest, however, that neither *The Skeptic* nor *Superstition and Revelation* is merely an attack on the skeptic poets. Here once more I differ with Jerome McGann, who says, "reading her, we do well to begin with *The Skeptic*, just to make sure we keep her philosophical views in clear perspective" ("Reading Hemans"). In my view, each poem develops not so much a "clear" as a complex intertextual relationship with its interlocutors, and in the process reflects both sides of the Pisan circle's dual religious project of skepticism and syncretism. For instance, in the *The Skeptic* Hemans argues that Byron is not truly the skeptic he claims to be--and reveals herself as something of a skeptic too (Sweet, "The Bowl of Liberty" 329-43). In this vein, she characterizes God as one who exacts the sacrifice of "our fairest and our best," always a painful outcome for those who mother those "fairest and best" (Hemans 152). As we pause at this harsh characterization of God, we remember that elsewhere for this poet (for instance in *The Tale of the Secret Tribunal* and *The Vespers of Palermo*) son-sacrifice is either a cruel instrument of policy or the fulfillment of vengeance--and in either case it is critiqued as a form of nihilism. Attacking the skeptic poets may have given Hemans the license to fulminate loudly against skepticism, while also quietly questioning Christianity and being well reviewed by the Tory press in the bargain (*Quarterly Review*, October 1821, 130-37).

12. In the interests of women and children, then, Hemans's *The Skeptic* has quarreled with skepticism and perhaps also with orthodoxy. As we know, Byron and Shelley complemented their skepticism with a syncretizing of Hellenic and Orientalist religious resources. In *Childe Harold* 2.8 Byron portrays this syncretism with his usual negligent ease: "Yet if, as holiest men have deem'd, there be" a life hereafter, we would encounter in it "the Bactrian, Samian sage." These latter are the two Magi of Shelleyan syncretism, Zoroaster and Pythagoras. (On Shelley's Zoroastrianism, see Curran 65-92; on his Pythagoreanism, see Lavelle 264-84.) Might Hemans also salve the cruel dispensations of Christianity with an array of "rites" from the Near East, especially feminine ones? Indeed a Pythagorean cult of beauty has shaped her aesthetics from the start, just as it has Shelley's; by 1819 that "beauty" had led her to Plutarch's healing legend of Numa and Egeria ("The Bowl of Liberty" 146, 274-78).

13. Hemans's formal experiment with Shelleyan syncretism begins circa 1820 with *Superstition and Revelation*. Unlike *The Skeptic*, this syncretic poem is neither completed nor published, nor is it well received by its Tory critic. Hemans goes on to replace it with the scattered lyrics on Greek and Western religion embedded in her 1823 volume ("Elysium," "The Funeral Genius," and others) and in

subsequent volumes (for instance, the "Lays of Many Lands" cycle in her 1825 *The Forest Sanctuary*), none of them so obviously a definitive work on religion. Yet in her book of 1819 (*Tales, and Historic Scenes*) and plays and poetry of 1823, Hemans had suggested that republican culture needed a local religious establishment if it was to contend with the instabilities that threaten women and children. In *Superstition and Revelation* she had proposed the daring syncretic project that could meet this need: a harmonizing of Shelleyan syncretism with established religion.

14. Chorley recounts that, while she was composing *Superstition and Revelation*, Hemans was in the early stages of her literary acquaintance with Reginald Heber (1783-1826), Anglican cleric, poet, hymnist, *Quarterly Review* reviewer, at the last Bishop of Calcutta. Heber's 1803 Oxford Prize Poem *Palestine* gave him an audience with Scott and brought him to literary attention. For the *Quarterly Review* he was to review many books important to Hemans such as the poetry of Mary Tighe, Stäel's *De l'Allemagne*, and Goethe's *Tasso*. His chief literary legacy, however, is his hymns, especially "Holy, Holy, Holy," "Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning," and "From Greenland's Icy Mountains." Perishing while at work in India, Heber is memorialized in St. Paul's Cathedral [figure 5]. Heber and his clerical friend H. H. Milman, the later Dean of St. Paul's, both sponsored Hemans, Heber through his *Quarterly Review* connections, Milman in the London theater. Milman would later write *The History of the Jews*, a valuable attempt to historicize English "Hebraism."

15. Heber often visited St. Asaph, the North Wales episcopate and town nearest Hemans's home, becoming the first literary light that she would know in person (Chorley 1: 55). No Shelleyan syncretist, Heber was nonetheless a learned comparatist (as his "Brightest and Best" Magi hymn suggests), interested in a Manichean Zoroastrianism that would divide good from evil. Hemans showed Heber her draft of *Superstition*, and he responded to it at length. Chorley quotes several passages from Heber's response as evidence of Heber's "high estimation" of Hemans's "natural gifts" and "acquired knowledge." "Possibly," Chorley says, Hemans "shrunk from the research and illustration recommended to her, as involving too much labour; at all events, the poem was never completed" (1: 56-57). Hemans did not often shrink from "research" and "labour," however. As it happens, the theology "recommended" by Heber, a Hebraic orthodoxy of the "Chastener" God, was only partially compatible with her own. Taken together, Hemans' poetico-religious draft and Heber's rigorous disciplining of it offer fascinating reading, whether from the standpoint of feminist, cultural, or purely literary criticism.

16. Starting with its title, *Superstition and Revelation* is an equivocal text: Heber will enforce the contrast between its noun terms, but Hemans plays across the linkage "and" to blend pagan and Christian experiences and dilemmas. A text of twenty-eight "Modern Greece" stanzas (from Hemans's 1817 progress poem by that name: *ababcdcdee*, the last line an alexandrine), this draft-fragment is footnoted by a further, suppressed stanza (Hemans 493-96; poem to be cited by stanza number). One might illustrate her pagan-Christian fragment with the pagan-Christian site she wrote about as "Our Lady's Well," *aka* Ffynnon Fair and St. Mary's Well, the ruined shrine and ever-fresh spring that Peter Trinder and I found and photographed in the Vale of Clwyd [figure 6].

17. In its extant form, *Superstition* appears at first to be a disordered congeries of allusions and motifs concerning pre-Christian religious sensibility. Its moments zigzag designedly, however, from Eden to exile; from patriarchal shrine to "apostate wanderer"; from worship of sun, moon, and stars to Druidic human sacrifice; from Hellenized/Near Eastern mystery cults to Zoroastrianism. In alluding to Shelley, Wordsworth, and Milton, Hemans blends their religious poetics to her ends, using also the harmonizing values of picturesque painting. The poem opens, for example, on an Eden graced with allusions to Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"--"phantoms, with ideal beauty fraught". . ."pass, like sunbeams, o'er the realms of thought" (1)--and the Wordsworth poem behind that hymn, the "Intimations Ode": "the child of that primeval soil, / With you its paths of high communion trode, / His glory yet undimmed" (2).

18. The poem's Shelleyan Stanza 1 posits a "mystic veil" behind which dwell a set of "beings of brighter worlds" or "Immortals." In Hemans's syncretism, these figures are both the immortal dead (in *The Skeptic*'s "worlds of light,/ Where severed souls, made perfect, reunite," 149) and the demigods of a Shelleyan theogony. Later appearing as archangels or "sons of Heaven," these beings evoke the figures favored by the Promethean poets, Satan and the Titans. When *Superstition* turns from its Shelleyan Eden to an exile from that Paradise, its echoes become Miltonic: angels now "in angry splendour tower" over exiled man (*Paradise Lost* 12.643-44), "Guarding the clime where he no more might dwell,/ With meteor-swords" (4). All told, in her opening stanzas Hemans has posited a poetico-philosophical Eden and a Fall, but one whose loss and exile will be unaccompanied by sin and guilt. Courting Tory disapproval, she has connected her afterlife with the theogony of the skeptic poets. In stanza 5 comes the Deluge, and it too will be disposed as cultural sensibility rather than religious orthodoxy.

19. This Flood is followed, not by a conventional rainbow, but by the figure Byron used in *Childe Harold* 4, the Claudean sunset of the Italian picturesque; Byron's "one vast Iris of the West" (4.27) becomes Hemans's own "purple west," "the orb of day" that "seeks the ocean's breast,/ A thousand clouds, all glowing in his ray" (7). This "brief splendour" recalls the Claudean radiance that elsewhere in Hemans submerges and suspends history's fragments in a gouache of feminization. Suspending "Truth" in this flow, Hemans brings her flood figure from pagan fragment to Christian sanction with all of its destabilizing force intact. In this important stanza 7, she portrays a deceptive blending that allows "superstition" to seem part of "Truth" and that ultimately baffles orthodox attempts to sequester the title terms ("Superstition," "Revelation") that are party to it:

> So round thy parting steps, fair Truth! awhile
> With borrow'd hues unnumber'd phantoms shone[;]
> And Superstition, from thy lingering smile,
> Caught a faint glow of beauty not her own,
> Blending her rites with thine--while yet afar
> Thine eye's last radiance beam'd, a slow-receding star.

This feminine personification of Truth does not willingly separate herself from Superstition--which is also feminine--preferring to "linger," receding only slowly, very much the mother reluctantly leaving her child. And if "fair Truth" would bestow a "lingering smile" on Error, who is to gainsay Error's basking in such a glow? Truth, after all, is radiance (a "star"), a commodity that in Hemans is made for "blending": it is part of the many-hued "beauty" celebrated and respected in Hemans's earlier work (Sweet, "History").

20. It is on this equivocal stanza that Heber chooses to make his first comment on Hemans's draft, suggesting a myth (about "Astraea, or Righteousness") in which "Religion" "left the world" of superstition more decisively than it does in Hemans's poem. After religion's departure, for Heber "the grand features of nature" still testify "to their Maker's existence and power"; in effect, he hurries off his pagan, feminine figure (a "celestial virgin") and refocuses on a more safely Biblical--and masculine--"Maker" (1: 57).

21. Showing a spirit less Hebraic than Heber's, Hemans's poem in one stanza skims past Superstition's only pure "shrine," that of the Biblical patriarchs (who worshiped "The One adored and everlasting Name"), preferring instead (like her own "Truth"?) to linger over "apostate wanderers" who "fondly sought" communion with "beings. . .sublime" (8-9). These "exiles," not the patriarchs, enlist Hemans's key notions of succor and sanctuary: "Yes! we have need to bid our hopes repose/ On some protecting influence" (10). As though pursuing the serpentine river that in a Claudean painting unifies the diminutive human foreground with its vast skies, we now follow this "wanderer Man" into the

"boundless void" of "futurity"--or, in more painful moments, back into this human dilemma: "when affliction bade his spirit bleed,/ If 'twere a Father's love or Tyrant's wrath decreed?" (12). In the pagan's dilemma, the Death/God ambiguity of *The Skeptic* again asserts itself; and Hemans's poem observes, "marvel not" if amidst such ambiguities man "sought to trace" in "rushing winds" "The oracles of Fate!" (13).

22. It is stanza 12's unresolved dilemma--is God a Father or a tyrant or both?--that leads to the second response given by Heber, an energetic attack on the blendings and continuities forwarded in Hemans's poetics of religion: "I would certainly introduce the doubt," he advises, "whether the blended prospects of good and evil in nature, might not arise from the struggle of a good and evil principle," "that principle which the Magi embodied into a system" (Chorley 1: 59). Heber's comment develops a lengthy portrait of "the mind of the savage" as Manichean and prey to "baser" moments such as the worship of priests, wizards, Furies, and witches. A catalog of female evil absorbs much of his passage, including "the woman of Endor," "Thessalian witches, who smeared themselves with human gore and made philtres of the hearts of famished children," "hags," and "the witches of the middle ages." The distance is great between Heber's Manicheanism and Hemans's blendings, empathies, and dilemmas in the face of paternalist tyranny; and the extraordinary lack of tact that Heber shows when he demonizes the feminine to a woman poet would hardly assuage such estrangement.

23. Heber to the contrary, as *Superstition and Revelation* continues it catalogs in a forgiving light even the most offending parties to pre-Christian history as Blake and Wordsworth wrote it: the Druids with their human sacrifice and the Near Eastern mystery devotees with their moon-ridden feminine passion and male-sacrifice. As in Blake, the Druids are emblem of tyranny in Hemans (in *Dartmoor*; see Sweet, "History"). She chooses to probe this superstition further here, giving us to understand that "Fear" triggers this cycle of sacrifice, "Fear" that "bow'd before the phantoms she portray'd" (16). The Near East features sacrifice too; and there Hemans chooses to study with empathy the woman made complicit in this sacrifice, "the frantic mother" who "bore her child to die." The Near East fertility cult of child sacrifice in Hemans includes not only this mother but "Syrian maids" who keep vigil, mourning for Adonis and also weeping "for the dead" (13-15). A grace note here, these female singers are the predecessors of those many who appear in (or in effect, sing) the dirges that fill Hemans's work after 1820. Those dirges and their singers will offer a feminist folklore that originates in *Superstition and Revelation*'s sympathetic study of Near Eastern mystery religion. In sum, Hemans involves woman and the feminine in religion in more complex and equivocal ways than Heber's catalog of "witches" would allow.

24. In this poem as in Shelleyan syncretism, the intimations "Of life, and power, and excellence" have announced themselves most pervasively through the Zoroastrian "symbols" of the stars and sun (stanzas 14, 17-19, 26-28). It is via a worship of the stars in particular that Hemans plots her poem's gradual, much interrupted, emergence of religious consciousness: stars can "benignantly convey . . . erring thought" to a greater "Power" (18); they can also exemplify guidance to home, that favored sanctuary in Hemans (19). It is at this moment ("after stanza 19") that Heber begins his next note, one recommending a more "judicial astronomy" in which "the stars were supposed. . .to walk the world and report to the Almighty the deeds of the evil and the good." Heber further remarks on the ensnaring beauty of the planet Venus ("believed to have been a woman") and on the identification in "Spain, Portugal, and Sicily" of Venus with the Virgin Mary: this results in "an undue share of homage from. . .mariners" (Chorley 1: 60-61).

25. Well might he register a conservative caution at this point, for Hemans's stanza 20 adds to astronomical worship "the queen of heaven," the "silvery crown" of Diana presiding over the Near Eastern rites of fertility and sacrifice ("On hoary Lebanon's umbrageous height"): "Hail" to this queen, the poem says, who "faintly" illumines "the 'wilder'd soul." After this excursus on the moon, for the balance of her

poem Hemans embraces the stars of Zoroastrianism as her chief pre-Christian emblem. Her Magi-leading stars, however, invoke the unbroken, searching processional that has formed her laureate poetics to date rather than the divisive Manichean values selected by the orthodox Heber from Zoroastrianism. In the Near East, close by the "polluted shrine" of Syrian sacrifice, Zoroastrianism offers Hemans a unifying and "expanding flood/ Of radiance," pre-Christian though it may be:

> What if his thoughts, with erring fondness, gave
> Mysterious sanctity to things which wear
> Th'Eternal's impress?-- (27)

With this emblem of guidance and in this poem of continuous yet wandering progress, Hemans has created another in the series of processionals that, as I have argued elsewhere, inform her poetry ("History"). Once again, the conductress is a feminine "Truth," the loving, "slow-receding" star of stanza 7. For Hemans, the star induces not a "judicial" disciplining of error but a continuity from "Superstition" to "Revelation."

