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"Soundings of Things Done": The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era

Introduction

A forum convened by

Susan J. Wolfson, Princeton University

1. Well, that was the title, ably coined by Stuart Curran for the Keats-Shelley Association of America, that we sent to the MLA, in glad cooperation with President Marjorie Perloff's invitation for a Convention mega-colloquium on "The Sound of Poetry." The editors of the Convention Program sighed, and shortened it to "*Romanticism: Poetry and Poetics of Sound*," at once killing off the resonant Sidney sound-bite,[\[1\]](#) and foreshortening our sprightly leap from instance to theory, and our lovely apt anagrams. Not poetic, that Convention bureau. But what they lacked in wit in the program-prose they made up for in the resourcefulness of material doing: they did manage to schedule this session on verse in a perversely narrow wind-tunnel of a room in Philadelphia, 2006, where, too poignantly, hearing was hard, we were told.
2. So we, and our frustrated auditors, are especially grateful for Orrin Wang's invitation to revise our essays for a new hearing in *Romantic Praxis*, promoted not only from narrow wind-tunnel to worldwide web, but also released from the torture to twenty minutes on the MLA's new LimiTimer: a branded coinage, catchily two-sided, with a single shared T facing in opposite directions at once, that reads like a lampoon of those blended phonetic effects in Romantic verse that each of the speakers tries in various ways to keep in earshot—not to mention a parody of romantic end-rhyme itself, with its metrically clocked bounds of sound.
3. Our participants, now unbound, are, in addition to me, Adam Potkay, James Chandler, and Garrett Stewart, and in our auditorium, all those whom we quote. I wonder about the sound of *sound* in Romantic poetry. Adam has his ear to the sound of Wordsworth's stanzas; Jim relays Wordsworth's *Power of Sound* into the Sound of Power and what "sound overpowers" in the Intimations Ode and Shelleyan coordinates; and the Master-Ear of the Phonotext, Garrett Stewart, catches the Romantic phone-omenon in Romantic poetry, its reverberations in Victorian imagination, and its resonance in cognition theory today.

Susan J. Wolfson

Notes

¹ Stuart Curran supplied this, from Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*: "And even Historiographers, although their lippes sound of things done, and veritie be written in their foreheads, have bene glad to borrow both fashion and perchance weight of the Poets."

"Soundings of Things Done": The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era

Sounding Romantic: The Sound of Sound

Susan J. Wolfson, Princeton University

Those of us who may have been thinking of the path of poetry, those who understand that words are thoughts and not only our own thoughts . . . must be conscious of this: that, above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds.

1. That's a noble writer, Wallace Stevens, riding round at last to the subject signaled but delayed in his iconic essay, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words."^[1] But, we hear you murmur, *Sounding Romantic?* or in line with the 2006 MLA Convention call, *sound* in Romantic poetry and poetics? Either way, it seems counter-intuitive: words, especially poetic ones, affront the new Romantics with unwanted trading in "poetic diction" (Wordsworth and Coleridge, anyway, though Keats rather liked camping it up), or a too parodyable mimetics ("Oh woe is me! oh misery!"). But still, these are technical transactions; whatever the gambit, poetry is words, and words work in the sounding. We might even endorse Stevens's radical constitutiveness: "A poet's words are of things that do not exist without the words" (32). No things but in words.
2. Reading poetry, we sound the words, out loud, or in the head. It is through a path of sound that Coleridge drives his theory of poetry. He opens a lecture of 1818 on the art by observing, with a preliminary near pun, that "Man communicates by *articulation* of Sounds, and paramountly by the memory in the Ear—Nature by the impression of Surfaces and Bounds on the Eye."^[2] In the auditorium of Coleridge's lecture, even the visual work of Nature seems conscripted, in so far as the ear catches the rhyme of *Bounds* to *Sounds*. But what of reading, sound evoked by an impression on the eye? Reading poetry, too, is a sounding, Coleridge proposed just the year before in *Biographia Literaria*, with a Stevens-prone simile for audition: a reader is carried forward "like the path of sound through the air" (chapter 14).^[3] More than a simile, this is a transformational trope: poetry is this very imagination of words as a path of sound through the air. Yet in Romantic airs, its path often courses into a waning or absent sound: that prized metaphysics of silence, deep within, way beyond the material or any mere phenomenological instance. And the old paradox is that sound takes us there, pitches its tenor.

I

3. In the Romance of silence, Romantic poets are always tuned to what T. S. Eliot calls an "auditory imagination" ("the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word").^[4] Coleridge's verse in *The Eolian Harp* sounds out a lilting course into silence, "Where the breeze warbles and the mute still Air / Is Music slumbering on its instrument" (31-32). He feels his syllables beautifully to this end: *Where* (whispering across *warbles*) echoes in *Air*, and within, *mute* is poised for reverberation into *Music* and *instrument*. This is all tuned to an extended figure in which music is not music, but its cessation, a suspense both of motion and sound finely compounded in *still*, and underscored by the arrest of pentameter into spondees: "the

mute still Air." Coleridge has an ear for such limits, of sound suspended: the rapture of being "Silent with swimming sense" in *This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison* (39), or the gothic turns: that "strange / And extreme silentness" that vexes meditation and nearly freezes the meter in *Frost at Midnight* (9-10); the "moonlight steeped in silentness" in the Mariner's return to an alien home harbor (*The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* [1798] 505). On hissing s's, sound subsides into spectral dreamscape.

4. The iconic Wordsworthian poet is a famously silent type: mute above the Boy of Winander's grave, or tracing "wreathes of smoke / Sent up, in silence, from among the trees" (*Lines, written a few miles above Tintern Abbey* 18-19), with a metric stress on the faintly audible sympathies of *wreathes* and *trees*, from among, and the wisp of all the s-words. This poet is soon cherishing "an eye made quiet" (48). Elsewhere he contemplates "the silence and the calm / Of mute insensate things" ("Three years she grew" 17-18) that also claims "the silent Tomb" ("Surprized by joy"). All these pauses of deep silence verge on a poetics of eternity that makes "our noisy years seem moments in the being / Of the eternal Silence" (*Ode: Intimations of Immortality* 154-55), the world for "ears" indicted in the subvocal of "noisy (y)ears." In her bodily decrepitude Dorothy Wordsworth will sigh of the "robe of quiet [that] overspreads / The living lake and verdant field" (*Lines Written . . . April 6th* 9-10), as if this were a burial shroud for a life in sound, too, now stilled.
5. Keats's luxurious reveling in language, a physiology it often seems, makes all the more potent his moments of epiphanic negation. If reading Chapman's Homer has him feel he's "heard CHAPMAN speak out loud and bold," silence is the reciprocal homage. Hence the listening reader as kin to Cortez "star[ing] at the Pacific, . . . / Silent on a peak in Darien" (*On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*)—a conclusion "equally powerful and quiet," marveled Leigh Hunt as he introduced Keats to readers of *The Examiner* (1 December 1816). In another scene of reading Keats hails an urn as a "still unravished bride of quietness" (among the puns in *still* is *unsounding*) and a bearer "of silence and slow time" (*Ode on a Grecian Urn* 2), the time of reading slowed by the shift of pentameter into spondee. He is soon tuning his words to "unheard melodies" over and against, and "more endear'd" (11-13) to the ear than a merely unyielding "silent form" (44).[\[5\]](#)
6. So, too, Shelley's apostrophe to Mont Blanc's "Silence" hails a carte blanche, a blank upon which "the human mind's imaginings" flurry into verbal production. The very name, by punning historical revision, puts a claim on the erasure that so agonized Milton's lament, "a universal blanc / Of nature's works to me expunged and razed" (3.48-49; thus *blank* in the 1667 text). Shelley's title by Franco-phonics says "my blank; my blank verse."
7. As these conflicted poetics of silence suggest, none of the metaphysics, none of the epistemics, none of this would matter, materialize to consciousness, but for the paths of sound. "Speak si[l]ence with thy glimmering eyes," Blake invokes the Evening Star (*To the Evening Star*), with an audible sigh of "silence" in "eyes." Well before Simon and Garfunkel sang "the vision that was planted in my brain / Still remains / Within the sound of silence," Romantic poets were there, and tacitly theorizing the contradiction.[\[6\]](#)

II

8. Not the least of the agents is the word *sound*, not only the occasion of our convocation, but a meta-trope for poetry in the ear, whether heard or silently audited, more endear'd. It's a meta-trope, too, because *sound* is homophone, variously drawn out from different etymologies, which come together (by chance or choice) from a prodigal polyglot past. There's the Latin *sonare*: the very word is like a bell for poets, the fount of *sonnet* ("little sound") and *persona* ("sounding through"). Petitioning for,

and sometimes crowding into the same literal space, and open for punning (*O Pun!* to honor Charles Lamb), there are Old English tributes of *sound* (test the depths); *sound* from a different source for *healthy* (sane), and with a slight shift, as in *sound asleep*, whole, entire; and the waters (more etymology yet) in Milton's poetry of Creation, "Sounds and Seas" (*PL* 7.399)—poignantly sounding *sees*, what the blind poet does no more. All these *sounds* play as synchronic kin, the accident of phonemic confluence that condenses new senses. My audit of "sounding Romantic" in what follows is keyed to the sound of *sound*, figuring not just a pre-verbal pulse of apprehension and expression, or a counter-verbal metaphysics, but the pleasurable satisfactions realized by the language in poetry.

9. A primer of this recreation, playing on poetic infrastructure, is Southey's *jeu d'esprit*, "The Cataract of Lodore," a poem shaped, phonically and metrically, into a cascade of sounds that not only coincide with lexical sense but drive it as a primary expressive force:

Turning and twisting,
 Around and around
With endless rebound!
Smiting and fighting,
 A sight to delight in;
Confounding, astounding,
Dizzying and deafening the ear with its sound. (64-70)

Alliteration, assonance, rhymes terminal and medial, all rebound in lines that seem

. . . never ending, but always descending,
Sounds and motions for ever and ever are blending,
All at once and all o'er, with a mighty uproar,
And this way the Water comes down at Lodore. (118-21)

And this way, too, "The Cataract of Lodore" comes down to the name from the rush of sound with which it rhymes more than once—"All at once and all **o'er**, with a mighty **uproar**." With different theological or epistemological pressure, this might be a landscape of hell or an intractable Mont Blanc. Part of Southey's delight is just such suggestion and negation—underwritten by the displacement of epic or odic pentameter by jaunty tetrameters. Half echoed is the "wilde uproar" of Milton's Pandemonium and chaos,^[7] converted to delight. Against Milton, too, the poetics of *up* and *down* is so changeable and interchangeable (all at once) that the last line arrives as an arbitrary end for soundings that, once in motion, seem endlessly variable, always descending, this very word a relay-rhyme that contains and undoes *ending*.

10. As Southey's political enemy Byron knows, sound can pack a polemical punch. The very hero of *Don Juan* refuses a continental chime of *Juan* with *want* ("I want a hero") to insist on English matchmaking with *new one*. Anti-hero *Southey* is brought to rhyme with *mouthey*, one of many with whom Byron settles scores in sounding the name. English national hero, Napoleon's vanquisher at Waterloo, Wellington, gets a French twist at the outset of Canto IX, rung and wrung on Byron's disgust of war glory:

Oh Wellington! (Or 'Vilainton', for Fame
 Sounds the heroic syllables both ways.
France could not even conquer your great name,
 But punned it down to this facetious phrase—
Beating or beaten she will laugh the same.)
 You have obtained great pensions and much praise;

Glory like yours should any dare gainsay,
Humanity would rise and thunder 'Nay!'