26. In her last extant stanza (28), Hemans begins to historicize Zoroastrianism as the religion of Persian conquerors: "And with that faith was conquest." Her fragment ends with Persia's "quenchless flame" accompanying Cyrus "from shore to shore" (496/28). Her 1823 volume's poetry on Greece will refer to the attempt by Persia to conquer Greece, and it is regrettable that *Superstition* stops before clarifying the tenor of its own work on the Persian empire. Heber's last note recommends that she write on the Hebraic topos "Belshazzar's Feast," as she soon does (matched by Milman in 1822). Babylon's last feast offers Hemans another "last banquet" poem (as the 1819 "The Last Banquet of Antony and Cleopatra"), one featuring favored themes of empire and exile. At this feast the "handwriting on the wall" predicts Persia's conquest of Babylon and the release of the Hebrews from captivity.

27. Heber's note "after 28" continues to discipline Hemans's revisionist views: "Conclude with observing, how God made the growth of the religion of Zoroaster subservient to the security of his people" (Chorley 1: 62). Then, after projecting two further cantos for Hemans's poem and declaring himself against the Cult of the South, Heber recommends the beliefs of the "northern nations" over "the inferiority" of those of "the Greeks and Romans." He concludes his comment to Hemans with the (either disingenuous or ill-fated) hope that he has saved her trouble and contributed to the production of "more lines as beautiful" (1: 63).

28. Thus Hemans's argument for continuity between "superstition" and "Christianity" ran aground when it was not approved by her conduit with the Tory literary press. Yet the poem's survival in fragment form grants much to readers seeking to understand Hemans's tone, theme, artistry, and cultural practice: it leavens the apparent orthodoxy of *The Skeptic*, with which it shares, after all, the theme of guidance home and a discomfort with a Father/Tyrant God; it shows that subversive aesthetic values inform her religious as well as her secular poetry; it helps historicize Hemans's great body of lyric material to come, associating its ever-present dirge with a Near Eastern religion of son-sacrifice attended by a fertile array of feminine feeling; and its comparative religion offers further background for the folklorist project that begins with "Greek Songs" (1823) and "Lays of Many Lands" (1825). Hemans's *Superstition* fragment also contributes to our understanding of the Cult of the South and its religious and poetic topoi.

29. Making it even more difficult to quit *Superstition and Revelation* is the suppressed stanza printed with it. Entering the fight over Zoroastrianism--is it a "judicial" Manicheanism, or a flooding, "lingering" light that guides?-- this stanza remarks that the Zoroastrian Mage "rear'd no temple, bade no walls contain" incense and prayer. A Shelleyan figure, this admired communicant has no need of organized religion, "But made the boundless universe his fane" (496n). Such were the views barely suppressed in

the poem that threatened Hemans's alliance with Tory Anglicanism. Such were the views that would soon make the Boston Unitarians Andrews Norton and W. E. Channing claim Hemans as one of their own.

30. Of more immediate moment is this: with *The Skeptic* and *Superstition*, Hemans has probed the cultural idiom in use by the prominent writers Byron and Shelley, who are serving as apologists for--and even actors in--revolution in the Mediterranean. She is thus now better prepared to address such revolution at that cultural level: one result will be her 1823 Risorgimento drama *The Vespers of Palermo* (there lies another scene of clerical misreading, as the Covent Garden production guided by Milman revises Hemans's ending). It is on the cultural level that the feminine is often all-but (to adapt McGann's qualifier) co-opted, her "eye" made the "lode-star of thy soul," for instance in the unreconstructed Petrarchanism of these so-called skeptical poets (*The Skeptic* 149). After *Superstition* Hemans has at least her own private lexicon in which the Zoroastrian star of smiling "Truth" is feminine and guides a train of "frantic" mothers, "wilder'd" Maenads, and "tearful" maids toward her by "blending her rites with thine" (7, 20, 24-25).

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Romantic Passions

Passion and Romantic Poetics

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1. The recovery of women writers of the Romantic Period has inevitably brought attention to the representation of passion in literature. Passion, a word belonging in the same domain as Sensibility, emerges as its own subject in the 18th-century novel and, as criticism is presently demonstrating, in 18th- and early-nineteenth-century poetry. It appears to be a form of expression of the tensions and linkages of hope and its partial denial in a world that has difficulty tolerating excessive attentiveness to needs and desire. As such it assumes a *thematic* importance in the study of literature. Less concern has been delivered upon passion as a principle of vitality in poetics, as part of the very structures and dynamisms of poems. (Jerome McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility* is an important exception.) The history of the criticism of Romantic poetry in the twentieth century has, I believe, privileged a poetics of the transcendence, suppression, or simple avoidance of passion; thus to expect anything in addition to a thematic focus on passion would be unworldly indeed.

2. The subject of this essay, however, is precisely that relationship between the resistance to and discovery of the poetics of passion in Romanticism (defined broadly and with reference to the poetry of women as well as to the canon). This relationship exists in my own career over time; I have therefore chosen, in the midst of this essay, to write that little history in the hopes that it will illuminate some of the problems of the subject of passion in literature and some of the ramifications of taking it on.

3. As the subject has evolved in my own thinking during the past ten years, it has coalesced at three points: first is the thematics of Romantic passion; second is the warping of critical style from and in reference to the operative affect of the critic; and third is the poetics of Romantic passion; this last is heavily influenced by twentieth-century experimental Western poetics. Passion--dispersive, excessive, chaotic--breaks or at least threatens boundaries of all sorts: as in "The Road of Excess leads to the Palace of Wisdom." Where does one draw the line? To discuss passion may require enacting it in one's own writing, and it certainly involves discussion of its medium, its poetics.

4. Passion may also necessitate a different kind of contract with the reader, whose engagement with the critical text may be analogous to that with a poem. The reader may have to suspend or redefine radically the expectations about the immediate *use-value* of the critical text. Swimming in a lake of highly affective language written in the presence of literature, he or she may feel or think the text in disorientating ways designed to free the mind from traditional or predictable perspectives about, let us say, the poem-at-hand but may not put anything "concrete" in its place. Michael Ready's discussion of "the conduit metaphor," a metaphor that blankets English-language thought about the communication of an idea, may be relevant here: if you say, "where did you find that idea?" or "I'm getting a lot out of this essay," you are using the conduit metaphor, in which communication means *the transfer of an idea, whole and intact, from point a to point b*. Ready proposes an alternative model that is, or should be, a truism in the good reading of a poem: the idea isn't communicated by transferral but by being produced actively at the moment of one's encounter with a situation and a need. Here you cannot bank on what you will get. And in that sense you may not be able to "use" ideas in a simple and direct way (footnotes, incorporation into an argument or conversation, etc.). On the other hand, flowers may bloom unexpectedly in the mental field. In this sense the critical text will, with the aid of one's "gardener Fancy," have called up a *presence*. The sense of the authenticating frame of this new work may shift as well: instead of citing contemporary critics and scholars, one might establish ponts of

view, indeed a whole system of relations, between Romantic poetry and twentieth-century poets in their manifestoes and poems (as in Rothenberg's and Joris's brilliant new anthology-with-commentaries of modern experimental world poetry, *Poems for the Millennium*, with its nineteenth-century "forerunners").

5. These conclusions (probably "this landing-place" would express it more precisely) I have derived over more than a decade of thinking and writing on this subject, which has met with much inner resistance on my part. In retrospect the resistance with which I have burdened myself is part of the subject because passion and its representation, as I have just described it, has historically caused in society at large denial and displacement and rationalizations. Partly, I suspect, this is because of its inherent excessiveness, its threat to established boundaries, and probably because the boundarilessness inevitably means the passions of *women*, making them subjects and agents. As a member of this society and one for whom the dominant view of passion has at some level held sway, I have put up my share of resistances in my efforts to consider the subject. But, as one who can't avert the gaze from the dangerous snake in the path, I keep looking!

6. Let me summarize four of the five major essays into Romantic passion that I have made since the mid-1980s, the purpose of this summary being to suggest one range of approaches to the problem. *Radical Literary Education* (1987) considered the problem of passion in terms of Wordsworth's revisions of his "Immortality Ode." One chapter is sub-titled: "From 'Untam'd Pleasure' to 'Heaven-born Freedom,'" phrases respectively from the 1807 and the 1815 publications of the Ode that recount the drama of the sublation of passion from a more-or-less central position in a description of the human subject to at best a peripheral one. This trajectory is noticed by Hazlitt in his critique of the Ode (in his lecture on *Romeo and Juliet*) as a failure on Wordsworth's part to acknowledge the centrality of passion in human life and growth. Hazlitt seems uncannily aware of the earlier, now suppressed, version of the Ode upon which the version that privileges the "doctrine of pre-existence" rests. *Radical Literary Education* builds upon this *thematic* problem: the suppression of passion in the Ode and Hazlitt's consequent perception. This drama is embedded in the larger framework of the suppression of passion throughout Romanticism, a topic I explore later in *The Current of Romantic Passion*.

7. But the structure of the book anticipates a recurrent preoccupation: how do I frame and from what point of view do I write my criticism? At that point I did not explicitly associate this issue with passion itself; rather, by situating my discussion of Romanticism and of the poetry of passion in a pedagogical narrative (the history of a course in which I taught and heavily contextualized one poem--Wordsworth's Ode--for an entire semester), embracing the discourse of Romanticism with that about and from the college classroom, I suggested that literary criticism is not disinterested but emerges from particular settings and convictions and that the genre (in this case a narrative of educational practice) can influence, indeed determine, the questions that are asked and the answers that are given.

8. In my next book, *The Walk: Notes on a Romantic Image* (1989), an essayistic journey through the literature and art of walking centering on Romantic walks but travelling far from that source, I offer the walk as a metaphor for critical activity as I imagine it best practiced: the experience of walking fosters the loosening of boundaries of responsiveness:

> The walk is an occasion of limited vulnerability. I offer myself to unpredictable occurences and impingements. The world flows past my body, which may block, pleasurably or uncomfortably, some sudden cometary intrusion and create a *situation*. But mostly I can modulate the immediacy of random intrusions for the sake of encouraging, unimpeded, the "inner life." Raising the stakes, the walk implies a mixture or an alternation of committed responses and disinterested reflection, or the world on a walk engenders the mental polarity of critical thinking all the way to wonderment. . . . Furthermore, my thoughts and

immediate pleasures belong to me in my solitude but also to me as part of an historical community. (*The Walk*, pp. 4-5)

9. In *The Current of Romantic Passion* (1991) I paint a canvas of passion in Romanticism in broad strokes. Once again, as in *Radical Literary Education*, I thematize the subject, focusing at the beginning on Rousseau in his *Confessions* and *Reveries* and on Goethe in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, as crucial substrata for writing in the (traditionally designated) British Romantic period. I look at instances of erotic passion, fantasy, the interplay between personal and politically resonant expressions of passion, and at the younger Romantics (Byron, Shelley, and Keats) as sensitive to the early Romantic suppressions of the theme (as in the Immortality Ode described previously). Included in these discussions are, perhaps surprisingly, works such as Dorothy Wordsworth's journals, Charles Lamb's early novella, *Rosamund Gray*, and Hazlitt's brilliant journalistic essay "The Fight." And as with the previous two works, I accentuate the connection between criticism and the style in which it becomes manifest. This 200-page book is written in 57 micro-chapters, moving rapidly as a set of *correspondences*, from perception to perception, INSTANTER, as Charles Olson says about Projective Verse, and from work to work, passage to passage, from the canonical to the unfamiliar.

10. Passion, in poetry and in criticism, becomes energy as excess: the representation of the mind in rapid movement, in a state of perpetual and, one hopes, fruitful longing ranging in bliss over the infinity of materials, like Keats's gardener Fancy who breeding flowers will never breed the same. Imagine (I say in the Introduction) a history or a profile of the characteristic Romantic poem that, instead of resembling Wordsworth's "Tintery Abbey," with its celebration of the contemplative mind at ease in the countryside, is modeled on Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, at least on the following passage from it, as Oothoon, full of sexual desire, plucks the flower/nymph Marygold:

    I pluck thee from thy bed
    Sweet flower and put thee here to glow between my breasts
    And thus I turn my face to where my whole soul seeks.
    Over the waves she went in wing'd exulting swift delight;
    And over Theotormons reign, took her impetuous course.
    Bromion rent her with his thunders on his stormy bed
    Lay the faint maid, and soon her woes appalld his
    thunders hoars.

    The expression of Oothoon's innocent sexual desire produces its suppression in Bromion's reign of terror. For Blake, particularly during the years of the French Revolution, the primary moral issue is the fate of desire--its flowering or its containment(p. 5). Thus early in the book I begin to associate desire or passion with *poetics*, in the simple sense of anticipating a certain type of poetic writing with the preference for or interest in a certain thematics, that of passion. Not so parenthetically, the poetics and thematics of passion contains a strong feminist element, in that passion, always excessive, implies the other, the presence of passion in the other who is often in Romanticism figured as the woman.

11. The history of experimental poetics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is based upon the principle of the poetry as the *production* of energy and its transfer into the world: this is a visionary poetics, in which poetry as consolation (for a bad world and a world defined by death) is exchanged for a poetry of transformation. Death, in this system, and the body as a limit initiate rather than conclude the occasion of poetry inquiry. Similarly, the lyric subject, or speaker, is less the object of interest than the referent, or world, represented in the poem. But it is as if the transfer of focus from the lyric subject to the world cannot occur without an outflow of poetic energies. According to the manifestoes of such a poetics, from Blake to Hopkins and Whitman, to Olson and Levertov, the imagination of the modern person in ordinary (social) consciousness is "fettered"; to break the fetters requires the excessive force

of imagination and breath, in the breaking of conventional line length, in the overthrow of the monumental subject of poems for the *listing* of subjects in the world, from the abandonment of the speaker's self-representation for that of the world (i.e. Negative Capability, a slogan for many experimental poets), to the relinquishing of the traditional figures, such as metaphor and simile, for the correspondences. Instead of accruing interest around a single subject, hierarchical in relation to other possible subjects, experimental poetry looks to a "field" or "constellation" (Mallarme, Rilke) of subjects in mutual relation. In this spirit *Romantic Presences* (Station Hill Press, 1995), like *The Current of Romantic Passion*, works in many small essayistic sections, inspired erotically by a number of famous and not-so-famous Romantic images. Moreover, in this recent book, some of the "essays" are in fact poems, like the following called "Skylark":

"trill, trill, trill, trill"--
The lark of Blake sings with its
tongue: the song of
exquisite touch, phallic delight
the treble thrill and tremble, the
Divine and spirit of the
Feathery body
"His little throat labours
with inspiration; every feather on
Throat & breast & wings
vibrates
with the effluence Divine"
Tongue and throat, the gutteral divine depth
  Morning: he awakens the other winged singers
The sun of morning witnesses with its heat the
Voices of Thou and Thee
Spirit and Nature: the vertical coordinate
which we insist goes
upward for our benefit--a Choir of Day!
But the tongue to the throat to the sex
and the green covert of the
origin of song
Generation and the psychology of desire
Fantasy of love in the air
But air has a body and a voice,
Or Voices of Avian Variety
"trill, trill, trill, trill,"--a repetition of
Sounds before our words--
No metaphor, no turnings, no
Journeys, but the
Ritual of sounds we needed to hear
And with the lark it is now, for poetry and the
Morning. . . .

The skylark: in Blake, Shelley, and Clare an image of a visionary, open-form poetry, shooting up from its ground-level nest hidden away past all sight into the sky and back again; the human subject listening on hears it come from and go to places beyond where the social self can go, the condition of the Romantic and modern visionary lyric: the aubade.

12. What follows are some brief pieces from a work in progress currently entitled: "A Little Book of

Romantic Poetics," in which passion, poetics, and criticism all speak to the choice of excess in literary activity. The features, referred to in what follows, of the Romantic poetry of excess include its *vernal* nature--the springing up of life out of the blank or oblivious winter of death, convention, familiarity, the negative in any of its forms; its impulse less for consolation and more for transformation of vision; its release of attention to the lyric subject or speaker into attention to the referent, or world, which appears in multiple versions (an exchange of the *singular* for the *manifold*); and the expression fo multiplicity in poetry as correspondences or as a constellation, an image that defines poetry as the visionary representation of subject and world as a set of cosmic relations. Behind such a poetics lies the principle of the release of "energy" (a word travelling from Blake to Charles Olson and beyond that is a component of "passion").

I

13. Let us suppose that Romantic poems (as, perhaps, the "Romantic" in many lyrics) open with a gesture towards immobility, towards the condition of frozen or lapsed consciousness: think of those poems of the dawn, like Mary Robinson's "London Summer Morning," which refers to prior immobility by displacement into a *class* of those who do not listen and note the sounds of the city accumulating, once again, at an early hour. The same displacement occurs in Wordsworth: "Dull would he be of soul who could pass by / A sight so touching in its majesty." In both cases the awakening is a touching of the soul towards something beyond the person's own scale of reference, a conversion to outsized realities which, before the dawn of the poem, remained numbed in familiarity, in repression, in security. When the numbing becomes pain, the poem opens:

    My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my sense. . . .

    Those first three words of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" quote the nightingale itself, coming from afar, frozen in the myth, yet warming to the poem that proceeds from it.

14. Whitman's "The Compost" opens:

    Something startles me when I thought I was safest,
    I withdraw from the still woods I loved,
    I will not go on the pastures to walk,
    I will not strip my clothes from my body to meet my
    lover the sea,
    I will not touch my flesh to the earth as to other flesh
    to renew me.

    The defiance of a series of activities associated with absorption in natural collective experience and of the long lines in particular announcing that past pleasure in an immobilizing but pleasurable unselfconsciousness, calls the poem forward; the poem's beginning startles just like the speaker is startled. Perhaps it is the "Romantic" poem (of any historical period) that opens by startling and inscribes that effect in the poem's opening, just as it inscribes the condition of immobility, the trajectory of oblivion and the end of the world.

15. The purpose of these acknowledgments of past immobilities and present awakenings is to announce the visionary intention of the poem. Two short sections later in "The Compost," at the end of its introductory movement, the speaker--writing about the decomposing bodies of Civil War battles--declares a first visionary act: "I am sure I shall expose some foul meat."

16. As the speaker's prior immobility recedes and as his/her own consciousness sharpens and differentiates

itself from its grounding comforts, attentiveness towards the world increases: the world newly comes into view.

17. This is visionary Romanticism.

II

18. John Clare's "Emmonsails Heath in Winter" takes the final stanza of Keats's "To Autumn" a step further into the poem of nature becoming a poem of mind, the poem of winter becoming a poem of spring, the closed becoming an open poem:

    I love to see the old heaths withered brake
    Mingle its crimpled leaves with furze and ling
    While the old heron from the lonely lake
    Starts slow and flaps his melancholly wing. . . .

    This barren-winter sonnet begins in love and observation: "I love to see"--what a simple but powerful framing directive! How can we all not read this and become poets! identifying with this "I" who loves and sees.

19. Immediately, and unpredictably, however, he begins to turn his *singleness* into a vision of *mingled* sights--just as the heron (receiving the projected loneliness of the solitary viewer) dwells in melancholy gives way to a multitude of flying, bouncing, quaking, and flitting creatures:

    And oddling crow in idle motion swing
    On the half rotten ash trees topmost twig
    Beside whose trunk the gipsey makes his bed
    Up flies the bouncing woodcock from the brig
    Where a black quagmire quakes beneath the tread
    The field fare chatter in the whistling thorn
    And for the awe round fields and clesen rove. . . .

    Amidst the movement of fauna a gipsey prepares to sleep. Interestingly, the only named human accepts his homelessness. He becomes, as Nelly Sachs in a very different setting observes, one who cannot hold a homeland but can hold metamorphoses. The speaker discovers in the dead of winter what Wordsworth called "the life of things," a principle focus of visionary poetry.

    And coy bumbarrels twenty in a drove
    Flit down the hedge rows in the frozen plain
    And hang on little twigs and start again.

    The sonnet, better than any other Romantic form, bespeaks the preference for closure. But here the principal subjects of the final couplet, twenty coy bumbarrels, refuse closure of form by a) hanging, living in suspendedness and b) starting again. And by the end, I've forgotten that "I" who gave himself so ingenuously at the beginning.

20. Perhaps the lyric subject disappears as the referent proliferates, in a constellation of living energies. The "singular" is shipwrecked (George Oppen) as the world becomes "numerous," and the sonnet disdains its tradition as a monumental form by dissolving in its anticipated new beginnings.

III

21. The shipwreck of the singular (Mallarmé to Oppen), focusing primarily on the lyric history of the speaker, does not define the condition of Romantic poetry. (The traditional way of reading it does, however, consider the poem as a monument coalescing around the privileged lyric speaker.) Lament ("*Klage*," Rilke) does not either (although elegy predominates in many readings of Romantic poems). Lament, like a youngest among sisters, while "maidenhanded counts for nights the old curse" (*Sonnets to Orpheus*), suddenly, in spite of her awkwardness, lifts up the CONSTELLATION ("*Sternbild*") of our voice into the heavens. Out of the languagetrap of loss or death, the singular shipwreck, springs its opposite, a *Sternbild* in the sky, composed of many nameless stars. The *Klage* becomes the *Ruhmung* (praise). Praise, expressed amidst the visionary changes, makes the constellation. Praise locates the thing amidst its cosmic relations.

22. Praise also is expressed by "*un coup des dés*," a throw of the dice," that freedom to play with the terms, not to be enslaved by them. Mallarmé's constellation offers itself as a throw of the dice, a freeing device that shifts the emphasis away from the singular but also eschews nature as determining. The throw of the dice represents instead a mental state, potentially a poetic one.

23. The constellation appears obliquely in Keats's "Ode to Psyche": buds and bells and stars without a name.

IV

24. On sitting down to read *Beachy Head* again, I confront a large (b)land mass of verse, without edge and--expecting a more characteristic work of Romantic blank verse--without the guiding and sympathetic beam of the first-person singular. The "I" in early Romanaticism is light, flexible, sensitive to sight and sound, a darting image of reflected and projected lights, a precious conductor, a bridge-maker and healer, a friend to woman and man.

25. With *Beachy Head* I have forgotten how the self drains its alienating and coalescing energies into the tail or predicate--eccentrically, with a synaptic switch onto the track of the referent: the characteristic sentence of this poem *forgets* the "I" that perceives with a heaving of energies into the objects of perception. For example,

    I loved to trace the brooks whose humid banks
    Nourish the harebell, and the freckled pagil;
    And stroll among o'ershadowing woods of beech,
    Lending in Summer, from the heats of noon
    A whispering shade; while haply there reclines
    Some pensive lover of uncultur'd flowers,
    Who, from the tumps with bright green mosses clad,
    Plucks the wood sorrel, with its light thin leaves,
    Heart-shaped, and triply folded; and its root
    Creeping like beaded coral; or who there
    Gathers, the copse's pride, anemones,
    With rays like golden studs on ivory laid
    Most delicate: but touch'd with purple clouds,
    Fit crown for April's fair but changeful brow.

    Thus far I recapitulate the general binary of poetics that criticism accords this poem: its focus on natural elements, its shifts of subject-position is anti-Wordsworthian, anti-egotistical sublime. Smith's excess and boundariless nature-passsion in her verbs--I love to trace. . .and stroll among--already register the thinning of ego-texture by the texture of nature. Yet that "I" still, technically, orchestrates

the whole sentence, so that to speak simply of an emphasis-shift from subject to object is a reductive truth. The "I" conserves itself as a vibration in the wood sorrel's "root Creeping like beaded coral." Strolling through the woods is not quite like Baudelaire's wanderer through the forest of symbols that observe him with friendly glances. These flowers and trees reveal their own living presences. In a poem, however, what does that actually mean? With heightened attentiveness I note that the speaker does not yield to nature but to a *mind* lacing the world in its perfume (more like Baudelaire than I think?). The attenuation of the speaking self follows a vortex through its death into a non-human form of self, the midway point the "wispering shade" with its unstable referent hovering between death in the natural poet and the collective image of representation--just as Smith's blank verse hovers between the closed, finite image of the ten-syllable line and the infinite openness of its vertical coordinate of the stream of many lines. In terms of "the self," in other words, the speaker's dissolution into the referent is really her expansion from an ego to a collective (lore-ridden, nature-ridden) self.

26. Negative Capability and the (woman) poet of *Beachy Head*: In his otherwise buoyant account of the "camelion poet" who has no identity but who becomes whatever his imagination lites upon, Keats registers a slight quantum of discomfort in his experience of a gathering of friends when--having entered into their beings--no longer has a self to "come home" to. It is the downside of Negative Capability; it is not only the loss of the ego but, in the language of Rousseau, the loss of *amour de soi* and, in Wordsworth, the "sentiment of being."

27. Perhaps this accounts for the somewhat depressed affect in *Beachy Head* (forgetting momentarily the depressing life of its author), a poem seemingly buoyant with the Negatively Capable lyric subject moving from topic to topic in a way that minimizes reference to the speaker's ego, a poem of massive correspondences in which, nearly Whitman-like, the speaker merges with the ground of the poem's being, the landscape--geographical, historical, autobiographical, and biographical--of Beachy Head. Yet the fecundity of topics (e.g. the teeming life of plants) and the incessant motion of perception to perception, which ought to produce a primavera atmosphere instead exudes a perfume of sterility, of missed connections and corruptions: it is a poem that cannot heal the world brokenness signaled at the beginning (the sea's rift of Britain from the European landmass). The poet-figures at the poem's conclusion compromise effectiveness with their own deaths. Clearly, the fate of the poet is a trouble.

28. Yet the poem resolutely commits itself to that most un-camelion-like of lines and verse forms in early Romanticism, the ten-syllable line of blank verse. Coleridge's conversation poems (as well as Thelwall's and Lamb's) and Wordsworth's *Ruined Cottage*, *Pedlar*, "Tintern Abbey," and *The Prelude*, carry on the Romantic project of defining the speaker in relation to other human presences, usually written into the very line: the scale primarily human and social, at times, intimate. But the implicit image of a free-standing agent in a bourgeois republican state never diminishes, indeed only solidifies, in the journey towards poem's close. Given the nature of Romantic blank verse, it is odd to find it in *Beachy Head*.

29. Might a woman poet of this era feel the cost of Negative Capability keenly? As she allows herself to be drawn into the referent, does it remind her of her social and economic powerlessness and invisibility? Smith's choice, to represent the speaking voice, nonetheless, in the poetic (10-syllable) line of community may represent exactly the conflict between the preference for a poetry of the referent and the longing for a visible, coherent presence of the speaking, social self.

30. Nonetheless, Smith's trace-and-stroll poetics becomes an image of a praising thread of elements, a Sternbild or constellation that includes the death of shepherds and natural poets. Amidst her somber plenitudes the lark sings.

Romantic Passions

Romantic Anger and Byron's Curse

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The men who grow angry with corruption, and impatient at injustice, and through those sentiments favour the abettor of revolution, have an obvious apology to palliate their error; theirs is the excess of a virtuous feeling. At the same time, however amiable may be the source of their error, the error itself is probably fraught with consequences pernicious to mankind. (Godwin, "On Revolutions," *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 1793) And the just man rages in the wilds / Where lions roam. (Blake, "The Argument," *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1789)

1. Between the years 1780 and 1830, two closely-related developments in Europe changed utterly the function and form of anger in public discourse, and so marked the advent of the modern political and cultural world. First, the French Revolution brought the issue of anger to the forefront of English consciousness, and inspired intense debate over the place of that emotion in (and in creating) the new forms of civil society. From its beginnings, the Revolution was centered in an assertion that the anger of the people deserved respect, and had a legitimacy of its own. Yet as it democratized anger, the Revolution (and the Terror) demonstrated the dangers of unbounded public rage, leaving conflict an ambiguous inheritance for English writers.(1) Second, the periodical press began a phase of rapid expansion that transformed the substance, style, and speed of public discourse. Printing technologies allowed for the dissemination of angry rhetoric across lines of class and nation, and helped establish the right of an outraged people to redress.(2) The democratization of anger meant that learning to marshal the outrage of the populace took on radically new urgency, and the periodicals were there to step into the breach. By way of anger, the new medium discovered its demagogic powers.

2. In England particularly, where large-scale revolutionary violence never took place, the printing press became the engine of a war of words. For writers of the time, anger was a vexed locus of rational justice and irrational savagery; and the importance and difficulty of writing anger make that emotion a key pressure point within the literary history of this revolutionary period. In the wake of Augustan satire, the Romantic poets developed their ambivalent attitudes toward angry art in concert with the multitude of outraged voices in the periodical press. (3) How to distinguish their rage from that of the Augustans on the one hand, and that of the propagandists on the other, became a crucial question. Romanticism in England can thus be seen as a chorus of responses to the crisis that was brought about by anger's prominence in public discourse.

3. Some of these responses were acts of negation: the poetry of Wordsworth and Keats, for example, defines itself by excluding anger from its precincts. One example from Wordsworth will have to suffice here *pars pro toto*, although more attention should be paid to his engagements with violence and outrage, and to how those engagements have influenced our reception of Romanticism. In a poem called "The Warning," written in 1833, the conservative Wordsworth laments over those agitating for the passage of the Reform Bill:

    Lost people, trained to theoretic feud!
    Lost above all, ye labouring multitude!
    Bewildered whether ye, by slanderous tongues
    Deceived, mistake calamities for wrongs;
    And over fancied usurpations brood,

> Oft snapping at revenge in sullen mood;
> Or, from long stress of real injuries fly
> To desperation for a remedy;
> In burst of outrage spread your judgements wide,
> And to your wrath cry out, "Be thou our guide."
> (*The Poems*, 2: 739-40)

For Wordsworth, the tygers of wrath are clearly not wiser than the horses of instruction; and when the people allow themselves to be guided by anger, they become bewildered, deceived, mistaken, desperate, and lost. Such an attitude towards public wrath owes a great deal to Wordsworth's experience of the French Revolution and the Terror, and also to his disapproval of the angry rhetoric of the popular press, that "theoretic feud" of "scandalous tongues" leading the citizens astray. As Wordsworth wrote in response to what he saw as Carlyle's overly enthusiastic account of the French Revolution, "Hath it not long been said the wrath of Man / Works not the righteousness of God?" (*The Poems*, 2: 881).(4) The agitation surrounding the Reform Bill was England's version of the revolutionary conflicts in France, and Wordsworth saw in both only an outraged blindness dangerous to the people and the nation.

4. In Book 10 of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth recalls his experiences in Paris in 1792, just after the September Massacres and the declaration of the Republic, both of which put him at great unease:

> But at best it seemed a place of fear, Unfit for the repose of night, Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam. (*1805 Prelude*, Book 10, lines 80-82)

Wordsworth's image of unfenced tigers prowling the *civitas* is meant to register his sense that the state should police the anger of citizens rather than encourage it. But even Wordsworth would have recognized that, like it or no, the Revolution had resulted in a new place for anger within the public sphere. How much had changed in regard to anger can be seen by comparing two passages that recall Wordsworth's from *The Prelude*. The first is from Edward Young's *A Vindication of Providence*, written in 1728, when the anger of the monarch was still the monarch of the political jungle:

> It is elegantly said, the King's anger is as a roaring lion, which Description of it is confin'd to Kings, only as to its Efficacy; it is strong, though not as successful in other Men. By a King it is let loose into the large Field of Power; in others it bites the Bars that confine it. (Young 28)

Young recognizes that anger is our fundamental political emotion, the ferocity of which is equal in all men. By picturing the common man's anger as a caged lion that "bites the Bars that confine it," Young implies that instruments of control (i.e., chains and prisons) are the only things that separate the king -- both physically and ontologically -- from his subjects. Approximately one hundred years later, Sir Walter Scott looked back on the period leading up to the fateful meeting of the Estates-General (on May 5, 1789), and wondered at the provoking behavior of Louis XVI's government:

> The conduct of the government . . . towards the nation whose representatives it was shortly to meet, resembled that of an insane person, who should by a hundred teazing and vexatious insults irritate into frenzy the lion, whose cage he was about to open, and to whose fury he must necessarily be exposed. (Scott, *Life of Buonaparte*, 1: 4)

The political role of the angry citizen had changed utterly between Young's era and Scott's; the enraged populace (one of the larger cats of history) had been let out of the bag, and had entered the "large Field of Power" as a legitimate force for political change. Like the unfenced tigers that Wordsworth imagines in Paris, the uncaged lion offers to tear apart the old order in the name of the people's wrath.