In the French story, *Wellington* is punned down to *Vilainton* (villain-style), and the protest *Nay*, without even sounding the syllables another way, says *Ney*: Napoleon's field marshal, executed into nothingness after the Bourbon restoration. On his manuscript Byron wrote *Vilain ton* as two words, to sharpen the pun; and he scrawled an equivocation about *Ney* or *Nay*: 'Query, - *Ney?* - Printer's Devil,' a footnote that was put into print.[\[8\]](#)

11. Though Waterloo may seem far afield from the War in Heaven, our close-listening (one form of close-reading) is, by multiple Romantic routes, a heritage of *Paradise Lost*, full of sounds, not the least the sound of its extraordinary verse. This is poetry in love (too much in love, Milton could worry) with its material pitch and tone—sounds, for better or worse, for sin or salvation. Johnson complained famously at the end of *Life of Milton* that blank verse—blank of rhyme punctuation for the ear "as a distinct system of sounds"—was "*verse only to the eye.*"[\[9\]](#) But to blind Milton, blank verse was first and always a poetry of sound, sounded in the head, aloud to a secretary, and never seen, by him anyway, on the page. His was "a voice whose sound was like the sea," said Wordsworth (*London 1802*)—the alpha-theorist of *The Power of Sound*—with an undersound in "like the *see*" that plays back to Milton's "Sounds and Sees."
12. In all these punning measures the word *sound* keys a poetic differential from words as information. Though the line of difference can be anyone's call, *sound* is the poetic trade. "Quite an epicure in sound," was Wordsworth's lifelong impression of Coleridge, and he was among the beneficiaries.[\[10\]](#) Having listened (over the course of two weeks in the dead of winter, January 1807) to Wordsworth reading *The Prelude*, Coleridge finds himself at the close "Absorb'd, yet hanging still upon the sound," with *still* (again) catching *quiet*, *stasis*, and a *duration* of sound in the air (*To a Gentleman* 111). In this blank verse, Coleridge lets *sound* find a rhyme (with metrical stress) at *found* in his last line: "And when I rose, I found myself in prayer" (112).
13. The paths to these soundless raptures are often love-affairs with sound, leading to the very word:

And now, its strings
Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes
Over delicious surges sink and rise,
Such a soft floating witchery of sound.

(*The Eolian Harp* 17-20)

Such witchery is the sounds, the vibration of sequacious / delicious surges (undertoning *urges*) / *such a soft floating witchery of sound.*[\[11\]](#) The word *sound* then vibrates in a phrase about itself: "Melodies *round* honey-dropping flowers" (23), enriched by the dropping of the *round* sound into the flowers. Even *boldlier*, a strangely arresting sound in so rare a word, seems half-created to herald this insurgence.

14. No wonder then that the hymn Coleridge boldly added in 1817, to "the one Life, within us and abroad" (26 *ff*), is so intricate with its sound, *Life* heard again in the relays of *light*: "A light in Sound, a sound-like power in Light" (28). Allegorizing poetic presence, Coleridge not only suggests that sound, like light, is a powerline through the air; he's also working with the chiasmus of *sound* as a phonological paradigm. Even the sound of the simile-word *like* echoes *light* as it sends the sound of *sound* into *power*. It's the first pulse of the line, the imperative that shimmers *A light* into *Alight*.[\[12\]](#)
15. Coleridge was a reflective theorist as well as effective poet of these events, of meaning generated by

the happy accidents of words in sounds:

N.B.—In my intended Essay in defence of Punning—(Apology for Paronomasy, alias Punning) to defend those turns of words,

che l'onda chiara
E l'ombra non men cara,

In certain styles of writing, by proving that Language itself is formed upon associations of this kind . . . that words are not mere symbols of things & thought, but themselves things

—

(*Notebooks* 3: 3762)[13]

Associations are accidents of sound, in which words as things gain unsuspected power. When the poetry of *This Lime-Tree Bower* concludes that "No Sound is dissonant which tells of Life" (76), Coleridge arranges the line so that the assertion by negation carries an echo of itself in *Soun(d is Disson)ant*.

16. In telling of the unlife of the Arctic, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* is haunted by sounds so alien that even the word *sound* becomes phantasmic:

The Ice was here, the Ice was there,
The Ice was all around:
It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd—
Like noises in a swound!

(*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* 57-60)

In this ice-sounding, noise similes the assault: *swound* is a ghost of *sound*, a rhyme-word that lurks in the aural field without precipitating. And (we may well wonder in reflex) what the hell is that *swound* flaunted for reference? It sounds like a nonce-compound of *wound* (coiled), *wound* (injury), and *sound* —another of those Coleridge inventions, exquisitely desynonymized from near kin for this moment only. OED tells us that *swound* is a word from long, long ago, the age of oral poetry. For his retro-ballad of 1798, Coleridge recalls *swound* as a forgotten sound, an archaeology unearthed: it's *swoon* old-form (same etymology), [14] and (even better!) a variant of *sound*. *Like noises in a swound* is not after anything so mundane as mimesis. It is etymology, as if Coleridge were auditing Pope's tidy couplet, "'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence, / The *Sound* must seem an *Eccho* to the *Sense*" (*Essay on Criticism* 364-65), to estrange the lesson, and propose the reverse: the genesis of *sense* from *sound* or as sound. However one speaks it, the stress of *Swound* hits the ear as a wounded *sound*.

17. Coleridge must have been remembering this terrific sublimity of sound when he recalled, a decade on, a storm on the lake of Ratzeburg, in sentences so exquisitely tuned to phonics as to suggest an event still in the writer's ear:

there was a storm of wind; during the whole night, such were the thunders and howlings of the breaking ice, that they have left a conviction on my mind, that there are Sounds more sublime than any Sight *can* be, more absolutely suspending the power of comparison, and more utterly absorbing the mind's self-consciousness of it's total attention to the object working upon it. (Rooke, ed. 2: 257)[15]

And here, Coleridge may be remembering Burke on the "sublime passion" of "sounds":

The noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery, awakes a great and awful

sensation in the mind . . . and by the sole strength of the sound, so amazes and confounds the imagination, that in this staggering, and hurry of the mind, the best established tempers can scarcely forbear being borne down.[\[16\]](#)

Burke awakes awful sensation in his sounds: the alliterations, the swelling of *sound* in *confounds* and *down*, the strange reverse-birth in *forbear being borne down*, the line made slow and heavy by these very sounds.

18. Across the poignant course of his sublime *Rime*, Coleridge writes the verse of sound in a chord of antithetical returns. This is the Mariner's delusionally beatific swoon, the revival of the dead crew, rendered and remembered with a vibration in the sound of sounds:

Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,
And from their bodies pass'd.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the sun;
Slowly the sounds came back again . . . (341-45)

This is a symphony of *sounds*, exhaled through the vowels and the slide of *s*'s in *rose slowly through* (with a phonotext-effect in *rose lowly*) to issue up and out from *mouths* that seem formed for *sounds* and resound in the rhyme with *Around, around* and the slow return of its own *sounds*.

19. Coleridge may seem spendthrift of such effects, in the register of Keats's urging poets to be "misers of sound and syllable" (*Incipit altera Sonnetta*). For his sonnet-sonics, Keats did not spend the word *sound* until his tenth line, and waited for its return until its last: "She will be bound with garlands of her own"—that is, Poesy, among her weavings, *sound* unchained from rhyme-scheming to echo in this liberal *bound*. In a haunted dream-epic Keats wonders of sound without syllable, the sensation without sense:

Or thou might'st better listen to the wind
Whose language is to thee a barren noise,
Though it blows legend-laden through the trees . . .

(*The Fall of Hyperion* 3.4-6)

—verse he copies in a letter, underlining the compound, eager to share it with one of his most attentive readers (Richard Woodhouse) "on account of" its "fine sound." As if caught up in the sweep, Keats may have transcribed the line with two *thoughts*: "Though it blows legend-laden though the trees." Editors usually follow Hyder Rollins in supplying a dropped *r* for the second one, to get *th[r]ough*;[\[17\]](#) but Keats often writes a shorthand emphatic downstroke that implies two letters, and I think here he may have liked the fine-sounding of *Though / blows / though* enough to let it ride.

20. In the Keats phonotext of 1819, the fine sound of *legend-laden* echoes the *leaf-fring'd legend* that "haunts about" the Grecian Urn, to tease with a latent sound effect (*Ode* 5). There is some evidence, moreover (Andy Elfenbein tells me) that *legend* was sounded in Keats's day with a first long *e*; if so, *leaf* gets an echo, along with a pun on *legion'd*—a word Keats sounds in fantasy in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, where "legion'd fairies pac'd the coverlet" of Madeline's quiet sleep (xix). On the Urn site, Keats manages, with fine visual poetics, to bring an unsounded "ring" within the *fring'd legend*, as if the sound were ready for audition.

21. It's a fine sound that plays, too, in Autumn "on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep" (*To Autumn* 16), a suspense of motion and music—as if in this poppy-drowse, all sound sleeps in heavy ease. Keats's deft slide in these registers reminds us how *sound* may multiply, variously, in chords of sense: as tone, as character, as depth, as resonance. It is Keats's irrevocably sound sleep of death that prompts Shelley to imagine *Echo* pining away "Into a shadow of all sounds:—a drear / Murmur" (*Adonais* 134-35), a trace of waning sight (shadow) that gains this phonic effect. On another pulse, the "sound of life" heralded in *Prometheus Unbound* draws aural sensation into recognition, the world-enkindling "seldom-heard mysterious sound" learned from the artist who wrought a guitar into a vibrant instrument (*With a Guitar, to Jane* 75). "Sounds as well as thoughts have relations, both between each other and towards that which they represent, and a perception of the order of those relations has always been found connected with a perception of the order and relation of thoughts," Shelley proposed in his *Defence of Poetry* (*SPP* 514)—the same paragraph that insists on "the vanity of translation," and seems, even, to offer a demonstration in the relation of *Sounds* and *found*.[\[18\]](#)
22. No one broods more over sound, caressing words as things (so the poet put it in a note to that sound-haunted ballad, *The Thorn*) than the iconically-ironically named Words-worth. In his own audit, he identifies a habit that feels diachronic:

Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form
 Or image unprofaned: and I would stand
 Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth . . .

(The Prelude 1805 2.324-28)

"The 'power in sound' is the severe music of the signifier or of an inward echoing that is both intensely human and ghostly," says Geoffrey Hartman, hearing in these lines an even more radically pressured "relation between textuality and referentiality": the way this poet's words respond to a priority of sound that beckons as "a potentially endless descent," saved only by an impulse to textualize the sounds, install them, measure them in poetry.[\[19\]](#)

23. For Wordsworth this impulse is an element of style, an argument that words matter for the sounding: among the "reasons why repetition and apparent tautology are frequent beauties of the highest kind" is "the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion but as *things, active and efficient*."[\[20\]](#) And so the luxury of words as sound—whether in "the sound like thunder" that is not thunder but the motion of eternity ("It is a beauteous Evening" 8); or the "sounds / Of undistinguishable motion" (*Prelude* 1805: 1.331-32) that are not eternity, but the reflux upon an imagination still haunted by boyhood thefts (how rare to put the sound of *undistinguishable* to work in blank verse); or the luxuriously echoing redundancy of "heard the *murmur* and the *murmuring* sound" in the nut-tree grove (*Nutting* 37) that underscores epicurean boyish foreplay in the key of Eve's call from mirror-romance to Adam by a sound of "murmuring waters" (*Paradise Lost* 4.453).
24. What a world of winter gets generated by, and surrounds, a recollection of a whole pack of bellowing boys, as their ice-skates hiss and fly along the sounding board of the lake:

All shod with steel
 We hiss'd along the polish'd ice, in games
 Confederate, imitative of the chace,
 And woodland pleasures, the resounding horn,
 The Pack, loud bellowing, and the hunted hare.
 So through the darkness and the cold we flew,

And not a voice was idle: with the din,
Meanwhile, the precipices rang aloud,
The leafless trees, and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron, while the distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound . . .

(*The Prelude* 1805: 1.461-71)

No wonder Coleridge put this verse into *The Friend* after his own account of the thunderous sounds of icebreaking on the Lake (2: 259).^[21] Half-rhyming *aloud* and *sound*, with both echoing *loud* and *resounding* in the train, Wordsworth fills the verse with sound everywhere and alien—a weird auditorium that he amplified in 1836 by replacing the merely space-filling *Meanwhile* with *Smitten*, to echo in the relay from *din* to *precipices*. Even in the auditorium of 1805, the relay of *sent* is already sounding in *distant*, in *tumult sent*, and the hiss of *sint* across the line of "hill(s / Int)o."

25. As Wordsworth's verse shows in more than a few traces, sound is a memory, an imprint poetry strives to capture:

My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirr'd,
For the same sound is in my ears,
Which in those days I heard. (*The Fountain* 29-32)

It is sound that stirs the heart to recover what was heard, and it is sound, too, that recovers, finds lost *years* in m(y ears), *idly* stirring inside "ch(ildi)sh." For Wordsworth it is often sound that stirs and flows feeling from past to present:

I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion . . . (*Tintern Abbey* 76-77)

Reciprocally, an adult reads back from sight to sound:

The gentleness of heaven is on the Sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder—everlastingly.

("It is a beauteous Evening" 4-8)

The manuscript shows no final period^[22]—a mimesis of *everlastingly* not only in sense but as a pervasive sound sweeping up the phonics of "the Sea: / Listen . . . / hi(s e)ternal . . . thunder—everlastingly." Hearing is believing.

26. It is Shakespeare's *Lear* that Keats says is in his ear at the seashore in April 1817, the occasion for a sonnet that advances *sound* is a formal rhyme. It is all immediated by Edgar's fiction for his blind father, "Hark, do you hear the sea?"—a solicitation that falters metrically when Gloucester completes the line "No, truly" (4.6.4), a foot short and in a weak rhyme with *sea*. Writing about writer's block to fellow-poet J. H. Reynolds, Keats reverses this to his hearing of the sea and a communication to his correspondent (Reynolds). He recreates Shakespeare's sea-scene into a sound stage (with absent Reynolds doubling blind Gloucester):

. . . the passage in *Lear*—"Do you not hear the sea?"—has haunted me intensely.

On the Sea.
 It keeps eternal Whisperings around
 Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell
 Gluts twice ten thousand Caverns; till the spell
 of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.
 often 'tis in such gentle temper found
 That scarcely will the very smallest shell
 Be moved for days from whence it sometime fell
 When last the winds of Heaven were unbound. . . . [23]

How nice of Keats, comments Christopher Ricks, to interpolate the coercive pressure of *not* [24] and, with a poet's ear, add the tenth syllable to Shakespeare's line. We see him working sound through it all: *Sea / Intensely / To the Sea*—right into the first rhyme, with *Sea* itself in the subtle current of sound in "keep(s E)ternal." The whispering is also of the portmanteau *Seaternal*, an undertow of Wordsworth's "hi(s e)ternal" ("beauteous Evening" 7). In Keats's sea-listening, the shadowy sound of *sound* in "Whisperings around" (*surround / sound*) washes into the echo-chamber of those ten thousand Caverns, rippling the s's across *desolate shores . . . spell . . . shadowy . . . scarcely . . . sometime . . . last*.

27. This is a meditation of sound in the deepest measure, but as Keats and especially Wordsworth know, sounds haunt, in synonymy, sometimes in accidental collusion, with the verb *sound*. Hence, Wordsworth's present participle *sounding* as searching, sonic information when sight is of no avail:

Three sleepless nights I passed in sounding on,
 Through words and things, a dim and perilous way . . .

(*The Borderers*, 4.98-99)

In the blind chamber, "passed *in*" intimates *din* before its sounding, then is echoed eerily in *dim*, a slide of sound that one is tempted to audit as the terrain of "perilous (s)way." Wordsworth gives the Solitary similar lines to follow:

By pain of heart—now checked—and now impelled—
 The intellectual power, through words and things,
 Went sounding on, a dim and perilous way!
 And from those transports, and these toils abstruse,
 Some trace am I enabled to retain
 Of time, else lost;—existing unto me
 Only by records in myself not found.

(*The Excursion*, Book III 699-705)

In the memory of this trace is Wordsworth's Note to *The Thorn* on the mind's adhesion "to words . . . as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion." Sound recovers what sense negates.

28. Coleridge was arrested by this sense of *sounding*, and made it a self-description at the end of *Biographia Literaria* Chapter 4: "I earnestly solicit the good wishes and friendly patience of my readers, while I thus go 'sounding on my dim and perilous way.'" Recollecting his first acquaintance with Coleridge, Hazlitt endorsed the transfer:

I accompanied him six miles on the road. It was a fine morning in the middle of winter, and he talked the whole way. The scholar in Chaucer is described as going
 Sounding on his way.

So Coleridge went on his. In digressing, in dilating, in passing from subject to subject, he appeared to me to float in air, to slide on ice.[\[25\]](#)

The sound of Coleridge himself seems the path through air, or in its winter climate, the hiss of sliding from subject to subject, sliding on ice.

29. The sound of *sounding* as prescient deep knowing is nowhere more audible for Wordsworth than in a strange recollection of death by water. In *The Prelude* he recalls a boyhood sensing of such an event:

Seeking I knew not what, I chanced to cross
One of those open fields, which shaped like ears,
Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite's Lake.

(1805 5.457-58)

The simile is not chance, however, for the event, as the poet now knows, was all about a sounding of information, of random seeking turned to succeeding:

The succeeding day—
Those unclaimed garments telling a plain tale—
Went there a company, and in their boat
Sounded with grappling-irons and long poles:
At length the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene
Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
Rose with his ghastly face. . . . (5.466-72)

The *telling* that is the intuition, and the discovery worked through that half-punning homonym, *sounded*, are the verbal actions that bring this scene to sight. Called into the verse by a seemingly random, now motivated simile ("like ears"), sound is already in the air, and in retrospect texturing the verse from *boat* to *beauteous* to *bolt upright*. The revelation at hand is even more audible in "*sounded*"—a *dead* homonym, with a Miltonic formation.[\[26\]](#)

30. Such sounding without sight, dim and perilous for the haunted, can seem to a sighted poet who can't paint what then he was, a fantasy of perfect harmony:

Thus lived he by Loch-Leven's side
Still sounding with the sounding tide,

(*The Blind Highland Boy* 91-92)

The sounding is in the world, past and present, and in the boy himself, in whom all sounds echo, and still sound in Wordsworth's reservoir for the poetry of sound.

31. This is a poet forever seduced by the sound of *sound*—

O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

The poetry is an event of overflow, from the vocative *O listen* as a phonics for *O-verflowing*, to the drama of enjambment—"the Vale profound / Is overflowing with the sound"—to the way the rhyme of *profound* into *sound* arrives on the metrics that pace the overflow. It is a sound that listeners recall as the poet's own. "Christopher North" (John Wilson) remembers him "pacing in his poetical way . . . and pouring out poetry in that glorious recitative of his, till the vale was overflowing with the sound."[\[27\]](#) Bearing this sound in memory, Dorothy Wordsworth can even catch the lines as her own:

There is something inexpressibly soothing to me in the sound of those two Lines

Oh listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound—

I often catch myself repeating them in disconnection with any thought, or even I may say, recollection of the Poem.[\[28\]](#)

The iambs of "O listen! for the vale profound is" pulse in "I often catch my self repeating." The sounds are not a memory but a sensation that seems ever renewable—and hence in her letter she replaces her brother's period with a dash that implies prolonged audition. The poem that follows *The Solitary Reaper* in the 1807 *Poems, Stepping Westward*, re-echoes *sound* (as Adam Potkay notes). The title is from a local greeting to the foot-travelers, "What you are stepping Westward?", that Wordsworth liked, in a stepping of regular meter, for its "sound / Of something without place or bound" (13-14).

32. Shelley takes this scene of boundless audition to the Alps, and replays it with a sense of poetry aspiring, not to tame, but to run wild with antiphony and metrical disorder:

Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion
A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame;
Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion
Thou art the path of that unresting sound—
Dizzy Ravine!

(*Mont Blanc* 30-34)

"Like the path of sound through the air" is Coleridge's simile for the retrograde motions of reading. If Shelley's *Defence* contends that poetry is not poetry without a striving for "a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound" (*SPP* 514), the case is pitched to crisis here, with the poetry wresting the path of sound into a primary commotion of mind.[\[29\]](#) The sound-streaming tribute of his poetry is its anagrammatic churning of *caverns / Arve's / art pervaded / art / Ravine*. While *sound* achieves an end-rhyme at line 40, "the clear universe of things around," the formal chord is already belated in the train of the triple chord of *sound* in the commotion of 30-34 about the phenomenon itself. Even the expansive pun of *surround* in "things around" figures what is already in motion. Is this, too, what Keats heard, in tune with Wordsworth, in those "whisperings around" at seaside?

33. For Shelley, unresting sound is the mode of the verse, discharging the very words and their inventory of letters from the end of the first stanza and into the dramatic turn to the apostrophe in the next:

Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.

2

Thus thou, Ravine of Arve—dark, deep Ravine— (9-12)[\[30\]](#)

Shelley makes his claim for the sounds of poetry as its very sense, and with echoes everywhere of Milton (*Paradise Lost*), of Wordsworth (*Tintern Abbey*), of Coleridge (*Kubla Khan*), and not the least his own harvest:

Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters, with a sound but half its own (1-6)

In the phonic roll of gerunds, sweeping up the very ontology of *things*, Shelley springs the poem's first rhyme, *springs*, then turns it to the poem's first couplet-rhyme, *secret springs / tribute brings*—the last punning on the very poetics (tributary stream; gift). Thus *sound* is set to echo in *its own (its sone)*, half in the transformations of the echo-relay. In love with sound, Shelley releases *sound* to such a pitch as imply that the secrets behind sounds are only blanks, not *Mont Blanc*. As he is at pains to say in and through *Mont Blanc*, poetry is called to a sound-source that is but half owned. It is half owned not because sound out there is radically untamable and unnamable, but because the sound of poetry is an audition that is always a sounding of another's words with tributes of one's own.

Notes

¹ 1942; rpt. *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1951) 32. This is also the place to say that my essay takes foundational inspiration from Garrett Stewart's *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Univ. of California Press, 1990) and has been encouraged and everywhere improved by his eyes and ears. I'm also grateful for the benefit of Andy Elfenbein's careful and carefully informed conversations with me.

² *Lectures, 1808-1819, On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes; 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 2: 217, my brief italics.

³ Stewart gives this passage pride of place in *Reading Voices*, the first epigraph of his *Prologue* (1). For quotations of Romantic poetry and prose, I assume sources are near enough at hand or keystroke, and so I cite no particular edition. Titles in quotation marks are, by editorial convention, derived from first line of untitled poems; italic titles are the poets' own.

⁴ Lecture on Matthew Arnold, 1933 (towards the end); rpt. *The Uses of Poetry and the Uses of Criticism* (1933).