5. Even Edmund Burke, in the final sentence of his reactionary *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, admits the virtue of personal rage -- as if he recognizes that the events in Paris, however deplorable, have instituted a new relation between the anger of citizens and the conduct of the state. Burke concludes his great work by describing himself as "one in whose breast no anger durable or vehement has ever been kindled, but by what he considered as tyranny" (*Reflections* 376). So, despite his talk of the bestial madness of the French people, Burke avers that vehement anger is the appropriate response to tyranny after all. And although he would point to the tyranny of the mob rather than the monarch, the logic of outrage prevails. Burke's rhetoric obliquely approves the petition for redress of grievances, and the violent opposition to tyranny when that fails: that is, the stages of political anger that amount to revolution.

6. Of course, some expressions of anger have no immediate relation to the state; they are merely personal. Yet Blake's altercation with the soldier Scofield (like Achilles' with Agamemnon) demonstrates how, in wartime, such a division is almost impossible to maintain. Anger aims to have consequences; and it tends to expand to include all apparent targets, rapidly crossing lines towards public concerns. Achilles' private quarrel with his king has immediate political and martial repercussions; Blake's personal indignation at Scofield's invasion of his garden grows to an assertion that all soldiers are slaves, and then to a damning of the king. Whether Blake actually said these things matters less than their insertion (either by Blake or Scofield) into a private conflict between strangers, indicating the tendency of citizens' anger to implicate or involve the state in times of crisis.

7. Furthermore, private experiences of indignation and outrage establish the patterns by which the citizen will behave towards the indignities threatened by and to the state. We learn from our childhood experiences of tyranny how to respond to larger engines of oppression, be they kings or invading hordes. One of Shelley's schoolmates recalls the "Mad Shelley" of Eton:

   > I have seen him surrounded . . . hooted, baited like a maddened bull, and at this distance of time I seem to hear ringing within my ears the cry which Shelley was wont to utter in his paroxysm of revengeful anger. (qtd. in White, 1: 38)

   Prometheus' curse of Jupiter echoes faintly behind this passage, and we can see here one of the sources of Shelley's image of himself as exile, cursing and accursed. That Shelley embraced pacifism -- that Prometheus recalls his curse -- does not negate the importance of anger to his imagination of structures of oppression. Surrounded by this mocking ring of boys, the young Shelley learned anger as the emotion of alienation from institutions and their members.

8. After all, anger is typically the sign of a mind in exile. The anger that Homer asks the muse to sing at the opening of the *Iliad* is not the rage that will inspire Achilles' vengeful *aristeia* against the Trojans, but rather the emotion that alienates Achilles from his compatriots. This war epic begins not with a battle hymn, but with the noise of a quarrel, the cause of an unnatural separation that "put pains thousandfold upon the Achaians," and sent their best warrior back to the domestic consolations of his tent (*Iliad* 1.2). Slighted by Agamemnon, Achilles enacts the exile that he feels -- partly as a way of punishing the king, but also as a literalization of Agamemnon's refusal to grant him his respect, his regard. Agamemnon chooses not to see him, so Achilles sees red, and makes himself scarce.

9. Similarly, when Shakespeare's Coriolanus, enraged at the Roman populace that has cast him out, exclaims, "I banish you!", he captures nicely anger's ambivalence about the origins of the exile it imposes (*Coriolanus* 3.3.133). Always a response to some perceived trauma -- some truncation of the self or severance from a social body -- anger still desires priority and will therefore deepen the wound. Thus the ex-employee retorts, "You can't fire me because I quit!", in a compensatory fantasy of agency which anger demands. Here the verb tense ("quit") balances nicely between past and present, deferring

the issue of the trauma's origins. For the sake of pride, anger shoves the mind from that which is in the act of pushing it away. We call anger offensive -- that is what anger wants to be: a taking of (the) offense -- when in fact, it is a fundamentally defensive emotion.

10. The world elsewhere that anger inaugurates is thus, like Milton's Hell, a scene of punishment transformed into a kingdom. Having just acknowledged the departure of God's "ministers of vengeance" from Hell, Satan asserts to Beelzebub:

    > Here we may reign secure, and in my choice To reign is worth ambition though in Hell: Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven. (*Paradise Lost* 1.170; 261-63)(5)

    Self-reliance is the order of the day, and Satan's trouble with his pronouns in this passage demonstrates the powerfully alienating drive of anger. "We may reign," Satan opines democratically to his equally outraged fellow, and yet he follows immediately with talk of "my choice / To reign," as if his anger were driving him constantly towards isolation and further forms of exile. When Satan announces later, "My self am Hell" (4:75), he confirms this drive, and makes it clear that, at one level, his angry rebellion against Heaven amounts only to a wish for personal sovereignty. In promoting Jesus, God alienates Satan; in rebelling against God, Satan confirms that alienation. In sending Satan to Hell, God makes the alienation permanent; and in claiming he chose to reign in Hell, Satan turns it into an industry of his own. At each moment, anger compels both parties to envision their doings as actions rather than reactions -- as products of an individual will, not as belated responses. Of course, God's omniscience makes belatedness on his part impossible -- and so his anger is really nothing but judgment expressed as punishment. Satan's rage, on the other hand, is always reactive, like our own -- an identity that William Blake deplored.

11. Alienating, defensive, reactive: such descriptions -- and they were the dominant ones in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries -- begin to explain why writing anger was such a problem for the Romantic poets, who, in an age of the ascendancy of lyricism, were to express their own emotions rather than creating dramatic or narrative characters to enact them. In most circumstances, angry rhetoric wards off readerly sympathy, the primary goal of the archetypal Romantic poet, and institutes a scene of distance and distrust. No emotion invites judgment from its audience so readily, because our experience of others' anger, unlike that of other strong passions, is always informed by rational measures. How much anger is justified under the circumstances? Is this particular pound of flesh too much or too little in the way of vengeance? Has this angry person gone too far? In *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*, John Kerrigan has shown that the deep connections between revenge and theater have a basis in our eagerness to make such evaluations.(6) For the lyric speaker whose art depends upon a sincere and sympathetic voice, anger invites the encroachment of the dramatic and the juridical, and thus threatens to break down lines of imagined communion between poet and reader.

12. What, though, of satiric poetry? Between the Augustans and the Romantics, Thomas Lockwood finds a widening split between satire and poetry: it is not that satire was not being written, but that critical canons were changing, dismissing wit, reason, and politics as components alien to "pure" poetry. In his influential study of Romantic theory, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), M.H. Abrams traces the Romantic substitution of internal for external verisimilitude as the end of poetry. The work of art, which before 1800 aimed to mirror nature, now aimed to project the artist's emotional state, without deceit or distortion. Primarily under Rousseau's influence, English poetry came to be governed by an aesthetic ideology of (authorial) sincerity and (readerly) sympathy that prohibited the essential theatricality and confrontational implications of angry satire. As the voice of poetry became more disembodied and more isolated in order to avoid imputations of theatricality, anger -- a violent passion that relies on tone, gesture, and facial expression for its communication to others -- necessarily grew problematic for lyric poets. How does one become angry without a body, a voice, or an established

dramatic context? One answer is to write very strongly worded imprecations and curses. Yet such a strategy invites charges of overreaction and overacting, or madness and insincerity, as the career of Lord Byron demonstrates.

13. Indeed, when one considers the dialogue between Romantic lyricism and ill-tempered theatricality, Byron's poetic procedures come first to mind. However, studies of Byron's engagement with satire tend to downplay the importance of anger, probably because *Don Juan* bestrides his satiric poetry like a colossus, and most readers understand the modes and methods of that poem -- the digression, the lampoon, the sly wink, the humorous deflation of hypocrisy -- as paradigmatic for Byron's work as a whole.(7) Furthermore, a focus on the satires alone excludes a large portion of Byron's poetry of anger and revenge. Byron characteristically combines satiric impulses with a dramatic sense of himself as a figure of vengeance. As a result, he expresses anger most frequently and exuberantly as a curse: a ritualized declamation of ill will that performs his wrath. For Byron, the resulting angry poetry -- a combination of satire, dramatic curse, and confessional lyric -- opposes Romantic sincerity with its theatricality, Romantic sympathy with its alienating effects, and Romantic transcendence with its commitment to worldly cycles of retribution.

14. Of these aspects of Byron's poetry that challenge Romantic aesthetics, self-dramatization is the most familiar. Lockwood speaks of the "personal quality in post-Augustan satire," in which the satirist "makes personal references to himself as well as to the man he is satirizing" (p. 18). "Satiric rhyme first sprang from selfish spleen," Byron writes in a cancelled line of "Hints from Horace," and his poetic career shows him writing often in a spirit of personal revenge. Such intimacy reverses the policies of eighteenth-century satire, wherein the poet presents himself as a scourge of vice *pro bono publico* whose private enmities must be subordinated to the larger claims of society. As Steele put it in 1710:

    > When the sentence [of reproof] appears to arise from personal hatred or passion, it is not then made the cause of mankind but a misunderstanding between two persons. . . . No man thoroughly nettled can say a thing general enough, to pass off with the air of an opinion declared, and not a passion gratified. (qtd. in Lockwood, p. 36)

    Byron explores the implications of Steele's comment by writing poems of "personal hatred" arising precisely from such misunderstandings, transforming his eighteenth-century satiric inheritance by making a spectacle of his personal rage. His angry poetry avoids mere satiric rhetoric by presenting his enmities as matters of public record and the world's evils as personal affronts -- as it were, dragging Europe across his bleeding heart.

15. The paradoxical combination of apparent rhetorical manipulation and a convincingly confessional, passionate style has kept the issue of Byron's sincerity at the forefront of criticism. Two observations by Jerome McGann capture this central paradox of reading Byron's poetry: first, Byron "is the one English Romantic who has been commonly charged with -- who has had his work charged with -- hypocrisy" (*Towards a Literature of Knowledge* 39);(8) and second, "We think of Byron as the most personal of poets, recklessly candid, self-revealing to a fault" ("Hero With A Thousand Faces" 295). Accounting for the utter fascination this figure exerts has long been the central task of Byron's critics: why is the Byronic personality so compelling? Romanticist scholarship generally assumes that Byron's antithetical position, and thus much of his appeal, involve his ironic masquerading in the face of Romantic ideals of sincerity and spontaneity. Yet this critical narrative tells only half of the story; the other half concerns how Byron undermines his own ironic stance, particularly by way of anger and hatred. Put another way, Byron's crucial revisionary move involves two steps: not merely the ironic interrogation of Romantic ideology, but also the importation of anger, an emotion often not productive of sympathy, into the sincere Romantic poem.

16. In a series of articles, McGann has emphasized the importance of "truth" to Byron's poetic procedures. (9) In his synoptic view, the contradictions of Byron's poetry are meant to expose false certainties, disrupting the orthodox by means of the paradox. Focusing on the rhetorical mobility and dialogic ethos that characterize Byron's work, McGann argues that the emergent truths of the Byronic perspective are thus negative, deconstructive truths that depend upon a process of contradiction. Irony is the most recognizable vehicle and accompaniment of such a perspective. Yet, as McGann explains, Byron's genius lies in his refusal to abide within a strictly ironic vision; his commitment to contradiction includes contradiction itself. This means that Byron sometimes grounds his work in sincere and consistent emotions, whose vehement certainty exempts them from the play of irony and contradiction. Not surprisingly, the first of these emotions are anger and hatred. As McGann says of *Don Juan*:

> Romantic irony is not the work's ground of truth either. We glimpse this even through the example of Southey, who is not known in Don Juan through the plays of Romantic irony. He is known rather through hatred -- the same way Brougham and Castlereagh are known....Byron can be witty at his own expense, or at Southey's expense, but his wit is not engaged in the face of the Byron/Southey parallel....because Southey is not in the end a figure of fun for Byron, he is a figure of all that is hateful and despicable. (TLK 55)

17. Before turning to a closer examination of Byron's work, we should sort out the connections between Romantic sincerity and sympathy, and how anger cuts against them. Clearly, as dramatic action, anger can produce a powerful sympathetic response in an audience. From Oedipus forward, the history of tragedy has found its center in anger and revenge, as John Kerrigan has shown.(10) Because anger arises from the perception of unjust injury, we take great interest in the circumstances and consequences surrounding it; if we think that someone's anger is appropriate to the injury, we grant him our sympathy. The complex ethical economy of anger makes the stage its proper home, where the nuances of situation and response can be presented. Furthermore, since anger emerges most often from some dramatic relation, its artistic expression is typically most effective as dialogue; it takes two (or more) to make an argument. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, the expression of anger depends on tone, gesture, and facial expression for its communication to others -- things available to actors but not to lyric poets.

18. Charles Lamb, in his "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare" (1811), sees anger as the most appropriate emotion for the stage, where the goal is the overt display of passion:

> The glory of scenic art is to personate passion, and the turns of passion; and the more coarse and palpable the passion is, the more hold upon the eyes and ears of the spectators the performer obviously possesses. For this reason, scolding scenes, scenes where two persons talk themselves into a fit of fury...have always been the most popular on our stage. (qtd. in *Romantics on Shakespeare* 114)
>
> Anger is "coarse and palpable," best represented in dialogue as a "scene," attractive to spectators who naturally prefer scenes full of sound and fury, regardless of what they signify. However, to express anger using pen and ink alone, the poet may feel obliged to resort to very strongly worded imprecations and curses. Yet, faced with such outbursts, the reader typically assumes the poet is either over-acting (and thus insincere) or overreacting (and thus unsympathetic). In either case, the sincerity effect is disabled and the poem becomes a spectacle, returning in effect to theater. Such readerly detachment opens a gap into which rush hermeneutic suspicions and judgments.

19. The "sincerity" that characterizes Wordsworthian Romanticism depends wholly on sympathy -- precisely that which the decontextualized anger of the lyric has trouble evoking, particularly when it

appears spontaneous: that is, uncalled for. Robert Langbaum has written, "*Einfühlung*," or sympathy, "is the specifically Romantic way of knowing," and the Romantic speaker is "a pole of sympathy -- the means by which reader and writer project themselves into the poem" (*Poetry of Experience* 52). We call sincere the poetry that effectively provokes such sympathetic projection. Of course, as Langbaum and McGann both recognize, sincere poetry is, at one level, an oxymoron. Langbaum writes, "the anti-rhetorical style is itself a rhetoric. For there remains, between the sincere feeling in the heart and the effect of sincerity on the page, the art of communication"(p. 23), and McGann reminds us similarly, "Romantic sincerity only presents itself as unpremeditated verse; in fact it involves a rhetoric" (TLK, p. 42). However, these statements define sincerity at the level of the *énoncé*, as a truth-value of the poetry itself as a record of the poet's mind. Following Suzanne Guerlac, we may say that poetic sincerity can also be measured at the level of the *énunciation*, defined as an effect upon an audience (11); and that effect, particularly for the Romantic poets, is called sympathy.