⁵ To Paul Fussell's remark on the slowed time of *slow time* (*Poetic Meter & Poetic Form* [1969; Random House, 1971] 41), I'd even add the foot of *and*. For my fuller discussion of the poetics of silence in this ode (and companionable readers), see "The Know of Not to Know It: Returns to Keats's Urn," in *Praxis*: "Ode on a Grecian Urn": Hypercanonicity and Pedagogy," ed. James O'Rourke, Orrin Wang & John Morillo (rc.umd.edu/praxis).

⁶ Garrett Stewart's seminar will take us further, into an auditorium of potential auralities, sometimes with thematic import, that press into the auditions of reading and the arrays of textuality.

⁷ *Paradise Lost* 2.541 for the first; then Satan in awe of God's high formalism over chaos's "formless mass"

(3.708): "Confusion heard his voice, and wilde uproar / Stood rul'd, stood vast infinitude confin'd" (710-11)—with a dramatic halting of pentameter into spondees at *–roar / Stood rul'd stood vast*.

⁸ *The Manuscripts of The Younger Romantics*, vol. XI, ed. Cheryl Fallon Giuliano (Garland, 1997) 60-61; I draw a bit on my introduction to the Penguin *Don Juan* (2004). Ney, having joined the king's army after Napoleon was exiled to Elba, rejoined Napoleon when his troops defected.

⁹ "Milton," in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; With Critical Observations on Their Works*; ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Clarendon, 2006) 1: 294; Johnson's italics credit another "ingenious critick" for the remark (William Locke).

¹⁰ A comment recorded by Samuel Carter Hall, *A Book of Memories of Great Men and Women of the Age, from Personal Acquaintance* (London: Virtue & Co., 1871), p. 42.

¹¹ I poach on Garrett Stewart's refined attention in *Reading Voices* 152-53.

¹² Stewart follows the trail of *Alight* into an archaic past participle (kin to *Alit*), within the poetics that coordinate "sound and the medium of vision": "'A light in sound' becomes 'Alight in sound' in the double sense of 'brought to light' in sound (lit, lighted, imaginatively kindled) and descended, settled, or come to rest therein (alighted)" (*ibid* 153).

¹³ *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), vol. 3: 3762. For fine attention to the sound qualities of Coleridge's verse, see Anya Taylor, "Coleridge and the Pleasures of Verse," *Studies in Romanticism* 40 (2001): 547-69.

¹⁴ This is how it plays in Bishop Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765): "The lady shriekte and swound away" (*Sir Cauline*, 183); a drunk tinker is passed out "as if laid in a swound" (*The Frolicsome Duke*, 6); and lords laugh so hard they're "readye to swound" (*The Beggar's Daughter of Bednall Green*, 62).

¹⁵ "Christmas Out of Doors," *The Friend* No. 19, December 28, 1809; *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, 2 vols. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1969) 2: 257.

¹⁶ *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 2d edition (1759), Part II, Section XVII: "Sound and Loudness" (itself an echo of the sense).

¹⁷ *Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Harvard Univ. Press, 1958) 2: 171.

¹⁸ For noting this semantically laden relation of sound, I'm indebted to Michael O'Neill, "'Driven as in Surges': Texture and Voice in Romantic Poetry (*The Wordsworth Circle* 38 [2007], 91).

¹⁹ "Words, Wish, Worth" (1979; *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* [Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987] 99, 101-2). I give fuller attention to this passage in "What's Wrong with Formalist Criticism?", *Studies in Romanticism* 37 (Spring 1998) 77-94.

²⁰ Note to *The Thorn*, *Lyrical Ballads* 1800; his italics.

²¹ Dorothy Wordsworth had conveyed the verse in a letter to Coleridge, December 1798; *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2d edn. Rev. Chester L. Shaver (Clarendon Press, 1967) 239.

²² "Poems, In Two Volumes," and *Other Poems, 1800-1807 by William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (Cornell UP, 1983) 464.

²³ I follow the transcribed ms. (from a lost original) in Richard Woodhouse's letterbook; Rollins gives a slightly different rendition of the same ms. (*Letters* 1: 132).

²⁴ "Keats," in *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford UP, 2002) 175.

²⁵ "My First Acquaintance with Poets," *The Liberal* 2 (April 1823); Hazlitt misremembers the phrase as Chaucer's.

²⁶ To Sin's cry of *Death* in Hell's echo-chamber, "back resounded *Death*" (*PL* 2.789), the event is first sounded in "resounded" (finely noted by Stewart, *Reading Voices* 80). Wordsworth ceded this dead-success when he revised to "Sounding with grappling-irons" (*1850* 5.447; even as the double gerunds add a present

intensity of recollection).

The phonologic of *ears* and *sounded* seems too deliberate for Cynthia Chase's slotting into "mute catachresis," meanings and signs linked only "by the accident of identity"; "The Accidents of Figuration: Limits to Literal and Figurative Reading of Wordsworth's 'Books'", *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 21, 27.

²⁷ *Noctes Ambrosianae*, in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* XLVII (December 1829), p. 872, cited by Samuel Carter Hall, *A Book of Memories*, p. 372.

²⁸ *Letters, The Early Years*, 650.

²⁹ *Mont Blanc* and *Biographia Literaria* were published late in 1817; I haven't been able to find evidence of cross-influence or a common source for the similar phrasing of "path of sound." A few years on, Thomas Lovell Beddoes (who read both poets) may have caught this strain with lighter luxury, closing "The Induction to the First Fytte" of *The Improvisatore* (1821) thus: "With finger springing light / To joyous sounds, the songster wight / First tuned his lyre, then danced along / Amid the mazy paths of song" (51-54).

³⁰ William Keach's comment on Shelley's poetics of rhyme may illuminate the anagrammatics here and the metapoetics of *sound* in 30-34: the "verbal imagination structures and shapes, without giving a closed or determinate pattern to, an experience which defies structuring and shaping" (*Shelley's Style* [Methuen, 1984] 196). To Frances Ferguson the "linguistic *tour de force*" of the anagrams is a relational punning that underscores "the symbiosis of things and mind. . . the inevitability of any human's seeing things in terms of relationship" ("Shelley's *Mont Blanc*: What the Mountain Said," in *Romanticism and Language*, ed. Arden Reed [Cornell Univ. Press, 1984] 206-7).

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"Soundings of Things Done": The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era

The "Power of Sound" and the Great Scheme of Things: Wordsworth Listens to Wordsworth

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1. Two citations, for starters, one that will be familiar enough to students of the Romantic period and a second that should be more familiar than it is.[\[1\]](#)
2. First, Shelley's famous claim, at the close of *A Defence of Poetry*, that the poets of his age surpassed those of other ages not because of their opinions, with which he himself often disagreed, but because of their ability to tap into something larger than themselves, a great secular energy, a spirit of the age. Shelley represents this power with a figure drawn from recent explorations in the natural sciences carried out under the rubric of "vitalism." He calls it "the electric life which burns in their words" (535).
3. The second citation is taken from Murray Cohen's *Sensible Words*, a fine book that traces changes in eighteenth-century English linguistics and that has not had the readership it deserves, despite praise from Noam Chomsky and Edward Said upon its publication. Cohen's final chapter charts a twofold shift in late eighteenth-century writing about language, such that "words . . . come to function less referentially or logically and more affectively" (109), and that "*sounds* . . . become the object of new and widespread interest" among linguists (107). The scheme on which the new grammars predicate their work is based not on "the order of things," but on "manners of speaking" (103). The new paradigm, Cohen explains, "defines the linguistic expression of mental activity in a . . . context [that stresses] communication of intention through oral/aural signals associated with feelings or intentions" (106). Ultimately what is implied is a shift in the concept of "mind": from the mind "evident in syntactic logic" to "the 'mind' that is expressed by vocal tones [that give] evidence of passion" (106).
4. Let us suppose, then, for the sake of a too-brief argument, that the vitalist "electricity" that appears in some famous poetry of the Romantic period had something to do with this new attention to the sound of words, with a new way of hearing sounds in relation to a new understanding of the mind as an affective domain. Let us suppose that there was something distinctive, in other words, about how Romantic poets reckoned with "the power of sound."
5. In approaching this topic, we might wish to make a (familiar enough) distinction between the sounds that words have and the sounds to which they refer: the phonetic dimension of language as distinct from the semantic one.[\[2\]](#) As for the former, one could certainly point to passages where key Romantic poems seem, by the very sound of their words, to simulate vital processes. Celeste Langan, for example, has dilated brilliantly on the "oh" at the start of Wordsworth's *Prelude* in its relation to the human breath, and on the implications of changing the "oh" to the capital O with which the 1850 text begins (172-75).[\[3\]](#) But we can also find evidence of this sort of vitalist affective phonetics in Shelley's echo of the "Breath of Autumn's being" in *Ode to the West Wind*—that refrain "hear, O hear! / . . . O hear! / . . . O hear!" (14, 28, 42). We hear it again in Keats's dramatization of "forever panting" (27) in the central stanza of *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: "More happy love! more happy, happy love!" (25)—a line

that offers the promise of rising above "All human breathing" (28) but results in a "parching tongue" (30).

6. As for the semantic element of sound in language, the sounds to which words refer: these are everywhere evident in Romantic poetry, especially in the many lyrics responsive to the sounds of birds, such as Coleridge's and Keats's nightingale poems. One even finds a number of poems in the period that relate these two kinds of sound effects to each other. Such a poem is Shelley's *Stanzas Written in Dejection Near Naples*, which begins with "a voice of one delight" (7) but comes in the end to name itself an "untimely moan—" (40), a reference to its own moments of tonal and rhythmic breakdown. The first of Shelley's initial iambic tetrameter lines, descriptive of what the poem will later call the "day" (48), had built its perfectly cadenced syntax with geometric logic—two clauses per line, then one clause for a line, then one clause for two lines:

The sun is warm, the sky is clear,
The waves are dancing fast and bright,
Blue isles and snowy mountains wear
The purple noon's transparent might (1-4)

Not unlike some of his geometric play with Pythagorean figures in *Ode to the West Wind*, these lines produce what might be called a "squaring effect" within a poetic space defined by four feet repeated over four lines. But in the second stanza, descriptive of the self (and where the first-person pronoun is first-introduced), these harmonies dissolve, and the poem becomes a syncopated lament, an untimely moan:

I sit upon the sands alone:
The lightning of the noontide Ocean
Is flashing round me, and a tone
Arises from its measured motion,
How sweet! did any heart now share in my emotion. (14-18)

The final line of the next stanza produces a similar effect with a similar semantic reflexivity:

To me that cup has been dealt in another measure. (27)

The awkward 13-syllable line is almost impossible to scan and, like line 18, departs from the regularity of the iambic hexameter lines closing stanzas 1, 2, and 5:

The City's voice itself is soft, like Solitude's (9)
How sweet! did any heart now share in my emotion (18)
Will linger though enjoyed, like joy in Memory yet (45)

Line 27 effectively dramatizes the alien measure in which the poet has been dealt the cup (or *coup*) of which he here complains. Such are the ways in which the poem earns that self-label as an "untimely moan."

7. Upon these conceits for relating the phonetic and semantic dimensions of affective sound in poetry (known well enough to students of the Romantic lyric) are built yet more complicated structures of sound and sense. The relation of sound to affect, Cohen suggests, is an explicit topic for the age, an active subject for discussion by poets, critics, and philosophers. This is a point for which we can find persuasive evidence in familiar places—in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, for example. In light of this recognition, should we not be on the alert for poems that not only stage the relation of these two kinds of sound in poetry but also deal with it discursively?