20. In Byron's own time, and in the wake of the French Revolution, anger was most often a spectacle to be condemned, not an emotion with which to sympathize. In 1797, John Fawcett writes in his *Essay on Anger*:

> What a frightful and odious spectacle is the man who delivers himself up to the tyranny of his violent and wrathful passions! . . . The man is transformed into a brute, or rather into a fiend and a fury. Detestable sight! Who can behold him without horror? Fly from him; he is a disgrace to human nature. He is now only a fit companion for devils, and ought to be shunned and dreaded by human beings. (Fawcett 45-6)

Similarly, Thomas Brown, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1820), maintains that the man whose

> gloomy heart . . . preserves resentment . . . is like some dreadful being of another race, that walks the earth cursing and accursed; -- we shun him as we would fly from some malignant spirit who, by looking at us, could transfuse into us the venom which he feels;-- we have no sympathy for him. (Brown 435)

21. However, if anger alienates, it still may fascinate. Joanna Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" to her *Plays on the Passions* (1798) initiated an aesthetic ideology antithetical to the one articulated by Wordsworth the same year. Theater and spectatorship concern her here, as she considers the outward signs and bodily extroversions of anger that may captivate an audience even while estranging them:

> Anger is a passion that attracts less sympathy than any other, yet the unpleasing and distorted features of an angry man will be more eagerly gazed upon by those who are in no wise concerned with his fury, or the objects of it, than the most amiable placid countenance in the world. Every eye is directed to him; every voice hushed to silence in his presence; even children will leave off their gambols as he passes, and gaze after him more eagerly than the gaudiest equipage. The wild tossings of despair; the gnashing of hatred and revenge...all the language of the agitated soul, which every age and nation understand, is never addressed to the dull or inattentive. (*Series of Plays* 10)

For Baillie the dramatist, "Every eye is directed" towards the face of anger, "unpleasing and distorted" though it is, because of the lurid spectacles that anger (and other violent passions) can produce. Byron enacts this theatrical dictum as lyric practice, compelling mystified fascination rather than sympathetic assent from his audiences, and exposing his poetry to charges of insincerity and sensationalism.

22. Anger brings down the lines of sympathetic connection. Recognizing the importance of alienation for

the culture heroes of the modern, crowded world, Byron chose (and was chosen by) anger to separate himself from the herd and its sympathy. As Byron describes himself in his Childe Harold persona,

> In the crowd They could not deem me one of such; I stood Among them, but not of them; in a shroud Of thoughts which were not their thoughts. (CHP III; *Poetical Works* [CPW] 2: Canto 3, ll. 1053-56)(12)
>
> This "shroud of thoughts" that others cannot penetrate partakes of a Coriolanus-like contempt for the "rank breath" (line 1050) of the world, well-nourished by Byron's class-consciousness and sense of betrayal by his English audiences. "I have not loved the world, nor the world me" (line 1049), he writes, implying an underlying antipathy in his communications with that world, and placing anger at the heart of his poetic characters.

23. Yet as a poet seeking an audience, Byron must offset the alienating effects of his anger with sympathogenic strategies. When he neglects to do this, he writes a poem like "A Sketch from Private Life," an attack on Lady Byron's maid, Jane Clermont. "It was this poem," writes McGann, "that brought down the general public attack" on Byron in 1816, and led to his departure from England (CPW, vol. 3, p. 495). Reading the poem is still unpleasant:

    > If like a snake she steal within your walls, Till the black slime betray her as she crawls; If like a viper to the heart she wind, And leave the venom there she did not find; -- What marvel that this hag of hatred works Eternal evil latent as she lurks To make a Pandemonium where she dwells, And reign the Hecate of domestic Hells. (CPW, vol. 3, p. 384, lines 47-54)

    By foregrounding his "Private Life" and "domestic Hells," Byron draws the reader into a realm of personal anger where the subject of poetry is Byron's enemy and the object is revenge. "A Sketch" is a disturbingly intimate poem, whose problem is not theatricality but its relentless sincerity.

24. By bringing his anger and hatred to the lyric, Byron reveals the dark side of the 'true voice of feeling' and the 'spontaneous overflow' of emotion that characterize Romanticism. Of this aspect of Byron's poetry McGann writes, "When feeling comes to the aid of feeling in the Byronic and Baudelairean world, the sympathetic event is not confined to a horizon of benevolence" ("BAL," p. 32). In other words, some emotions are hellish, and Byron's poetry based in those emotions can be malevolent indeed, particularly for the Romantic reader accustomed to engaging sympathetically with the speaker of the poem. Byron's angry curses rebuff sympathy and introduce a set of agonistic relations amongst himself, his poetry, his readers, and his victims. The resulting spectacle invites judgment, criticism, and uneasy voyeurism.

25. In fact, Byron's unique style emerges under direct pressure from his anger, as he develops ways to engage readers despite his spite. One favorite method is to portray himself as one who has patiently suffered many betrayals, who endures despite having been unreasonably provoked. McGann calls this role "the figure of the suffering poet, whose (audience) reciprocal is the sympathetic reader" ("BAL," p. 31). Yet the angry Byron frequently lets this mask slip, as he plays the role of *poète maudit* with strong overtones of vindictiveness. To this his audience typically responds not with sympathy, but with a disturbed fascination; by means of its angry moods, the Byronic personality compels attention.

26. A mysterious, deliberately provocative blend of confession and accusation fairly defines the Byronic curse. Perhaps the most famous example of this occurs in Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, during the scene in the Roman Coliseum where Byron addresses "Time, the avenger!" (CPW 2: 167, Canto 4, l. 1169) He first asserts his patience, even as he hopes for revenge:

> If calmly I have . . . Reserved my pride against the hate Which shall not whelm me, let me not have worn This iron in my soul in vain -- shall they not mourn? (lines 1176-79)

"Thou shalt take / The vengeance" (lines 1194-95), Byron declares to "great Nemesis" (line 1181); "I sleep, but thou shalt yet awake" (line 1197); the poet's emotional equivocation and displacement do not mask his outrage. As Peter Manning puts it, we can perceive "the vindictive impulses surviving beneath the proclamation of sincerity" (Manning 23); one might say 'thriving' and be closer to the poem's spirit.

27. Vindication (that is, revenge and its justification) remains central to Byron's poetry. By fusing anger and patience, or outburst and deferral, Byron creates a seductive mode of intense expression that opens up a space for readers' sympathy, even as it alienates them. We keep reading Byron in expectation of either catching him in outright evil or finding him to be a saint -- in a moment of unalloyed judgment or sympathy. His curse of forgiveness exemplifies this mode:

> a far hour shall wreak The deep prophetic fulness of this verse, And pile on human heads the mountain of my curse!

135

> That curse shall be Forgiveness.--Have I not-- Hear me, my mother Earth! behold it, Heaven!-- Have I not had to wrestle with my lot? Have I not suffered things to be forgiven? Have I not had my brain seared, my heart riven, Hopes sapp'd, name blighted, Life's life lied away? And only not to desperation driven, Because not altogether of such clay As rots into the souls of those whom I survey. (CHP IV, lines 1204-1215)

> By "Forgiveness," Byron means the infliction of remorse, hoping in a cancelled stanza that "to forgive be 'heaping coals of fire' / . . . on the heads of foes" (CPW, vol. 2, p. 169n). Byron wants to "pile on human heads the mountain" of his forgiveness-curse, taking revenge by renouncing it. Furthermore, his litany of suffering, a bid for sympathy (if not martyrdom), concludes with another claim of his superhuman patience: "not to desperation driven, because not altogether of . . . clay." Simultaneously alienating and justifying himself, cursing and forgiving, Byron creates a poetry so grounded in contradiction that our response can be neither wholly sympathetic nor judgmental; by this road we approach the dramatic monologue.

28. The resulting deferral of conclusions on the reader's part feels like curiosity, just as Byron's own deferral of both violence and forgiveness results in a kind of mystification; this reciprocal relation lies at the heart of Byron's appeal. The conclusion to the forgiveness-curse, one of his best-known stanzas, shows this dynamic operating to its fullest:

> But I have lived, and have not lived in vain:
> My mind may lose its force, my blood its fire,
> And my frame perish even in conquering pain,
> But there is that within me which shall tire
> Torture and Time, and breathe when I expire;
> Something unearthly, which they deem not of,
> Like the remembered tone of a mute lyre,
> Shall on their softened spirits sink, and move
> In hearts all rocky now the late remorse of love.
> (lines 1225-1233)

Here the "something unearthly" that represents Byron's alienating embrace of conflict is imagined as a force for sympathy, one that will sink on the "softened spirits" of his formerly rock-hearted enemies. By leaving this powerful force unspecified and postponing its arrival, Byron masks its foundation in his desire for revenge; and by ending the stanza with "love," he conceals its basis in hatred. The indeterminacy of Byron's anger -- here the emotion that dare not speak its name -- invites the reader to sympathize with alienation.

29. However, in a letter to his sister Augusta, written around the same time as this passage from *Childe Harold*, Byron lifts the veil of conciliatory emotions to frightening effect:

> they had no business with anything previous to my marriage with that infernal fiend -- whose destruction I shall yet see.-- Do you suppose that I will rest--while any of their branch is unwithered? do you suppose that I will turn aside till they are trodden under foot? --do you suppose that I can breathe until they are uprooted?--Do you believe that time will alter them or me?--that I have suffered in vain--that I have been disgraced in vain--that I am reconciled to the sting of the scorpion--& the venom of the serpent? which stung me in my slumber?----If I did not believe--that Time & Nemesis--& circumstances would requite me for the delay--I would ere this have righted myself. --But "let them look to their bond"---- (*Letters and Journals* [BLJ] 5: 243). (13)

The repeated rhetorical questions, the idea that "time will [not] alter" the poet, and the belief that "Time & Nemesis" will "requite" him all find echoes in the *Childe Harold* passage, but here the emphasis is openly placed on destructive revenge. Clearly these two documents have sprung from the same bitterness and anger regarding Byron's broken marriage. As the more spontaneous and less public of the two, we could regard the letter to Augusta as the truer, more sincere record of Byron's feelings. Armed with the scholarship of Lovell, Marchand, and McGann, the modern reader of Byron confronts the poet at an unprecedented and sometimes disturbing level of intimacy; the poet's private letters, his manuscript fragments and revisions, and various detailed accounts of his life are all before us. It may not be quite fair to read Byron's letters into his poetry. On the other hand, the "Nemesis" passage from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* strongly implies what the "Time & Nemesis" letter to Augusta confirms: that Byron wants his wife and her allies to suffer for what he has convinced himself was treachery. As might be expected, Byron's angriest writing can be found in cancelled lines, fragments, personal letters, and private notations. However, these outbursts merely illuminate the larger patterns of anger and revenge that structure his more public works of art. In his communications to others, poetic and otherwise, Byron makes a spectacle of the conflicts of his intimate life.

30. Take, as another example, the letter that should be paired with "A Sketch from Private Life." Soon after composing that poem of abuse directed at Jane Clermont, Byron wrote of her to his wife:

> she came as a guest--she remained as a spy--she departed as an informer--&reappeared as an evidence--if false--she belied--if true--she betrayed me----the worst of treacheries--a "bread and salt traitress" she ate & drank & slept & awoke to sting me.----The curse of my Soul light upon her & hers forever!--may my Spirit be deep upon her in her life &--in her death--may her thirst be unquenchable--&her wretchedness irrevocable--may she see herself only & eternally--may the fulfillment of her wishes become the destruction of her hopes--may she dwell in the darkness of her own heart & shudder--now & for existence-----Her last food will be the bread of her enemies.----I have said it. (BLJ, vol. 5, p. 64)

Byron presented a poetic version of this curse at least twice, once as "A Sketch from Private Life," and again as an "Incantation" or "Chorus in an unfinished Witch Drama" that later found its way into *Manfred*. As Daniel McVeigh observes, the two poems resemble one another so that "it seems

reasonable to suspect with Marchand that the Incantation's vitriol came originally from the same reservoir of hate as this heartfelt curse against Clermont"; McVeigh also cites the letter to Lady Byron (McVeigh 603-4). Furthermore, McGann has exposed the wicked double-meaning of "unfinished Witch Drama" as a reference to Byron's tormenting marriage ("Truth in Masquerade" 16-17). It seems that a recurring accompaniment of Byronic anger is the transgression of boundaries between the public and the private: while this personal letter performs its anger self-consciously as a curse, the public poems (one, a drama) encode personal conflicts and outbursts at their foundations.

31. Combining the satirist's enthusiasm for punishment, the dramatist's sense of anger as spectacle, and the lyricist's confessional mode and matter, Byron creates poetry to stage his revenge. Particularly when he broods upon personal injuries and betrayals, the result is a strangely confessional and performative invective, filled with curses. In fact, the construction of the Byronic subject typically depends upon a curse, pronounced by or upon him, which enacts his alienation from the rest of humanity; one thinks of Childe Harold, of Manfred, of the Giaour, of Cain. In choosing the curse as vehicle, Byron situates his angry poetry between the precincts of sincerity and performance, since cursing performs its meaning (i.e., revenge) according to the authentic fervor of the curser. In other words, a curse is a dramatic attempt to compel the sympathy of the world, and it depends for its power on both sincerity and spectacle, or private emotion and public rage. Byron's poetic experiments with the angry curse thus provoke both sympathy and judgment, and help create the Byronic persona-- so alien to Wordsworthian Romanticism -- that prefigures the dramatic monologists of the Victorian era.

Notes

1. For a brief survey of the effects of revolutionary violence on the development of Romanticism, see Robert Maniquis, "Holy Savagery and Wild Justice," 365-95. As Maniquis puts it, "nineteenth-century writers never forgot the French Revolution -- both its hope and the challenge its violence posed to the imagination" (p. 394). Also important on this theme is John Kerrigan's "Revolution, Revenge, and Romantic Tragedy," 121-40. back

2. As Carlyle wrote later in *Sartor Resartus*: "He who first shortened the labour of Copyists by the device of Movable Types was disbanding hired Armies, and cashiering most Kings and Senates, and creating a whole new Democratic world" (*Works*, 1: 31). back

3. Useful studies of the intersections between Romanticism and the popular press include Jon Klancher's *The Making of English Reading Audiences*; Marcus Wood's *Radical Satire and Print Culture*; and two anthologies with their introductions: Betty Bennett's *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism*, and Michael Scrivener's *Poetry and Reform*. back

4. This poem was written in 1842, in response to Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837). back

5. Further references to this work will cite book and line numbers from Fowler's edition. back

6. See Kerrigan esp. pp. 3-29, "On Aristotle and Revenge Tragedy," in *Revenge Tragedy*. back

7. See for example Claude M. Fuess, *Lord Byron as a Satirist in Verse*; Frederick L. Beaty, *Byron the Satirist*; Thomas Lockwood, *Post-Augustan Satire*; and Jerome Christensen, "Marino Faliero and the Fault of Byron's Satire." The title of Robert Gleckner's important essay, "From Selfish Spleen to Equanimity: Byron's Satires," defines a trajectory of development towards *Don Juan* and away from Byron's angry poetry. back

8. Hereafter TLK. back

9. "Byron and the Anonymous Lyric," 27-45, hereafter "BAL"; "Byron and 'the Truth in Masquerade'," 191-209; "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" 295-313; "Rethinking Romanticism," 735-54; "'My Brain is Feminine'," 26-51; and the chapter of TLK entitled "Lord Byron's Twin Opposites of Truth." back

10. See his *Revenge Tragedy*. back

11. See Guerlac's "Longinus and the Subject of the Sublime," 285. back

12. Citations of Byron's poetry will refer to this edition, hereafter CPW. back

13. Hereafter BLJ. back

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Romantic Passions

Re-collecting Spontaneous Overflows: Romantic Passions, the Sublime, and Mesmerism

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Passions and Obstructions

1. The relationship between passion and the Sublime has, traditionally, been an ambiguous one, but in critical writing on the Romantic Sublime the passion most often cited as pivotal has been "terror" or one of its variants. Twenty years ago, Thomas Weiskel offered the most comprehensive and systematic account so far of the sublime of terror as Oedipal drama, and thereby set the terms for nearly all further discussion of the topic, including political, ideological, and feminist critiques. So pervasive have the assumptions of Weiskel's analysis become, that the relationship between terror and the Romantic Sublime may be due for some re-assessment. I offer what follows as a speculative experiment to determine how far Mesmerism can help us in that task.