8. Just such a poem can be found among the later writings of Wordsworth, an ode composed in 1828 and published in 1835 and in fact titled: *On the Power of Sound*. Wordsworth went out of his way to give this poem a certain prominence in his late collections, placing it in the concluding position for the prestigious grouping he called "Poems of the Imagination." Twenty-one-year-old Mary Ann Evans—later, George Eliot—read the poem in 1840 and wrote to a friend to praise it lavishly (*Letters* 1: 68). As Wordsworth's prefatory prose Argument makes clear, the poem is framed between explicit references to two "ears" and to the two spiritual powers associated with them. It opens with an extended address to a spirit who inhabits the labyrinthine cave of the human ear, and it ends with a tribute to Lord God of all, who is said to possess the "ear" into which all the sounds of the world are ultimately poured. Most of the poem along the way is a dramatization of the great efficacy of auditory stimulation across an enormous range of circumstances. Consider stanza 2:

The headlong streams and fountains
Serve Thee, invisible Spirit, with untired powers;
Cheering the wakeful tent on Syrian mountains,
They lull perchance ten thousand thousand flowers.
That roar, the prowling lion's *Here I am*,
How fearful to the desert wide!
That bleat, how tender! of the dam
Calling a straggler to her side.
Shout, cuckoo!—let the vernal soul
Go with thee to the frozen zone;
Toll from thy loftiest perch, lone bell-bird, toll
At the still hour to Mercy dear,
Mercy from her twilight throne
Listening to nun's faint throb of holy fear,
To sailor's prayer breathed from a darkening sea
Or widow's cottage-lullaby. (17-32)

It doesn't take much knowledge of Wordsworth's early poetry, certainly no more than he might have expected from his late readers, to hear this passage as a kind of echo-chamber of his own early lyric subjects, especially those of the period from *Lyrical Ballads* to the 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes*. The allusions are multiple. Wordsworth wrote more than one poem "To the Cuckoo," but we also find here echoed the "ten thousand" flowers from "I wandered lonely as a cloud," the prayerful nun of the sonnets, the sailors and widows of the early narrative poems, the bleating sheep of *Michael* and *The Last of the Flock*, and of course the streams and fountains from all over the Wordsworthian oeuvre. Why this self-recapitulation?

9. One might justifiably declare the burden of these lines to be that, no matter how great the variety of sounds in our experience, all can be understood to serve the spirit that inhabits the human ear. Exactly how the poem enacts this point, however, demands some careful attention. If we reinvoked the distinction between two kinds of sound effects, we can note that, with the possible exception of the "Toll . . . toll" echo to simulate the sound of the "lone bell-bird" (28), the stanza's way of invoking particular sounds is simply to refer to them. The rush of the streams and fountains, the roar of the lion, the bleat of the sheep, and the call of the cuckoo enter the poem only insofar as we know what those words mean and thus attach auditory associations to their occurrence there. Likewise for the human sounds: the nun's throb, the sailor's prayer, the cottage-widow's lullaby. For a stanza so long on the representation of diverse sounds, it is surprisingly short on onomatopoeic devices.[\[4\]](#)
10. At the same time, however, all the diverse sounds semantically indicated are articulated in words that can themselves be sounded. These sounds, the sounds of the words themselves, are patently organized

to constitute the poem's formal auditory system. Prosodists trained in linguistics nowadays refer to this as a poem's "verse design," its meter and rhyme patterns conceived as a recurring pattern. The "verse design" is what modern criticism calls the "rhyme scheme" together with what might be called the "metrical scheme." "Scheme," in a slightly looser application to poetic description, was a term in play in late-eighteenth century Britain, and thus available to Wordsworth, who employs the term suggestively in the Argument to *On the Power of Sound*.

11. Here Wordsworth seems to have taken this looser sense of a poet's "scheme" and to have pushed it toward the later and more technical senses of "rhyme scheme" and "verse design." The Argument offers an account of the poem's central line of development in the following terms: "The mind recalled to sounds acting casually and severally.—Wish uttered (11th Stanza) that these could be united into a scheme or system for moral interests and intellectual contemplations" (2: 323). That "wish," it is fair to say, is realized in the poem's own formal scheme or system of sound. And this scheme is in turn both expressive of and governed by a larger, indeed a cosmic regime of sound, one that Wordsworth describes at the start of stanza XII:

By one pervading spirit
Of tones and numbers all things are controlled . . .

The theme of poetic harmony—a revision of the Augustan conceit of *concordia discors*—is an important one for many of the major male Romantic writers, not the least Wordsworth, and his attention to it was crucial in the composition of *The Prelude*, where it anticipates some of the themes of *On the Power of Sound*.

12. In Book First of *The Prelude*, the theme of harmony is first figured negatively, during the poet's dramatization of his early failures with the poem:

It was a splendid evening, and my soul
Did once again make trial of the strength
Restored to her afresh; nor did she want
Eolian visitations—but the harp
Was soon defrauded, and the banded host
Of harmony dispersed in stragglings sounds,

The harmonics then appear in the poet's account of his success, once he has managed, despite himself, to get his great epic poem underway:

The mind of man is framed even like the breath
And harmony of music. There is a dark
Invisible workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, and makes them move
In one society. (1805: 351-55)

To gain a sense of how these passages differ from what we find in *On the Power of Sound*, we need only compare them with the 1850 text, a revision that appears for the first time in a manuscript of 1832, just a few years before *On the Power of Sound*:

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together

This talk of an "immortal spirit" likened to musical harmony, and of a biblically "inscrutable" workmanship by which it is brought to being, separates the already Burkean poet of the great decade from the Christian poet of the 1830s. To put the matter in other, not less apposite, Wordsworthian terms, it separates "natural piety" from Christian piety.

13. In *On the Power of Sound*, then, it is as if Wordsworth, with a kind of redundant reflexivity, were recomposing the straggling sounds of his earlier work into a sanctioned order, thus legitimating at once the soundness of its poetic principle and the principle of its poetic sound. There is of course considerable variety in the way the poem fulfills the requirements of its formal scheme of meter and rhyme—variety in the sound of individual words and of the sound patterns by which they are combined. But one might say that this is a far subtler sense of variation than that of the widely varying sounds to which the poem refers in its semantic register: the roar, the bleat, the shout, the throb, the prayer, the lullaby. (One might well argue that the human sounds are themselves already more homogenous, more shaped and cadenced, than the animal sounds.) Through the double-sided sound capacities of poetry (and indeed of language)—its capacity both to be sounded and to refer to sound—the poem thus seems to suggest two conclusions: first, that the pre-semantic sounds of the world are made meaningful by their being semantically distinguished in such words as *roar*, *bleat*, *shout*; second, that when these words are themselves brought into the *formal* sound pattern of a poem's distinctive music, they can be "heard" as constituting yet another kind of order: let's call this musical order "post-semantic."
14. Such an account may help to explain why Wordsworth goes on to spend so much of the rest of this poem on the question of music. In this, too, Wordsworth seems to be revisiting work of his "great decade," specifically a poem from the 1807 volumes titled *The Power of Music*, a verse reflection on how musicians playing to a crowd on Oxford Street provoke strong emotion among diverse listeners. The great Orphic theme of music's power became a kind of obsession in the Romantic period, for reasons related to those explored in Cohen's analysis. Vanessa Agnew has recently been developing an ethno-musicological account of how this topic came to have such importance from about the time of Charles Burney's musical travel writing in the 1790s.^[5] Indeed there is much more to say about Wordsworth's late reworking of the 1805 *Prelude* along these lines and about his late return to poems in the 1807 volumes. For now, I attend to the question of how *On the Power of Sound* rewrites the poem in which he developed the theme of "natural piety," the poem that is arguably the most important single lyric that Wordsworth published in the 1807 volumes, perhaps in any volume: the simply titled *Ode*, better known by its elaborated title of 1815, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.^[6]
15. *On the Power of Sound*, like the "Intimations" *Ode*, is a long lyric in roman-numbered stanzas; at 224 lines and fourteen parts it is slightly longer but on the same order of magnitude as the *Ode*. At the opening of stanza III, Wordsworth addresses the sounds to which he has referred in stanza II, beginning with lines about the phenomenon of echo that themselves echo the "Intimations" *Ode*:

Ye Voices, and ye Shadows
And Images of voice—to hound and horn
From rocky steep and rock-bestudded meadows
Flung back, and, in the sky's blue caves, reborn—
On with your pastime! (33-37)

This passage recalls two moments in the "Intimations" *Ode*. The first, the opening of stanza IV, addresses the songs of the birds and lambs, creatures named in stanza III:

Ye blessèd Creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee. (36-38)

The second is the reprise of these lines at the top of stanza X, where the speaker says, in effect, "on with your pastime":

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
And let the young Lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound! (168-70)

In the context of all the other allusions to the early poetry, these take on special force.

16. Most important for my purposes, the final stanza of *On the Power of Sound* includes a pointed and complex echo—to the ninth stanza of the "Intimations" *Ode*, arguably the poem's pivot, and one of the most complex passages in all of Wordsworth. Here, first, is the concluding stanza of *On the Power of Sound*:

XIV

A Voice to Light gave Being;
To Time, and Man his earth-born chronicler;
A Voice shall finish doubt and dim foreseeing,
And sweep away life's visionary stir;
The trumpet (we, intoxicate with pride,
Arm at its blast for deadly wars)
To archangelic lips applied,
The grave shall open, quench the stars.
O Silence! are Man's noisy years
No more than moments of thy life?
Is Harmony, blest queen of smiles and tears,
With her smooth tones and discords just,
Tempered into rapturous strife,
Thy destined bond-slave? No! though earth be dust
And vanish, though the heavens dissolve, her stay
Is in the WORD, that shall not pass away. (209-24)

The audible allusion is to the passage that records the sudden eruption of joy at the top of stanza IX in the "Intimations" *Ode*, more specifically a few lines on, when the poet says that it is not for the "simple creed" of childhood that

I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
But for those first affections,

Those shadowy recollections,
 Which, be they what they may,
 Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
 Are yet a master light of all our seeing;
 Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
 Our noisy years seem moments in the being
 Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
 To perish never;
 Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
 Nor man nor Boy,
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
 Can utterly abolish or destroy! (139-60)

What is involved in the crowning echo of this passage in *On the Power of Sound*—this return to the question of whether "noisy years" are mere "moments" in a metaphysical Silence?

17. Each passage, let it be noted, solves a problem posed in preceding stanzas. In the "Intimations" *Ode*, the problem is the puzzle voiced at the end of stanza VIII: why the growing child hastens his maturation by fitting his tongue to the dialogues of business, love, and strife. The answer comes when the poem is able to see these acts of "endless imitation" as expressing not a submissive accommodation to the world of custom but a defiant skepticism about the world of sense. The relief that erupts into the poem in that pivotal exclamation at the top of IX—"O joy!"—is not for the child's "simple creed" but for his doubts, newly understood in the child's verbal play. The child turns to mimesis as to a world of forms, one that expresses his distrust of the world of passing sensations.^[7] In *On the Power of Sound*, the problem posed is, as the Argument puts it, how to unite all the sounds of the world—so dangerous in their potency—into "a scheme or system for moral interests and intellectual contemplation" (2: 323)—or what stanza XI punningly calls a "*scale* of moral music—to unite / Powers that survive but in the faintest dream / Of memory" (170-72, my italics). The solution to the poem's puzzle, that is, involves the recognition that all sounds ultimately pour into the ear of the Lord God of all, the author of the all-creating Word. The world is thus the Word, understood as a perfectly circular figure of sound's power.
18. To see just what is at stake in Wordsworth's late reprise of his famous lines about the "Silence" and the "noisy years," we need to attend still more closely to the solution in stanza IX of the "Intimations" *Ode*. It is, I suggest, hedged around by syntactical ambiguities. These depend chiefly on two prominent echoes internal to the passage. "But for . . . / But for" (141, 148), and "Which . . . / Which" (150, 157). The first "But for" follows on "Not for" (139: "Not for these I raise") and so may denote "Not for these but rather for . . ." The second "But for," however, is syntactically placed ("But for those first affections, / Those shadowy recollections") so that it may also suggest "except for" (e.g. "there but for the grace of God go I"). This raises a question as to whether the second "But for" clause is to be understood in apposition with the first or as a qualification of it—a matter of serious instability to the grammar and logic of the passage.^[8] Likewise, though we feel confident that the first "Which" modifies those "affections" and "recollections" just named in the same sentence, with only a comma pause (148-50), it is difficult to know whether the second "Which" ("Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour . . . / Can utterly abolish"; 157-60) is in apposition to the first, or whether it modifies what has just been named, separated by a semicolon: "truths that wake, / To perish never; / Which" (155-57). If the latter reading is possible, then we have a question as to the grammatical "mood" of the immediately preceding "Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make / Our noisy years seem moments in the being / Of that eternal Silence: truths that wake" etc. (153-55). If the syntax is modifying, is its mood declarative (those affections and recollections do uphold us), or imperative/exhortatory (Uphold us, truths that wake!)? The effect of this further instability is to let the key point about just how the noisy years are made to seem thus hover between a statement and a plea, a fact and a hope.