2. Longinus was typically scolded by eighteenth-century critics like John Dennis for having failed to insist on any necessary connection between the emotions and sublimity, although the author of *Peri hypsous* had implied nearly as arbitrary a connection between the Sublime and its four other "sources," namely, "the power of grand conceptions," "proper construction of figures," "nobility of language," and "dignified and elevated word-arrangement" (181). Longinus's point was that no single "source" could insure a sublime effect, while any single source was capable of doing so if handled correctly and used in the right circumstances. Regarding the emotions specifically, he concludes that "nothing makes so much for grandeur as *genuine* emotion in the *right* place. It inspires the words as it were with a divine frenzy and fills them with divine spirit" (181; emphasis added).

3. In *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701), Dennis stressed the central importance of passion or "enthusiasm" to "the greater Poetry" and, following Longinus's invocations of the "divine," identified that greater poetry with "religious ideas." In doing so, Dennis helped to place the passions at the center of discussions of the Sublime for the century to follow. Going beyond Dennis in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke offered a thorough account of the relationship between the emotions and the Sublime.

4. Burke reduced all the passions associated with sublime experience--awe, reverence, astonishment, fear--to one original: terror. Following Dennis's lead, he also traced the prototype of all terrible objects to the idea of God, while bringing the airy structure of the Sublime down to rest on a material and efficient cause, namely, a violent--but "delightful"--agitation of the nervous system. Indeed, "a mode of terror is the exercise of the finer parts of the system" of nervous and muscular tissues, writes Burke. This mode of exercise was designed by the Almighty to help "clear the parts, whether fine, or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance" accreted through too much rest and inaction, which tend to destroy the "vigorous tone" necessary to maintain the "natural . . . secretions" vital to health (122-3).

5. There's a great deal more going on in eighteenth-century speculations on the passions and the Sublime besides what we find in the *Enquiry*, but Burke's version of sublime terror has long been of particular interest to Romanticists because its signature seems to appear on nearly every example of the so-called Romantic Sublime: the boat-stealing episode in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's confusion at Simplon Pass, the Ancient Mariner's experiences of terror and transcendence on a "wide, wide sea," Keatsian "dying into life," the Gothic violence of Shelley's "Mont Blanc"--the list has gone on and on. For the purposes

of this essay, however, I'd like to subordinate the Burkean template of terror to another, larger pattern of Romantic metaphorization in which Burke's therapeutic rather than aesthetic agenda will be foregrounded. That larger pattern depends upon ideas of "flow."

6. For Burke, the efficient cause of the "delight" occasioned by the experience of the Sublime is the power of terrible objects to "clear the parts" of the nervous system of dangerous and debilitating blockages arising from mental lassitude, that is, from persistent states of boredom and ennui. As it happens, less than ten years after the publication of the *Enquiry*, a dissertation was published by a German physician studying at the University of Vienna, entitled *Dissertatio physico-medica de planetarum influxu*, or "Dissertation on planetary influences upon the human body." In it, Franz Anton Mesmer argued that the fluids of the body, including the nerves, were affected by planetary motion, and even experienced "tides" induced by something he called "animal gravity" in the same way that earth's oceans moved tidally under the influence of Newtonian "universal gravitation." When these animal "tides" were blocked, said Mesmer, the result was mental or physical illness, depending on the particular bodily organ in which the obstruction occurred (Crabtree, 4).

7. Much of Mesmer's theory, as well as text, was taken from Richard Mead's *De imperio solis ac lunae* (1704), and several years later, in 1774, Mesmer found still another fruitful source of speculation when he learned of experiments with healing "mineral magnets" being conducted by Fr. Maximillian Hell, professor of astronomy at the University of Vienna (Crabtree, 5).(1) Fr. Hell's experiments ignited widespread interest in the relationship between magnetism and disease. Into this highly charged atmosphere, Mesmer released his most famous treatise, *Memoire sur la Decouverte du Magnetisme Animal*, published in Paris in 1779.

8. Robert Darnton (47-81) has chronicled the ensuing mania for (and controversy over) Mesmer's "animal magnetism" in Paris and in the provinces following the publication of the *Memoire*, and others have unearthed information concerning its brief popularity in England before the onset of the Napoleonic Wars closed down most cultural as well commercial traffic between England and France. (See, e.g., Mackay, 1.129; Cooper, 74-77, and Gauld, 197-99). I won't rehearse that history again here.(2) What interests me is the isomorphism between Mesmer's explanations of the magnetic mechanism underlying his treatments and the apparent place of emotions or passions in the structure of the Romantic Sublime, especially insofar as that structure appears in the work of Coleridge and Wordsworth. Specifically, I'll be focussing on figures of blockage, collection, and discharge.

9. Weiskel identified three essential stages in the structure of the Romantic Sublime, stages that appear in one form or another throughout eighteenth-century writings on the subject. First, the mind is "in a determinate relation to the object, and this relation is habitual, more or less unconscious . . . and harmonious. [But] boredom signals an incipient disequilibrium. . . ." Then, "in the second phase, the habitual relation of mind and object suddenly breaks down. Surprise or astonishment is the affective correlative, and there is an immediate intuition of a disconcerting disproportion between inner and outer. . . ." Finally, "in the third, or reactive, phase . . . the mind recovers the balance of outer and inner by constituting a fresh relation to a transcendent order" (Weiskel, 23-24). This phase is often accompanied by feelings of profound peace or tranquility.

10. Weiskel's second stage corresponds to what Neil Hertz calls "blockage," a pivot-point in sublime experience where the subject is forced to surmount its own threatened absorption, annihilation, or fragmentation by the incommensurable object of perception through a sudden self-reintegration at a higher and more expansive level, usually by identifying in some way with the power that threatens to annihilate it. As Hertz puts it, during the eighteenth century "the notion of difficulty or recalcitrance" that we find materialized in Burke's neurological explanation was transformed, through a passage to the limit, into the notion of absolute blockage":

> Although the moment of blockage might have been rendered as one of utter self-loss, it was, even before its recuperation as sublime exaltation, a confirmation of the unitary status of the self. (53)

In Kant, this "unitary status" became totalized through a transcendental identification with the Other, Reason, whose threat to overwhelm the self through its demand for totality in imaginative intuitions of infinite space or for free self-determination in intuitions of absolute power precipitated the experience of "blockage." Both Weiskel and Hertz seem to identify this Other or blocking *agent* with something terrifying or incommensurable. And yet, as we've seen, terror in Burke--including a sense of the infinite, which Kant will consider separately from the dynamic sublime of terror--causes a *clearing* of the nerves.

11. For present purposes I'm leaving aside an analysis of the transformations of the subject's understanding of its own relationship to a sublime object, whether a natural scene or a human artifact. My intial aims are more modest: to translate the Weiskel/Hertz three-stage paradigm into Burkean somatic terms, so as to reveal points of incongruity between the two. Such a translation might read as follows: First, too much relaxation, too much "habitual" or routinized behavior, leads to "boredom" or, in Burke's terms, a lassitude portending the accumulation "of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance" or blockage of the healthy "secretions" of the nervous system; second, the impending threat of blockage, reaching its crisis, is allayed when the subject encounters an object that breaks down the "habitual relation of mind" and the object-world by means of "astonishment," which Burke would consider a species of terror; third, the nervous system recovers its original, habitual relation to the outside world. Keep in mind, again, that in Burke's physiological account, terror is what precipitates the *clearing* of incipient blockages that might impede a healthy relationship between mind and world, while in Weiskel's and Hertz's phenomenological account, terror ("surprise," "astonishment") seems to precipitate (in the "dynamic" sublime) or be precipitated by (in the "mathematical" sublime) *blockage itself*, forcing the subject to perform a transcendental identification with whatever is causing this breakdown. Only later in phase three can a habitual relationship with the world be re-established. Because, in Burke's view, terror clears incipient blockages, his physiological account of the Sublime cannot explain, or simply does not allow any recognition of, what Weiskel calls the subject's "fresh relation to a transcendent order" in response to the threat of absolute blockage. Mesmerism provided just such a transcendentalizing supplement to Burke's inherently solipsistic physiological reductionism.

12. Mesmer believed that all illnesses, bodily and mental, arose from constrictions in the circulation of magnetic fluids within the body. These constrictions prevented the corporeal magnetic fluid from properly establishing the body's natural animal polarities and aligning them with that of the universal magnetic ether that flowed through all of creation and animated all sensient beings. The affinities between Mesmer's cosmic magnetic fluid and the "plastic and vast" "intellectual breeze" of the Coleridgean Primary Imagination are not far to seek. Melvin Rader's account (74-75) of Coleridge's early fascination with the "plastic power" of the Cambridge Platonists, like Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, can help us to understand the poet's enthusiastic reception of the idea of a "universal" magnetic fluid. Thus, in reponse to the "Report of the Commissioners" (1784) charged by Louis XVI to investigate the claims of Mesmerism, in which its effects were attributed entirely to the powers of the imagination (Tinterow, 126-7), Coleridge wrote in his notebook for February, 1821, "If the zoo-magnetic influx be only the influence of the Imagination, the active Imagination may be a form of Zoo-magnetic Influence" (Coburn, *Notebooks* 4.4806). By this time, however, he had undergone a long period of scepticism, eventuating in a wary faith, with respect to the objective reality of the "zoo-magnetic" force. (See especially Beer, *Intelligence*, 221-2 and 279-81; Levere, 185-88; and Coburn, I, 59n).

13. Coleridge was hardly alone among fellow intellectuals in his initial enthusiasm. Darnton (3-45) has

demonstrated the extensive affiliations between Mesmerism and popular science in the late Enlightenment, and Maria Tatar (45-81) has more recently shown "animal magnetism" to have been entirely consonant with contemporary scientific speculation, first incited by Newton's *Opticks*, on a variety of "ethers" for the propagation of magnetism, light, gravity, and electricity.(3) Throughout the nineteenth century poets, writers, and philosophers often concatenated these disparate media of ethereal transmission in their attempts to envisage and represent a transcendent, but nonetheless scientifically verifiable, realm of supra-individual vitality, or even universal consciousness.

14. Mesmer's own description, in 1766, of the "harmonizing" effects of animal gravity clearly anticipates the predominant symbol of the relationship between individual and cosmic consciousness that will come to prevail in Romantic writing:

> our bodies are harmonized, not in a uniform and monotonous manner, but as a musical instrument furnished with several strings, the exact tone resonat[ing] . . . in unison with a given tone. (Crabtree, 4)

Two decades later, Coleridge will ask his "pensive Sara" whether "all of animated nature/ Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,/ That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps,/ Plastic and vast, one intellectual Breeze,/ At once the Soul of each, and God of all?" ("Effusion XXXV," 36-40).

15. According to Mesmer, illnesses both psychic and somatic resulted when the flow of magnetic fluid was blocked and began accumulating in some part of the physical anatomy. For most of Mesmer's Parisian patients, especially female patients, blockage often took the form of the "*vapeurs*," a mildly hysterical, depressive state (Tatar, 15) that resembles the condition for which Burke considered a good dose of nerve-clearing terror to be salutary: "Melancholy, dejection, despair, and often self-murder, is a consequence of the gloomy view we take of things in this relaxed state of body" (122). According to Mesmer, the magnetic flow could be unblocked by subjecting the patient to an overpowering current of "animal magnetism," in most cases by means of a tub or *baquet* in which magnetic fluid had been collected through the medium of Mesmer's own highly "magnetic" body, on the analogy of charging a Leyden jar with electricity. Patients would sit around the *baquet* and hold onto iron rods inserted into it, or touch these rods to their afflicted parts. In particularly stubborn cases, Mesmer himself would sit the patient down in front of him, lock his knees around those of the patient, and try to infuse a powerful flow of magnetic fluid by passing his hands over the patient's body, or by staring into his or her eyes. (The eye was a particularly strong conduit of animal magnetism.)

16. A cure was signified by what Mesmer called a "crisis," usually consisting of convulsions, mild or severe, and/or the onset of a peaceful "magnetic sleep." In Mesmer's view, the "crisis," particularly the convulsive type, indicated a sudden release of pent-up magnetic fluid. Considering the large number of female patients apparently suffering from various degrees of sexual hysteria, it should come as no surprise that, according to hostile accounts, as well as a secret report submitted to the King by the Commissioners, the cries accompanying these "crises" often resembled those of orgasm (Crabtree, 90-105). (Interestingly, Burke thought that in their "languid inactive state, the nerves are more liable to the most horrid convulsions" (122), which, considered from a Mesmeric point of view, might indicate the body's attempts at self-healing.) In any case, Mesmer's task was not only to unblock the flow of magnetic fluid, but to direct it so as to harmonize the patient's body with the larger magnetic currents of the universe. In the view of later psychoanalytic theory, the convulsive "crisis" came to be seen as a form of abreaction characteristic of treatments for hysteria or other forms of neurotic repression. As Tatar has observed, it was no accident, given the roots of psychoanalysis in mesmerism and hypnosis, that Freud should so often have had recourse to the vocabulary of hydraulics and electromagnetism in formulating his metapsychology (43-44).

17. I wish to argue two things here. First, if any overt "passions" may be universally associated with the Romantic Sublime, they are to be found, in Mesmeric terms, in the moment of transition from stage 2, the precipitation of blockage, to stage 3, the release of pent-up vital energy, in the form of "magnetic fluid," so as to allow for its proper circulation--its "passion," if you will--in what Mesmer and his disciples considered a natural and primordial re-establishment of harmony with the transcendent "zoomagnetic flux" of the universe. Secondly, the "crisis" by which this magnetic fluid is released is not brought about through the nerve-cleansing agencies of Burkean terror, but through an overmastering experience of love--even ecstasy, as the orgasmic intimations detected in the cries of Mesmer's female patients in "crisis" seem to indicate. Terror, in the repressed form of those cognate emotions such as anxiety, melancholy, depression, and anomie that we have come to identify, since Freud, with civilization and its discontents, seems instead to have been the *blocking agent* in the Mesmeric paradigm, as in the more overtly terrifying three-stage paradigm of the Sublime articulated by Weiskel and Hertz. In the Mesmeric version of the Sublime, however, release is often delayed, sometimes for many years, sometimes indefinitely, until proper "treatment" with animal magnetism can be obtained.

18. I will cite as examples of this Mesmeric version of the delayed release of sublime passion two well-known poems from *Lyrical Ballads*, the original "Rime of the Ancyent Marinere" of 1798, whose mesmeric tropes and images have received a great deal of attention over the years, and "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey," from the same volume, which has, to my knowledge, rarely been examined in Mesmeric terms. (See, however, Beach, 76-77; Beer, *Wordsworth in Time*, 68-71; and Durrant, 94-106.)