19. The larger effect of all these syntactic ambiguities in the "Intimations" *Ode* is to undermine the logic of the decisive transition to joy, and thus ultimately to lodge the poem's claim to find consolation— affective renewal—in something like the sound of its own words. In *On the Power of Sound*, on the other hand, the primacy of sound's affective power is more like the problem than the solution. The whole poem, in a sense, is about just the kind of effect that Wordsworth so brilliantly manages in the "Intimations" *Ode*: Wordsworthian "shuffling," William Empson called it (151-54).^[9] *On the Power of Sound* is about the electric life of auditory affect. This effect, whose secular power strikes the older Wordsworth as dangerous, must now give way—not to the older "logic" of Murray Cohen's pre-enlightenment language scholars, but to Christian Logos, the Word issued *and* received by the Lord God of all, a transcendental figure that dissolves all distinctions of read or said, declarative or imperative. The sound of this Word is not only virtuous but also virtual. It is the sound of the power of sound.
20. Retrospectively, then, the later poem's moral sentence—its categorical "No" to the question of noisy years and eternal silence—reveals something crucial about the earlier poem, and about the electric life which there is in its words, in its auditory effects and affects. Despite its references to "the fountain light of all our day" and "master light of all our seeing" (151-53), despite its metaphors of sunlight and skyscape—"trailing clouds of glory" (64) and the coloring of "Clouds that gather round the setting sun" (196)—the "Intimations" *Ode* is finally absorbed in the sheer sound of its own named affections. Wordsworth may have had his second thoughts about this feature of his extraordinary early lyric, but for Shelley it was perhaps the most cherished feature of a poem that much preoccupied him. It was the feature that made the "Intimations" *Ode* very much a lyric of its age.

Notes

¹ My thanks to Susan Wolfson and Maureen McLane for searchingly helpful conversation on this essay.

² Such a distinction has been fundamental to the modern study of poetry at least since I. A. Richards's course-setting *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924).

³ See also Jonathan Culler, "Apostrophe," and Garrett Stewart's essay in this issue of *Praxis*.

⁴ Wordsworth's attention to such matters is well-attested. Recall his comment in the Preface to the *Poems* of 1815—a memorable instance of Wordsworth listening to Wordsworth—on the (Milton-influenced) line in *Resolution and Independence*, "over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods": "The stock-dove is said to *coo*, a sound well imitating the note of the bird; but, by the intervention of the metaphor *broods*, the affections are called in by the imagination to assist in marking the manner in which the bird reiterates and prolongs her soft note, as if herself delighting to listen to it, and participating of a still and quiet satisfaction, like that which may be supposed inseparable from the continuous process of incubation" (2: 437). Here sound and sense unite in a single word, while *On the Power of Sound* requires a full poetic "scheme," divinely sanctioned, to bring about such resolution.

⁵ "The Colonialist Beginnings of Comparative Musicology"; see also *Enlightenment Orpheus: The Power of Music in Other Worlds*.

⁶ It is this later text that I discuss here.

⁷ I elaborate this reading of the "Intimations" Ode in "Wordsworth's Great Ode and the Progress of Poetry."

⁸ Compare the repeated "But for . . ." in Felicia Hemans's *The Sceptic*, the context not terribly dissimilar:

And say, cold Sophist! if by thee bereft
Of that high hope, to misery what were left?
But for the vision of the days to be,
But for the Comforter, despis'd by thee,
Should we not wither at the Chastener's look,
Should we not sink beneath our God's rebuke . . . (457-62)

I don't mean that Hemans echoes Wordsworth, though "the vision of the days to be" certainly invokes the idiom of the early stanzas of the "Intimations" Ode. Since *The Sceptic* is likely a response to Byron (see Sweet and Taylor), it is interesting to speculate on Hemans's possible invocation of the idiom of Byron's nemesis, Wordsworth. At the very least, her clear syntax serves as a foil, in Empson's phrase (see n. below), to the "shuffling" grammar of the "Intimations" Ode, stanza IX. In Shelley's *Mont Blanc*—the publication (1817) falling between Wordsworth's Ode (1807, 1815) and *The Sceptic* (1820)—a well known *But for* crux occurs:

The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be
But for such faith with nature reconciled. (76-79)

But for might mean "except for" or, more in keeping with the context (and standard editorial commentary), "only through" (*Shelley's Poetry and Prose* 99n4).

⁹ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1947; revised from British edition 1930), 151.

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"Soundings of Things Done": The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era

Phonemanography: Romantic to Victorian

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1. "O wild West Wind," writes Shelley in the mode of high-Romantic incantation. But writing, scribed marks, is what the intonation remains—from the first tripled whoosh of strained onomatopoeic alliteration forward. With the titular W's wafting over the line in self-propelled graphic gusts, the first of these mere W-ords sweeps up the prearticulate "O" into an airborne but strictly lexical momentum. More than this, the press of enunciation is aimed toward the very object of its own discursive gesture across the drift from the phonetically denominated "double-u" to its single and more immediately recognized graphic variant. The inaugural "O" is only confirmed as vocative, that is, when the first junctural lurch of "O W" is rounded out by the equally opened-mouthed apposition that results in the line's coming phonetic increment, "thou(w) breath of autumn's being." Latency and fulfillment seem almost at one in verse wording. We will come back to this, via Giorgio Agamben, under the sign of potentiality.
2. We will also come back, by the same route, to the deep ontological ramifications of the so-called equative genitive (or genitive metaphor) in that line's second phrase: the breath of fresh air that is autumn, rather than the breath that issues from it, as one might say in common figure "the very breath of life." Yet if autumn realizes itself in breath, it is far from clear that the speaker of "O" can do so in expelled voice, quite apart from its spelled-out discourse. For homo loquens, neither the fact nor the act of sounded speech, let alone its imitative rewiring as onomatopoeia, can ground being, can get behind words to presence. Such language is there where being is not, naming things like being and need and the rest.
3. Before apostrophe, before the sounded "O" is caught up in any further alphabetizing of the vocative, Romantic poetry begins with a sigh. It is only then that lexical borders might start giving way to each other, as when Shelley's first summoning juncture faintly anticipates the second-person "thou." Romantic poetry begins with a sigh. I repeat more than myself. For "German poetry," I've put Romantic, but only to paraphrase the first sentence of Friedrich Kittler's *Discourse Networks* (3). He means Goethe, not the preludic and breath-born(e) launch of Wordsworth's "Oh there is a blessing in this gentle breeze," where the deictic "this" serves almost to demonstrate the poem's own aspirant impetus. The reader of Wordsworth's *Prelude* may well hope the blessing is contagious, there and then in the forced-air burst of the so-far breezy enough "Oh." For his part, Kittler's best evidence comes immediately with Schiller's two-line poem "Language." Its compressed point is that there can be no direct communion from spirit to spirit. A medium is required. "Once the soul speaks, then, oh!, it is no longer the soul that speaks" (3). Only words can discourse. Even the primal uprush of Schiller's "Ach!" (whose onomatopoeic alternate is "Oh" in German too) has begun the move from voice to language. That's why, for instance, in a classic modernist formulation that has all of Romantic philology to draw on, the phenomenology of the Logos in Joyce is never more than a phonemanon, anonymous, Babelized (258). Even divine fiat disappears into what it releases, what is let be by its speaking forth. So with each and every manifestation of (rather than in) language. "O" may record or at least interpret the soul's speech, but it is never the soul speaking, never the instance of a speaking soul.
4. Thus this essay, because of rather than despite that recognition. The undertones one hears in poetry or prose—as for instance in Romantic poetry and its attenuated strains within Victorian fiction—are not those of the speaking subject, let alone of the expressive soul, but language's own: imprinted phonemically by textual event according to the formative oscillations of wording itself. They are, to lift a Wordsworthian coinage from the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, a lurking "underpresence" (bk. 13, l. 71) in the weft of phrase—a borrowing from this romantic mastertext licensed only if the phrasing sheds completely its immediate metaphysical context in the visionary moment that "feeds upon infinity" in manifesting its "sense of God" (the former phrasing retained in the 1850 version [bk. 14, l. 71]), though "underpresence" and its deification were dropped. Maybe "under" seemed wrong for the transcendental uplift at stake. In any case, the thematic sustenance offered by the wash and undertow of sound is quite different from any such funding of higher "presence" from beneath consciousness. We are concerned simply, at the lexical level, with the nonabsent—with collocations percolating beyond the given. At transient rest in sheer potential, unselected by the inscriptive gestures of diction but not thereby cancelled entirely, these effects are not to be written

out by textual encounter just because they are left invisible. Even as relinquished formations, they retain the gesture of their lingual possibility. Call them cognitively imprinted without being written. As such, they may resound in silence upon the inner ear of reading.