Charge and Discharge: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

19. Lane Cooper, in an essay published in 1910, became the first to ever burst into the sea of Mesmeric flotsom littering the "Rime," in addition to citing related material in "Christabel," "Kubla Khan," *Osorio*, and other works. He was followed by John Livingston Lowes and, in several books, by John Beer. Beer managed to wrestle the paraphenalia of animal magnetism, magnetic sleep, ocular hypnosis, and related electromagnetic phenomena into the soaring structure of Coleridge's reflections on the Primary Consciousness and the role of imagination, genius, and reason therein. That the poem represents a "crisis" in which the protagonist is, at least temporarily, enabled to establish contact with a transcendental power in the mode of the Romantic Sublime has been taken for granted at least since Robert Penn Warren's coining of the term "sacramental vision" to describe the Mariner's self-transformative experiences. I will content myself with a brief synopsis of the poem according to the humbler terms of primitive Mesmeric theory.

20. As Cooper notes, the action of the "Rime" encompasses several instances of a regular and habitual motion interrupted by blockage and followed by sudden release. Only one of these is of interest to us here: the moment at which the Mariner, living the nightmare "Life-in-Death" (as Coleridge put it in 1800) to which his shooting of the Albatross has condemned him, feels himself at last capable of prayer:

> Beyond the shadow of the ship
>   I watch'd the water-snakes:
> They mov'd in tracks of shining white;
> And when they rear'd, the elfish light
>   Fell off in hoary flakes.
>   Within the shadow of the ship
>   I watch'd their rich attire:

Blue, glossy green, and velet black
They coil'd and swam; and every track
  Was a flash of golden fire.
  O happy living things! no tongue
  Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gusht from my heart,
  And I bless'd them unaware!
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
  And I bless'd them unaware.
  The self-same moment I could pray;
  And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
  Like lead into the sea. (1798: 264-283)

21. Lowes (38-42) traced the scientific origins of the phosphorescent sea-snakes to Priestly's *Opticks*, where such phenomena are linked to the glow of putrescent substances, and he also cited accounts of oceanic electro-phosphorescence in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* and in Captain Cook's *Voyages*. Piper (95-97, 99-102) established a larger connection to related electromagnetic displays *via* Priestley's *Experiments on Air* and *History of Electricity*, where phlogiston (the "element" of heat), electricity, and light were taken to be manifestations of the same ethereal power. Coleridge was also familiar, apparently, with Luigi Galvani's experiments with muscle tissue and electrical stimulation (Burwick, 282) and probably already acquainted with the growing eighteenth-century literature on organic electrical effects, such as were to be found in the mimosa, the electrical eel, and the torpedo, effects which had been reported as early as 1773 in a series of papers written by John Hunter for the *Philsophical Transactions of the Royal Society*. (See Coburn, *Collected Works* 11, I, 590-1 and 591n.) Indeed, well before Coleridge conceived the "Rime," physicians were using electical eels and torpedoes therapeutically, that is, as a means of removing blockages to the circulation of the "electrical fluids" in the patient's body by inducing electrical shocks (Tatar, 53-54).

22. In the context of such widespread speculative amalgamations of animal magnetic and electrical ethers in the scientific literature, the Mariner's experience begins to look more like a demonstration of electro-magnetic therapy than a tale of sin and redemption: "To tell the truth," says Cooper, "so far as [the poet's] salient ideas are concerned he hardly goes beyond the province of animal magnetism" (77). If indeed "Coleridge's allusions to ocular fascination and magnetic influence . . . deliberately and literally command attention" (Burwick, 277), then perhaps it would not be remiss to interpret them as literally as possible. Thus, "within the shadow of the ship" we are made aware of the electrical phosphorescence of the sea-snakes, one prototype for which, in the scientific literature, was the electric eel. Like the torpedo, the eel inspired analogies with the charge-collecting capacities of the Leyden jar among enthusiasts of animal magnetism (Tatar, 52-53). Read in this context, the glowing sea-snakes gathering in the shadow of the ship--that is, in nearer proximity to the Mariner--seem to comprise an ocean-going galvanic battery emitting an electric spark, a "flash of golden fire," in every "track" or, in Mesmeric terms, every "pass" near the ailing Mariner, as if to excite or draw forth the "spring of love" that eventually gushes from his heart. (Mesmer himself started out in his practice by using magnets to infuse and direct animal magnetic fluid. See, e.g., Gauld, 3; Crabtree, 5-7). As was often the case in the Mesmeric "crisis," sleep now descends from an ethereal source and flows or "slides" into the Mariner's "soul": "O sleep, it is a gentle thing/ Belov'd from pole to pole!/ To Mary-queen the praise be yeven/ She sent the gentle sleep from heaven/ That slid into my soul" (284-88).

23. Appropriately enough, when the Mariner awakens, a thunder-storm is threatening. The atmosphere is so charged with electricity that "the upper air bursts into life,/ And a hundred fire-flags sheen" (305-6), an apparent reference, according to Lowes (189), to the *aurora borealis*. Suddenly, "the thick black

cloud is cleft," and "Like waters shot from some high crag,/ The lightning falls with never a jag/ A river steep and wide" (314-18). Coleridge's fluid figures for electrical phenomena are perfectly consonant with the theories of mesmeric/galvanic flow popular in his day. In a scene anticipating by some twenty years the galvanic reanimation of dead matter in *Frankenstein*, this river of lightning, supplemented perhaps by the energies of the moon exerted through the gravitational ether posited by Mesmer in his original dissertation, begins to re-animate the dead crew-members:

> Beneath the lightning and the moon
>   The dead men gave a groan.
>
> They groan'd, they stirr'd, they all uprose,
>   Ne spake, ne mov'd their eyes:
> It had been strange, even in a dream
>   To have seen those dead men rise. (321-6)

Even the ship, untouched by any whisper of atmospheric motion, seems to have become animated by this cosmic influx of vital, electromagnetic power:

> The helmsman steer'd, the ship mov'd on,
>   Yet never a breeze up-blew. (327-8)

24. What gushes from the Mariner's heart after the "passes" of the sea-snakes, and what thereafter, in the physico-ethereal form of electromagnetism, brings the dead back to life, is not a species of terror, the passion of self-preservation that Burke makes central to sublime experience, but, according to Coleridge's Mariner, "love," the magnetic fluid of cosmic attraction and harmony, of reconciliation and spiritual alignment with the larger processes of the universe. This is quite in accord, not only with the universally "harmonizing" tendencies of Mesmeric theory, but with the actual circumstances in which Mesmer's healing arts were performed. Here is Tatar's description of Mesmer's salon, which "bore little resemblance to the normally austere decor of eighteenth-century clinics":

> Delicate perfumes floated in the air to mingle with the magnetic fluid pulsing through the atmosphere. Thick carpets, heavy curtains, and ornate furnishings graced the dimly lit chamber. . . . Soft music played on the pianoforte or glass harmonica--on occasion by Mesmer himself--kept the fluid in steady circulation. Everything in Mesmer's clinic seemed to foster an aura of mystery and magical enchantment. (14; see also Crabtree 13-15)

Though Burke believed "mystery" or "obscurity" to be productive of "terror," the conditions conducive to Mesmeric "crisis" were clearly not designed to incite a cleaning-out of the nerves through imaginative violence. They were intended, rather, to soothe and comfort or, in terms popularized by Mesmer's psychoanalytic heirs, to encourage a lowering of unconscious defenses, to relax "blockages" to the flow of what seemed, to judge from the orgasmic utterances of many of Mesmer's female patients, to be the essential cosmic fluid of universal *eros*

25. The patients entering Mesmer's clinic were already suffering from "blockage," in some cases for a period of many years, and if "terror" had anything to do with their magnetic constipation, it must have been exerting its effects far below the level of the conscious mind, in the form of what Wordsworth would later call, in the "Intimations" ode, "custom . . . Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!" (127-8). As Darnton was the first to point out (83-105), Mesmer's theories corresponded nicely--too nicely, from the viewpoint of the authorities--with a contemporary Rousseauistic and proto-revolutionary Utopianism that ascribed the moral illnesses of Enlightenment society to the repressive effects (what

Freud was later to call, the "discontents") of a class- and convention-bound civilization. The radical implications of Mesmeric theory were realized in Mesmer's clinic itself, where patients from all classes, even the very poor, were treated together, without segregation by rank or sex. No wonder Mesmer's tenets appealed to a young Pantisocratist like Coleridge!

26. Insofar as the Mesmeric "crisis," then, can be taken as a culturally analogous form of the Romantic Sublime, like Wesleyan Methodism or other forms of religious or popular enthusiasm (see, e.g., Coleridge's note to Southey's *Life of Wesley*, in Coburn, *Collected Works*, 14.2, 78n; also Cooper, 70-71; and Bewell, 112-13), it points us in a slightly different direction from the by-now standard critical account in which explicit Burkean "terror" plays so central and conspicuous a role. The Mariner's "blockage," for instance, occurs as a result of what Coleridge in another context, applying the term to Iago, calls "motiveless malignity" (Raysor, 1.44), a form of original sin: for no apparent reason, the Mariner shoots the albatross, iconographic symbol, as several commentators including Warren have observed, of the Holy Spirit, the divine power of God's Grace by which all "Christian soul[s]" (63) are united in mutual love. The terrifying Gothic effects of this blockage of the Godhead's vital effluence are well-known: the crew members are struck dead and the very sea begins to rot, swarming with "slimy things." But rotting, slimy things, as Priestly's treatises on optics, air, and electricity suggested, radiate their vital magnetic fluids in the form of electro-phosphorence as they expire. Beer has demonstrated comprehensively and in detail how such vital ethereal fluids were assumed by Coleridge, at this early date, to mingle with the greater flow of magnetic fluid in the universe that had its ultimate origin and endpoint in the light and heat of the sun (*Intelligence*, 31-37; *Wordsworth in Time*, 54-55). In the gathering glow and "tracks" of "golden fire" emitted by the sea-snakes, as we have seen, that vital eletromagnetic current seems to be re-collected as if in a galvanic battery so as to elicit, like a spark shorting out, a sudden "gush" of "love" from the Mariner's heart.

27. It may well be that overt demonstrations in Romantic poetry of what Wordsworth came to call the "ministry more palpable" of fear or terror--as in the boat-stealing episode or the encounter with the blind beggar in the streets of London (*Prelude* 1805 1.367-426; 7.608-23)--are better understood as moments or "spots of time" in which traumatic blockages originally occur, backing up and, in some cases, "collecting" vital "magnetic" energies that can only be released or tapped in a subsequent act of "re-collection," perhaps through some form of discourse, as in the Mariner's unconsciously elicited "blessing" of the sea-snakes and conscious prayer immediately following, or, whenever his "frame" is again "wrench'd/ With a woeful agony" (611-12), in his happening upon someone whose "body and soul" he can force, by "that which comes out of [his] eye, to be still" (364-365), and listen to his tale "like a three year's child" (19). Indeed, Freud's "talking cure," distant step-child of the discursive self-analyses elicited under hypnosis by Mesmer's disciples, like de Puysegur (Crabtree, 46-47; Dawson, 20-21), deeply informs the Mesmeric poetics of the Coleridgean and Wordsworthian Sublime.

Connecting the Landscape with the Quiet of the Sky: The Wye Valley as *Baquet*

28. Though J. W. Beach (76-77) is to be credited with first observing the resemblances between Wordsworth's "sense sublime" in "Tintern Abbey" and the primordial Newtonian "ether," Cooper, Beer, and Durrant argue that the poet embraced mesmeric doctrines only obliquely, remaining undecided as to the objective existence of the magnetic, or any other vital, universally pervasive ether. However that may be, images of flow, collection or charge, and discharge are central to Wordsworth's representations of imaginative power. For our purposes, what is most important is that Wordsworth's "sense sublime/ Of something far more deeply interfused" in the landscape of the Wye valley reveals, not an obstructing object of fear, but a "presence that disturbs [him] with the *joy*/ Of elevated thoughts" (95-97, emphasis added). There is, in this climactic moment of "Tintern Abbey," little terror. The nearest thing to it in the poem occurs at two other moments: first, when Wordsworth experiences "somewhat of

a sad perplexity" as he compares with the present view "the picture of the mind" retained from his first visit five years before. The second moment approximating some version of terror appears several lines later, in his description of that first visit in 1793, which took place a few months after he had returned to England from France. Immersed in the political wrangling and revolutionary zeal of the Reformists in London, anxious for the safety of Annette Vallon, his mistress, and their infant daughter, Caroline, whom he had left behind in France, and growing ever more doubtful as to the fundamental moral soundness of the Revolution that he had supported, up to this point, as an "active partisan" (*Prelude* 10.736), he sought relief "among these hills . . . more like a man/ Flying from something that he dreads, than one/ Who sought the thing he loved" (67-73).

29. After dread, however, came discovery of the thing he loved: "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" (85-86), "a feeling and a love,/ That had no need of . . . any interest/ Unborrowed from the eye" (81-84). It was as though something had given way, come unstuck, followed by the sublime tranquility of mesmeric sleep: "These forms of beauty have not been to me,/ As is a landscape to a blind man's eye . . . To them I may have owed another gift,/ Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,"

> . . . that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things (24-49).

30. This is the language of waking catalepsy, of magnetic slumber or "critical sleep," "an intermediary state," says Crabtree, "between wakefulness and perfect sleep" (66) in which, according to Mesmer's later theories, "the internal sense is stimulated by the fluid that animates the nerves of all living beings":

> This nervous fluid . . . can be transmitted at any distance and is not hindered by obstacles. It is through this fluid that the inner sense is placed in direct rapport with objects, near or far, and receives information about them beyond the reach of the five senses. . . . In . . . somnambulism . . . and magnetically induced critical sleep . . . the internal sense becomes the sole organ of sensation. (Crabtree, 66)

31. In Wordsworth's epiphanic description of "the life of things," the language of the "inner" senses (a standard element in eighteenth-century speculations on morality and taste) opens up into a common Mesmeric belief "in the existence of an internal sense that does not differentiate among the various modes of perception" common to the ordinary senses (Tatar, 46). This "sixth sense" of the mesmerists, what the physicist Johann Wilhelm Ritter called the *elektrischer Ur-sinn*, "established rapport with nature by picking up impulses from a magnetic, electrical, or vital power diffused throughout the universe" (48), much as Wordsworth will later in the poem establish, through a "sense sublime," rapport with "something far more deeply interfused." This sublime inner sense was later to be identified, particularly among the German Romantics, with such paranormal phenomena as "second sight" (which Wordsworth invokes in *Prelude* 7.602 to describe his impression of the passing London crowds), lucid dreams, and trance-induced, supernatural revelations (Tatar, 69-81).

32. In short, the interiorized, remembered landscape of the Wye, originally charged with "sublime" energy in 1793, has, over the succeeding five years, intermittantly induced in the poet something very like

"critical sleep." We might say that it has served as a mnemonic *baquet*, a continuing source of tranquilizing power and replenishment: Wordsworth has "owed" to it "sensations sweet" felt entirely within--in the blood, the heart, his "purer mind"--and "tranquil restoration" thereby, as well as a "gift . . . sublime" that can release the subject from his obdurate body and transform him into "a living soul" capable of seeing "into the life of things."