5. And in ways that plumb only the renewable energies and bottomless options—rather than any stable ground—of speech. "Ach" stands as the lower limit in German of voice enlisted, made literal, as discourse, sound made not just sensed but sensible—what Agamben calls in the etymological sense "literalized" ("Philosophy and Linguistics" 65). With Shelley's drawing in English on those interchangeable speech sounds "O" and "Oh," his ode momentarily arrests that move into literalization, into discourse, or pretends to, in a cross-lexical alphabetic suspension—even in the very fashioning of its first signifying transit; and even in the equivocation of its monosyllabic letter sounds. Shelley does not say "Oh! There is a wild west wind," still less "OH there is a blessing in the blast," let alone "Ach!" What his initial expansion of the O matrix does, instead, is to put us on early alert to the link between minimal utterance and its dream of intersubjective communication through speech. For his opening move—in which "Oh" would have been a feasible if less canonic alternative (fully licensed by the dictionary)—is a line that negotiates in process between the vocal base line of expressive orality, on the near hand, and, at expression's farthest reach, the vocative asymptote of natural communion with inanimate energy. Shelley's speaker as scriptor hovers, in other words, on the very cusp of wording, between an eruptive "O(h)" and the transitional "O-W" on its way to the widened diphthong of "thou."
6. Apart from genre tendencies, the point of departure would have been equivalent in English orthography: "Oh" or "O." Each is available as interjection and vocative alike—as exclamation or a (resultant) summons to audition, clamor or claim, pealing or appeal, calling out or calling to. Just as one might say that "ah" inheres in as well as preceding the word "Mama," so, in this leading genre of Romanticism, is there always a phantasmal "Oh" embedded in the address of every odic shorthand "O." And not just as the linguistic mystification of sound grounding a word, noise an enunciation, sigh a sign—but as a moan of solitude transmuted to communication. Transmuted, rather than ever directly transmitted. That targeted "O" is only the special case, of course, of an underlying fact in this regard. Lyric's raw phonemic matter precedes and equips every strophe as well as the odd apostrophe.
7. Working out of a subjectivity theory where the discursive self is indicated but never anchored by the linguistic shifter, Jonathan Culler, in his influential essay "Apostrophe," has shown how lyric address of this sort is always a kind of projective self-expression (135-54). But this is also true at the phonic as well as the psychological level, where ontologies of self and other get embroiled in phonologies of enunciation. Or, in other words, where philosophy (Hegel via Heidegger to Agamben) confronts linguistics on the absent ground of being. The silent phonemic mark d-o-g appears precisely where the animal isn't, and at the same time carries as inscription no noise, let alone bark, of its own.^[1] Likewise, "wind" has on the page no "breath," coming or going. In both cases, dog and wind, voice is gone from speech as much as from the spoken.
8. Operating still within an axiom of subjective presence, Shelley's poem nevertheless spells out the logic of projective expression as a manifest wish-fulfillment. That, and something more elementary into the bargain: not just a rhetorical vaunt but a phonetic vector as well. The inanimate wind can be spoken to only because it is a willed aspect of the subject—or is wished (fantasized) to be. Between first and third person, between grammatical interjection and descriptive projection—in other words, between the merely expressive "O(h)" and its full-blown apostrophic uptake—comes the immediate middle term of formalized address. But such vocative wording emerges there as a homophone of presence itself, the voice degree zero. Phonic and emphatic before actively phatic, making noise before contact, the monosyllabic sigh at the core of all Romantic sonority is a phonic surge before it can be coded as a monosyllabic signal in some discursive circuit with the Other: in the present case of Shelley's *Ode*, a mere animal venting before it can be enchained in any dream of spiritual ventilation.

Voices / Voice Is / Voice Says: Beneath the Metaphysical Spectrum

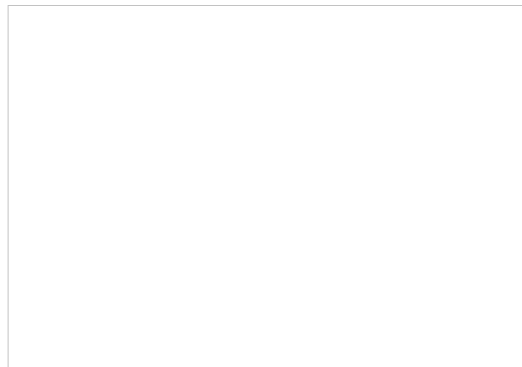
9. Kittler is quick to spot the "O!" ("Ach") in Schiller's title "Spr-ach-e" (3). Yet what his analysis skips over entirely in Schiller's second line might best be glossed by a more recent theorist of vocality, Mladen Dolar, who pays neither Kittler nor poetry the least heed—but who draws intermittently on Agamben's post-dialectical language theory in ways that lead us to the threshold of the latter's revisionary philosophical impulse. We can best close in further on Schiller's German wordplay by circumscribing its implications in advance as follows. Dolar reminds us, following

Agamben (and of course Derrida), that voice is exiled not just from text but even from primary orality itself in its capacity as discourse, where the somatic is inevitably subsumed to the semiotic. I reproduce below a trio of Venn diagrams to this effect dispersed across Dolar's chapters. In each diagrammatic case "voice" is the apparent transit zone—or flange-between a presumed interiority and a desired (or enforced) sociality.



In the first diagram (73), voice connects body with language. In the third (121), and parallel exactly to this transition (once rewritten in Greek) as the channeling of phoné into logos, is the spectrum running, let's say, from a general zoology of animal life to the biographical possibility of definition as a self, a social being. Life becomes a subject, which is always to say a social subject, strictly by the avenue of speech. Here, for Dolar, zoe achieves bios only through—or better to say (and we'll come back to this adjustment momentarily), only by passing through—voice. This is the sense of voice that, in the middle diagram (103), locates the audible interface between subject and Other.

10. But here is where we must stand back. The overlaps involved in all these schema seem at a glance more neutral and even-handed than in fact Dolar wants to show, so that his title, *A Voice and Nothing More*, is almost a (deliberate?) false lead in the setting out, before the full setting forth, of his argument. As clarified by my own reconfiguration below, speech suppresses by definition exactly the brute sonics of voice that its own phonics (taken up as logos)—its own discourse in transmission—may be mistaken to release. Where there is language, "a voice no more," rather than "a voice and nothing more," would be closer to the result.



When voice passes over into intelligible speech, the carrier of meaning is linguistic, not acoustic. Sound goes mute exactly when "voice" is metaphorized as the force of language. Or, pressing harder on the third of his diagrams, say that speech is the alien Other within voice that robs it of body. Not even symbiotic: just alien, invasive. Every language act is the erasure of voice, its suppression by meaning. Dolar so far. But no farther.

11. Hence the point of this essay. The armature of meaning, differential at its linguistic base, remains malleable, edged with its own othering, slippery and relativistic. The differential system that rules out voice from the byplay of linguistic signification is therefore an oscillatory mechanism through which voice itself may seem to stage its phantom evanescent renewal. Literary evidence on this point concerns the way voice returns from its requisite linguistic suppression by wording only in subvocal reading. Thus Schiller's turn, in the capping line of his famous distich: ". . . so spricht, ach! schon die Seel nicht mer" ("so speaks, oh!, no longer the soul"; emphasis added). Note the poet's elision of subjectivity when the skewed echo of the ach is picked out equally in the lost Ich of the first person and its own negation with nicht. In such fading in and out of differences there can be no voiced identity, only its phonemes in dispersal.

12. So, too, in Shelley's *Ode* and its first- and second-person singulars en route to fusion in ". . . Be thou, spirit fierce, / My spirit (l. 62-63; emphasis added), where enjambment, coasting on assonance, helps distend the appositive into intersubjective identification. No sooner installed, the effect is rephrased by further phonetic transfusion: first in the bracketing internal echo between imperative verb and its internalization as an objectified subject in "Be thou me"; and then in another appositive, turning this time on a four-syllabled punning epithet dilated into an almost conflationary rebus—"impetuous one" for the stormy impetus that turns "you" into "us" as "one." Kittler's larger point about nineteenth-century poetry would emerge here as clearly as anywhere: that in place of the soul's speech, poetry tries incorporating nature itself as muse. And the days of this effort are numbered.

Lyric vs. Vampiric Ear

13. With his argument bookended, in effect, by Goethe and Bram Stoker, Kittler could be taken to claim that in *Dracula* the womblike maternal orality that forms the basis of literacy training and the literary muse alike in the romantic discourse of 1800 must, a century later, return to the tomb of mute transcription. This would be a death indexed most notably by the puncture wounds of typography (and their demoted female agency in the new secretarial pools), a death of voice necessary to battle a vampiric transgression of mortality on its own terms. Though not quite spelled out by Kittler, the economy is remorseless. Just as the vampire's giving multilingual tongue to his desire is a speech from beyond life's natural bounds, so he must be bested by a death-defying lifelessness of inscription. What reaches beyond the grave must be recontained by the virtually engraved. The stroke of each typewriter key would become in this sense another nail in the monster's coffin. But only if the letter of text can be trusted.
14. So we get a quite tangential reminder of even writing's shape-changing instability in the capture and conveyance of fact. At one point Jonathan Harker complains in his own longhand rather than shorthand journal, and thus in standard alphabetic succession, about being misled by the (quote) "phonetic spelling" of a Cockney workman-sending him on a wild ghoulish chase to Poter's court rather than Potter's court (Stoker 314). Most readers, and precisely because they subvocalize in the production of a text, are likely to be taken momentarily aback by this thumbnail sketch of a dysfunctional orthography. In this first of two orthographic false leads, a purely scriptive mistake is evident in the man's semi-literate writing. It is only Jonathan's reading that could properly be called "phonetic." A more typical example follows. Jonathan is on guard now, only momentarily thrown off by the transliterated spelling, and quickly decodes "depite," despite itself, as "deputy": the common name that allows him to track down another informant. Mishearing the u as i while thinking to turn the long-e sound of y into a rebus of itself: these more closely resemble the slips accused under the usual heading of "phonetic spelling."
15. By contrast, the mistaking of "Poter" for "Potter" has been yet more revealing as a limit case in the default of orthographic literacy—and as a potential threat to an empiricist dossier on the elusive nosferatu. Derrida might well have ghost-written this passage, or even, less anachronistically, Saussure. The scribble that includes "Poter" doesn't testify to a difference in sound between one and two t's. A doubled consonant in English does nothing to the sound of either component. Its effect is entirely differential, grammatological—not acoustical. The unactivated sound change that results is deferred back to the preceding vowel, which is thus differentiated phonetically by a mark outside itself. The misspelling of the single t, in short, is a graphic miscue that changes the phonemic weight of an adjacent vowel within a strictly literal code. I belabor the obvious only because Stoker has flagged in passing, though under unusual thematic pressure, the mismatch between phonemes and morphemes overburdened by its preoccupation with linguistic transcription—somatic, mechanical, telegraphic, phonographic, and so on. A commonplace phonetic spelling of "Potter's" would be "Pa(h)ter's" or even "Pawders." Most of all, perhaps, what Jonathan trips over here, and we stumble upon by momentary metatextual conundrum, measures the increased (if still only relative) freedom from phonetic ambiguity toward which the scripts and typescripts, to say nothing of the dictaphone rolls, of his own vampire-tracking "discourse network" so obsessively aspire.
16. Nothing could mark more clearly the difference between Shelley and Stoker—between the rhapsodic sublime and the paranoid meticulous; or between lyric vocation and discursive networking—than this policing of the phonetic by the graphic, including its momentary, though nervous and diverting, lapses. But "phonetic spelling" aside, phonemic reading is inevitable, even if only as a kind of transmissive static in the scriptive network—and can sometimes be recruited for rhetorical rather than informational results. So that, even in Stoker (no Shelleyian phonologist he), we come upon the last clause in Mina Harker's journal, with its lament over Quincey Morris's death. As if elegized by

long i's pillowed upon sibilance, "with a smile and silence, he died" — itself a kind of sylleptic slipped gear for "with a smile and in silence." Accompanied by a simultaneous fourfold exclamation from the other vampire hunters of the closural "Amen" (pronounced "Ah-men" by the dead American's British survivors), this is exactly the way men should die, their souls leaving their bodies behind rather than dragging those bodies with them into a perverse mouthing from beyond the grave, whether vocal output or vampirical intake. And I'm thinking here of Mladen Dolar's emphasis, out of Deleuze and Guattari, on the reciprocal relation of eating and speech, translated via Freud into the overlapping zones, respectively, of drives and desire (186-87): the urge seeking satisfaction and the void that names it (for Deleuze and Guattari, the "starving" that is the speech it leads to). This is the same Dolar whose resolute emphasis on voice should lead us back to the philosophic crux of self-nomination in Agamben, where, too, "men" would never be present as constituted beings in the "ah" of an appeal even to the Logos, the self never anchored in prayer any more than in any other kind of enunciation.