33. Thus much for the first moment--chronologically, not narratively--of dread-induced blockage and sublime release in "Tintern Abbey." The other moment of fear--expressed as "somewhat of a sad perplexity"--arises when Wordsworth's "picture of the mind revives again" and is superimposed on his present experience of the Wye valley (61-61). The initial blocking agent here is apparently the resulting discordance of present and remembered images: as an object of the waking, exterior senses, the Wye valley can no longer serve as the *baquet* or reservoir from which Wordsworth has drawn vital, transcendental sustenance over the previous five years. As with his experience of Mont Blanc during the walking tour of 1790, the real valley seems at first but a "soulless image on the eye/ Which had usurped upon a living thought" (*Prelude* 4.454-455). But this perplexity is immediately displaced by the recognition of a "present pleasure" that will provide "life and food/ For future years" (65-67). Wordsworth recalls himself from the depths of his memories of self-replenishment to an understanding of how, from the first moment of his re-arrival on the banks of the Wye, as described in the opening lines, he has already begun to "connect/ The landscape with the quiet of the sky." He now recognizes that "blue sky," along with "the light of setting suns,/ And the round ocean, and the living air," to be a "dwelling" for the "spirit, that impels/ All thinking things, all objects of all thought,/ And rolls through all things," including "the mind of man" (98-103). The poet has already begun replenishing his "picture of the mind" with new, sustaining spiritual energies, and the sound of "these waters, rolling from their mountain-springs/ With a sweet inland murmur" (3-4) into the cliff-enclosed valley offers an objective correlative of this mental, Mesmeric in-filling.

34. In short, the memory of Wordsworth's present experience will become, like "the picture of the mind" he has carried with him from his first visit, a Mesmeric *baquet* for "future years." It enables him both to re-charge his zoo-magnetic batteries, so to speak, and to recognize that memory can function as such a storage device.

35. In some instances of the Romantic Sublime in Wordsworth and Colerlidge blockage is not removed for many years, and then only through the agency, it would seem, of language, as in the "talking cure" enacted by the Ancient Mariner's repeated narration of his literally arresting tale. Considered in the light of Mesmeric theory, the entire *Prelude* can be seen as an attempt to uncover, through speech, primodial "blockages" arrested in "spots of time" behind which vast stores of vital imaginative/magnetic energy have been accumulated, in order to make the "renovating virtue" (*Prelude* 11.257-9) arrested in such moments available as a "power of joy" to the conscious mind. In them it can perceive its own inner power as "lord and master" over "the outward sense," which is "but the obedient servant of [its] will" (*Prelude* 11.270-2).

36. This is a "renovating virtue" that the poet hopes to make available not only to his own mind, but to the minds of his readers, and of one reader in particular, Coleridge, the "Friend" to whom the entire *Prelude* is presumably addressed. Of course, the same thing can be said of "Tintern Abbey," wherein Wordsworth, in turning to address his "dear, dear Sister," Dorothy, thereby addresses his poem to her as well. At the same time, however, in the "shooting lights" of her "wild eyes" he can "read/ [His] former pleasures" (118-20) and thence receive back, perhaps, something of the vital power, the "aching joys and dizzy raptures," that once suffused his own corporeal frame in 1793.

37. Such mutually reciprocated "renovating virtue" is a power, like that drawn from the "spots of time" in the *Prelude*, that has been finally collected--or rather, "re-collected"--in the charged *baquet* of a poem

called "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey," to be made available to all future readers as well. In some of his most famous (and deceptively naive) reflections on the poetic process, Wordsworth described poetry in the "Preface" to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," adding, "it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" (266). At first glance, this looks like the rather cliched version of spontaneous composition once associated with the "eruptive" school of English Romanticism, e.g., with Byron's comparison of his writing fits to a live volcano or his idealization of perfect expression, in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, as something like a verbal lightning bolt: "Could I embody and unbosom now/ That which is most within me . . . into *one* word,/ And that word were Lightning, I would speak" (3.905-11). At second glance, however, it appears that Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow" must be allowed to run its course in order to be "recollected in tranquilty" and become poetry. The tranquil "blessed mood" incited by the "picture of the mind" that Wordsworth took away from his first visit to the Wye would seem, according to this account, to have arisen from just such an original overflow, the "aching joys and dizzy raptures" occasioned by that visit, now "recollected in tranquilty" on the poet's second visit.

38. There is a third possibility, however, which requires that we read Wordsworth's first sentence literally and keep its sense intact as we proceed: the poem "*is* the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," but this "spontaneous overflow" "takes its origin," ultimately, from a quite separate, past "emotion" that is only now "recollected in tranquility." The "overflow" is one thing, the emotion from which it originated another. But if that is the case, then it seems that this later overflow of feeling is not really as "spontaneous" as we might think. Wordsworth goes on to say that the original emotion

> is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion . . . from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment. (266)

39. This is a somewhat ambiguous account, but several things seem clear. First, Wordsworth does not believe in spontaneous composition, but in composition "voluntarily" undertaken in tranquil "contemplation" of a previously experienced emotion. Second, the emotion that is made to "actually exist" in the contemplating mind, in the present moment, is *not* the original emotion, but a simulacrum that gradually comes to disturb or destroy that mind's "tranquility." Third, despite this disturbance, the act of voluntary description will place the mind of the poet in "a state of enjoyment" distinct both from the "original emotion" *and* its simulacrum. In this state of joy the simulacrum "produce[d]" by memory disturbs the tranquility of the mind contemplating it and yet does not interfere with the mind's power to describe it "voluntarily." In Mesmeric terms, it appears that the present, contemplated simulacrum of the original emotion has somehow drawn to itself the disturbing power, the "charge," if you will, of the original emotion without impeding the mind's "voluntary"--and pleasureable--power to describe it in words.

40. But if the newly charged simulacrum of the original emotion comes to "actually exist" *in* the poet's mind by means of tranquil "contemplation," in what sense can it be said to "overflow," spontaneously or otherwise, and what can it be said to be "flowing over"--or into--in the process? According to the implied topology of Mesmeric flow, feeling must "overflow" the poet's mind, the site of its present "re-collection" in the emotional simulacrum, and to "flow over" into a material form, specifically, into the verbal "description" that is the poem itself. "Overflow," then, becomes not so much an active as a substantive term, less synonymous with an act of "overflow*ing*" than with what "flows over" into the verbal artifact.

41. We are almost back in the ranks of the "eruptive" poets, but not quite. For in what way can such an "overflow" of the simulated emotion be said to be "spontaneous" if the poet is "voluntarily" attempting to describe the simulated emotion? Only in the sense, I would argue, that the poet is "voluntarily" experimenting so as to arrive at a poetic form that will "spontaneously" elicit that "overflow," somewhat in the way a lightning rod deliberately constructed, positioned, and properly grounded might "spontaneously" draw down the scattered energies of a highly ionized atmosphere. Powerful feelings, then, do not erupt from within, but are drawn out of the poet by, and stored in, the material form of a "voluntarily" constructed poetic artifact.

42. Wordsworth had announced in the "Advertisement" to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* that his readers were to look upon these poems as "experiments" designed to "ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure" (7). That is, the poems were experiments in creating linguistic Leyden jars or *baquets* out of common materials for the eliciting and subsequent discharge of feeling. We can conceive of "Tintern Abbey," then, as something like a verbal device designed by means of "experiment" (more the trial-and-error type of experiment to be found at Thomas Edison's Menlo Park, perhaps, than the controlled testing of hypotheses characteristic of modern science) in order to draw from the mind of the poet, retain in the lines of the poem, and later discharge into the mind of the reader a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Applied to "Tintern Abbey," the poetic process thus conceived would suggest that the "picture of the mind" revived in 1798 was the efficient means by which a simulacrum of the original emotional "charge" was made to "actually exist" in the mind of the poet while he "voluntarily" attempted, during the days immediately after his and his sister's visit, to describe aloud, in blank verse, that emotional duplicate, thereby drawing its emotional "overflow" into a material verbal container.

Associating Ideas in a State of Excitement

43. Of course, it's not just indiscriminate "feelings" that particular poems discharge, but specific passions, and these are not always reducible to simple joy or fear, "Terror or Love" (*Prelude* 3.132). David Miall has reminded us of the "primacy of feeling" ("Wordsworth," 254) in the *Prelude*, and has renewed discussion of the ways in which Wordsworth's "affective scripts" (252) contribute to his self-constructive poetic enterprise. Coleridge's statements on the active imagination, too, says Miall, "are understandable only within the context of an agency that embodies the processes involved. To judge by his earlier more explicit accounts of the matter, that agency can only be feeling" ("Coleridge," 36). This version of imaginatively self-projective Romanticism was described succinctly by Robert Langbaum as far back as 1957: "The process of experience is for the romanticist a process of self realization, of a constantly expanding discovery of the self through the discovery of its imprint on the world" (25).

44. Langbaum's and Miall's accounts correspond to Wordsworth's announcement, elsewhere in the 1800 "Preface," that his "principal object" in the *Lyrical Ballads* was to make "the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them . . . the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement" (244-5). Wordsworth's language is drawn from the associationism of Locke and Hartley, filtered partly through Coleridge's transcendental preoccupations and applied to a subjectivist poetics. Because an individual's emotions affect the manner in which his or her "ideas" of the world are "associated" or arranged into coherent wholes, the wholes that result register the specific impress of the emotional energy by which they were first "associated." This means that, in Wordsworth's account of "voluntarily" "spontaneous" poetic composition, the "original emotion" must achieve its present power to disturb the tranquility of the poet's contemplative mind through an imaginative re-assembly of the "ideas" that were originally assembled, or "associated," by that emotion. In "Tintern Abbey," as we have seen, an original, emotionally charged association of ideas is revived as a "picture of the mind"--that is, a picture both *of* the mind as expressed in its original

imaginative concatenation of "beauteous forms" in 1793, and *within* the mind now beholding these forms in 1798. In Mesmeric terms, this present picture, a complex image of a past perception that has drawn to itself the emotional "charge" originally invested in that perception, is now discharging its accumulated energy as "a state of enjoyment," "the joy of elevated thoughts" that "disturbs" the poet's contemplative mind even as he attempts to induce its "overflow" by means of, and into, the poetic "description" that will become "Tintern Abbey."

45. To refer again to Coleridge's master metaphor of vital magnetic excitation in "Effusion XXXV," if we are all indeed "Harps diversely framed," then the music of our thoughts and feelings will be likewise diversely individuated. Shelley came closer to Wordsworth's conception of the interplay of individual agency and transcendental power in poetic composition when he wrote, in the *Defense of Poetry*,

> Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian Lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody, alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them. It is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound, even as the musician can accommodate his voice to the sound of the lyre. (480)

46. Wordsworth's concept of the mind "voluntarily" experimenting with words in order to capture or elicit a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" closely resembles Shelley's image of Aeolian harp-strings being adjusted until harmony is produced, although Wordsworth is describing poetic creation and Shelley a harmonizing of the *Gestalt* of perception and emotional experience. The adjustments in each case are experimental--the poet cannot know exactly what array of specific settings will enable the wind passing through the strings to produce harmony (though he may have a good guess), but he can keep re-adjusting them until harmony is in fact produced. The only confirmatory evidence that the adjustments are correct is the harmony itself, the "deep power of joy" that leaps forth like a released magnetic or electrical charge. This harmony is not determined in advance by the wind, the indiscriminate source of the "charge," if you will, for it offers only the condition of the possibility of "excitation," not the promise of harmony. Nor can harmony be achieved "voluntarily" according to a received, traditional notion of what constitutes an appropriate poem. Thus Wordsworth's rejection of "poetic diction."

47. In any case, there can be no resonant string--and thus no harmony of resonant strings--that does not, in some sense, resist the power of the wind that excites it. In religious thought, the body has traditionally been identified as the locus of such passive--or "passionate"--resistances to more metaphysical, trans-personal sources of divine power or Grace. In the Christian tradition deriving from Augustine, the inevitable result of habitually indulging such resistances is sin, and Coleridge was morbidly sensitive to the sinful tendencies of the "streamy nature of the associating Faculty" in his own imaginative life when it was left to itself, as in dreams and reveries (Coburn, *Notebooks*, 1.1833). The fault lay, of course, in the discordent or slackened strings of the individual harp, not in the fundamentally positive and life-giving, but ultimately impersonal power that excited them into thought.

48. Looking beyond the Freudian terminology of a culturally-induced "resistance" and "repression" by which such jangling "maladjustments" in the nervous system may be interpreted symptomatically, we may find further enlightenment by pursuing the resemblances between this notion of "resistance" or "blockage" and the Lacanian *point de capiton*, that point (the single "string" or point on the "string" of signifiers) which is arbitrarily "quilted" by the subject, and thereby fastened to a transcendental signified that remains inaccessible to consciousness, so as to enable the subject to adjust and constellate

into a coherent Symbolic pattern the otherwise arbitrary array of other signifying chains (or "strings") deployed throughout the Imaginary. One step further, and we arrive at Slavoj Zizek's "sublime object of ideology." But we haven't time to pursue such avenues of speculation here.

49. The scientific authority that Mesmerism gave to Romantic speculations on the relation of the individual mind to a sublime source of vital power seems absurd to us now, and the order of sublimity it authorized appears to be strictly ideological, an order of culture, history, or political economy rather than of divine interfusion. Be that as it may, Mesmerism provided poets like Coleridge and Wordsworth with one of their most important figures for describing sublime experiences, a master-metaphor of flow interrupted or blocked, accumulating a charge of emotional energy to be subsequently released or discharged in "a state of enjoyment." Given the prominence of "joy" and "love" in the Mesmeric paradigm informing the Romantic Sublime of Wordsworth and Coleridge, we should not be surprised to find less a Burkean than a Freudian "terror" at work in the "blockages" associated with it: anxiety, "perplexity," "dread," ennui, "dejection," all the characteristic symptoms of neurotic repression that the methods of Mesmer and his followers were designed to cure by means of an overabundant flow of "animal magnetism," the ethereal fluid of life and love. The experience of release from such blockages in the moment of "crisis" resembles what Burke calls "delight," "the removal or moderation of pain" (33), a "relative pleasure" (34) which accompanies the experience of sublime terror. But for the major Romantic poets, this "delight" seldom occurs in the immediate presence of the standard terrifying repertoire of vast, overtly threatening objects, but rather at moments when the vital magnetic fluids of empathy and universal harmony that have been checked or "blocked" in their courses by the discontents of civilization are later--often inexplicably, "spontaneously"--released. Our modern attention to overt terror, to explicit violence and fear, in Romantic accounts of the Sublime has blinded us to the more subtle, and subconscious, articulation of the experience as it is deployed, in much of the major poetry, not only along the vertical axis of present transcendence, but along the distended and discontinuous horizontal axis of time and memory. Mesmerism can provide us with the primitive ideological instruments to observe this deployment, and to understand something of its logic.

Notes

1 . As early as 1661, von Helmont, in *De magnetium vulneratum curatione*, had identified magnetism as a universal and occult curative power, and in 1679, Maxwell had posited a magnetic "spiritus vitalis" in his *De medicina magnetica*, "the legitimate precursor of Mesmer's doctrine of the 'universal fluid'" (Tinterow, xii). back

2. The influence of Mesmerism on Coleridge has been remarked at least since 1910, when Lane Cooper's essay on the subject was first delivered in lecture form, and it has since been addressed by Lowes, Beer (*Coleridge the Visionary* and *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*), Coburn (*Inquiring Spirit*, p. 417, and *Collected Works*, 1.59n and 14.96n6), and Burwick. Cooper suggested that Wordsworth, too, was probably indirectly affected (93-95), and Beer went on to explore Wordsworth's reception of Coleridge's mesmeric ideas more fully in *Wordsworth in Time* (54-71). Mesmerism's influence on Shelley was first addressed by Carl Grabo in 1936, and more recently by P. M. S. Dawson and Nigel Leask. back

3. Antedating Tatar, H. W. Piper (99-102) worked such speculations into his account of the "active universe" informing the English Romanticists' idea of the Imagination. back

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