17. In this way discussion will be brought alongside Agamben's heuristic search for a potentiality in self-voiced existence that survives the discredited metaphysics of Voice per se. Along a parallel path, literary examples lead us to what we might term a fully deconstructed phontology, where linguistics and philosophy, having emptied out each other's assumptions, might thus relaunch themselves together from a shared crux and crisis. At which point, however, Agamben would seem, so we'll find, to have given over his emphasis on voice, whose role—and with it, for us, that of subvocally engaged textuality—seems no longer directly engaged by a philosophy of the potential. Why not? How might it be otherwise? Why is the valorization of a contingency beyond necessity, as we'll see Agamben defining it, not routed back through the heightened literary convolutions of "phonetic spelling" after all, in instances more ambitious and self-searching than that of Stoker's Cockney botcher? That's where the evidence of this essay would come in, not smuggling back anything like a metaphysical Voice, to be sure, but giving vocality a fresh hearing on the Q.T.—the quiet of its own subvocal performance.
18. The nature of this quiet remains a Romantic (if only to say as well a post-Romantic) question. Somewhere between Faust's bartered lease on life and the Count's countless days—between the poet seeking an immortality in phrased voice that he thinks will compensate for his soul's fate and the damned polyglot soul so committed to leaving his body's imprint that poetic justice requires his being hounded down by textual inscription—somewhere between these poles falls the watershed Victorian moment of a long if ultimately posthumous Romanticism. Somewhere between the reign of lyricism's organic music and a subsequent anti-somatic archive of the living dead falls, as well, the nineteenth-century legacy of textual sound play. Or put it down to the distance between Keats's "This Living Hand"—with its figuration of hand-writing activated from beyond the tomb by reading (and itself a fragment not coming to light until the last decade of the nineteenth century, returned to haunt literary history from the much visited grave of Romanticism)—and Stoker's transcribed Undead. In this respect, we might want to take the nosferatu in his late-Victorian treatment as a veritable caricature of potentiality (in the debased mode of sheer organic recylement). If so, then the collaged chain of texts that isolates and curtails his self-resurgent momentum in Stoker's novel becomes in its turn a deliberate lampoon, and a strategic suppression, of everything figured elsewhere in Romantic verse as the shape-shifting thing "about to be." For under Romanticism the promise set forth, sent forth, even by the inevitable deferrals of any and all wording is everywhere recognized—rather than as the mere undead—to be something not yet let live, an aspect of existence awaiting rather than posthumously resumed. The relevant binary: not dead matter versus living spirit but, as we'll see in comparable terms via Agamben, the undead versus the potential—the latter enacted as such in the self-forged nexus of verbalism's always partially contingent linkages.

Acoustical Ink, Oneiric Hearing

19. Conjuring a paradoxical voice out of life's final silence, Thomas Hardy also seems to be evoking the Undead at the lower limit of humanizing speech, where the primal "ach" of romantic poetry ends up spoken paradoxically by the soul after all—in the absence of body, and thus only from the space of death—in the eponymous first line of "Ah are you digging on my grave." Breath itself is melodramatized in summoning the so-called verb of being. Again, this groan or sigh is literally a far "cry" from Wordsworth's opening line in *The Prelude*, "Ah, there is a blessing in the gentle breeze," which is closer in spirit—and suspiration—to the Faustian "ach" in Kittler's epoch of the organic muse. But by 1850 "Goethe in Weimar sleeps." Thus opens, by lamentary inversion, Matthew Arnold's "Memorial Verses". Wordsworth's tempered voice has gone from the world, too. And it is the subsequent mourning for two English romantics in this same poem, Wordsworth following Byron, that gets more than its share of the prelinguistic "Ah"—and with it a subtextual roiling of further elegiac energy at the phonemic level.

20. "And Wordsworth! Ah, pale ghosts, rejoice!" (l. 34). He is yours now, ". . . and ye, / Ah, may ye feel his voice as we!" (ll. 40-41). Whether mere inversion or the forced march of wishful thinking, the turn of these of awkward, halting (hence, rhetorically, all the more heart-felt?) lines obligates the pause on which it pivots. Given the tmesis of that neo-Goethean "Ah," the "may ye feel" is almost an accidental phonemic shadow of the telescoped alternative, "ye, Ah, may feel"—with the elision of the second "ye" more economical, to be sure, if less breathily felt. As written, the diphthongization is a kind of threnody in its own right. More slowly than otherwise, this long sighing inscription offers the deathless poet, unbodied, to the realm of immortality, where some may feel his power as much "as we" . . . as we did, as we do. Voice itself is figured as somatic (palpable) in these lines, not linguistic, but only by poetic license—and along a sliding scale of displacement. The mystification is all but transparent. The Romantic laureate is to be felt beyond the grave by the Victorians, and by their own poet, not in the wispy or whispering touch of his breathed words but in the abstract feelings generated from the written traces of their prophetic aura of aurality.
21. All but transparent, as I say, this figurative ruse. And yet out of the present "feel" of produced sounds comes something more, or at least something other. For by an entirely unscripted and strictly phonemic enjambment, the clausal "as we!"—so abrupt and lumpen on the page—yields to the melancholy "He too upon a wintry clime / Had fallen" (ll. 42-43, with "He" in a disorienting slant rhyme with the cross-linear iteration "and ye, / Ah, may ye" just before). Yet in precisely this jostling of succession, that wintry decline and fall of the precursor is already redeemed by the previous linear drop, despite the attempted brake of the exclamation mark. By phonetic traction alone, one may say, the Wordsworthian gift lingers on, virtual still, into its aftermath in "Ah, may ye feel his voice as we (!)/ (H)e t/oo. . ." I know no precedent, even in the comic runs of Byronic rhyme, for such a four-word monosyllabic liaison—this unwieldy oronym—yet it is strongly urged upon the ear by the otherwise jolting truncation, syllabic and grammatical both, of the echoic "as we!" [2] And certainly the point is instantly recuperable by an ongoing sense of Wordsworth's "soothing voice" (l. 35): the point, in short, that in the afterlife of its production (figured here as the otherworld of his transumption) its strictly textual—but not therefore silenced—timbre will remain "as sweet too" as it was (and is) for us.
22. I spoke hastily a moment ago. For I can in fact think of four monosyllables operating in something like this extreme cross-lexical mode of phonetic play, not in Romantic or Victorian poetry, or even in English, but in the French title of a linguistic treatise. It is very much in unmentioned keeping with a Romantic aesthetic of dream speech that Dolan's passing stress on the phonetic play lurking at the heart of structuralist linguistics should be linked to the precincts of unconscious dreamplay, jokes, and double entendres in Freud. For the grand metaphonetic punning of Roman Jakobson's French title, *Six leçons sur le son et le sens* (Dolan 146; emphasis mine)—and hopelessly lost in translation in the MIT edition, *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning*—finds mention in Dolan's chapter on voice and psychoanalysis, "Freud's Voices," as an instance of the phonetic repressed of signification and its now facilitated, now blocked returns. In its homophonic recursions, the triple soundplay also happens to be a clear example of Jakobson's "poetic function," where echo is mapped upon an overdetermined succession according to the beat, in certain instances, of a dreamlike code.
23. Such, too, if you will, is the connection in Keats between "Sleep and Poetry"—with its early examples of what Susan Wolfson, in her introduction, has detected for us as the phonemic dormancy in Keatsian script: a veritable "sound asleep." [3] And not least because that early poem by Keats climaxes with the spirit of poetry trying, like Kittler's Faust, or Shelley for that matter in his breathless *Ode*, to hear in the manifestations of nature the inspiration for its own speech. We begin with Sleep personified as a "Low murmurer," the adjectival effect rounded off almost comically by the next line's last word in "pillows" (ll.11-12). In her own edition of Keats, as it happens, without mention of her "sound asleep" paradigm, Wolfson notes how, in the erotic braidwork of the next line's "Silent entangler of a beauty's tresses!" (ll. 14-15), one hears the "poetic wit" of metrical "stresses" as well (33). Then, too, beyond this cross-lexical effect, there is the adjective's quiet anagrammaticization in the immediately following line, where "silent entangler" telescopes under conversion to "listener"—sleep apostrophized as if overhearing its own wordplay. In the same vein, in light of the synonym rest for sleep in Keats's epigraph, we may find further anagrammed in "tresses" exactly what sleep most deeply shares with poetry, besides the visions generated and sustained by each: namely, the recurrent rhythm of rest after stress. For it is in the hum and tumble of phonetic rather than strictly graphic anagrams—rather than in the slide from long to short i, hard to mute t, in silent listen—that reading comes upon the quintessential literary moment nonetheless so named.
24. When Keats's poem waxes Shelleyan toward the end, the chariot of poetic flight encounters the visionary shapes it seeks by converting the previous phonatory "l-o-w" of oneiric audition to the exclamatory and forcefully open-mouthed "Lo! How they murmur." Simultaneously, the charioteer, in Keats's rhyming wordplay, appears as "bent" on

(and in the very posture of) transcribing them as is the dreaming spirit similarly "intent" to audit them in his turn. At this juncture, a juncture both narrative and lexical, the visionary chauffeur "seems to listen: O that I might know / All that he writes with such a hurrying glow" (ll. 153-54), where the familiar epithet of whispered presence ("low") may seem detached at the end, extraneous to all syntax, as a kind of dying fall to the passage beginning "Lo!" If so, that is only a trivial aftereffect to the telling cross-lexical skid—the carefully timed d/rift—just before, where our own listening, cued by that within the poem, springs an unwritten but decisive rhyme. For it is here that the interjective "O" of sheer pre-apostrophic exclamation (at the core of "Lo!" before it) appears to suggest that pure audition might—across the caesura, the epistemological gap itself—become cognition as smoothly as the phonetic ligature at "listen: O" releases the verbal alter ego of "(k)n-ow."

25. With the full-blown Shelleyan verse that this early pastiche by Keats so cannily anticipates, instances of phonetic reading proliferate in the visionary *Triumph of Life*. The reflexive line that impugns the "sceptre bearing line" (l. 268) of violence transforms its word for sword, by phonetic anagram, and across the grammar of hendiadys, when the effect of conquest is said to "spread the plague of blood and gold." Inevitability per se seems coiled upon itself in this alphabetic reknitting of s(c)ept(d)r into spred(t). Another partial phonetic anagram marks the fleeting reconfiguration, rather than the implacable consequence, of cause and effect in "Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost" (l. 431). Given this, one seizes the shimmering moment, as with the visionary "wind-winged pavilion" of the sky's arched dome (l. 442). This stratospheric aegis of inspiration triggers a further heady (and dizzying) syntax of vertical hierarchy and enjambment: ". . . underneath (th') aethereal glory clad / the wilderness" (ll. 442-43). No sooner, that is, does "ethereal glory" seem glancingly posited on the phonemic run as "the"—localized and transcendently contained as its own cynosure, comprising that sublime height beneath which something is further to be located—than the prepositional valence of "underneath" shifts to a new adverbial sense, modifying the transitive verb "clad." Now the canopied glory is realized to rain its glow on the whole subtending world, pervading it by insistent echo, eath/eth, even while effacing the spectral definite article in this transfusion.
26. Via Kittler once more, the Faustian (Goethean) bargain—trading one's mute soul for the voice of poetry—comes true yet again in an oralized alphabetic writing resembling nothing so much as the metonymic skids of the unconscious. All of which can lead, as we know, to nightmare as well as to visionary relief, even in this same poem, when the early "waking dream" initially discloses a vast human "crowd"—the jostling mob of modernity itself—pictured (with the forced air of phonemic friction) to be "half fainting in the affliction of vain breath" (l. 61). Not only does the dislodged morpheme ain seem emerging as an dreamlike root of vanity and dimmed consciousness alike, but in turn this frittered energy takes shape in the phonemic switchback of lexical "motions which each other crost" (l. 62). In the unconscious energy field of phonemic circuitry and its short-outs within the subvocal production of literary meaning, the double-cross can precipitate a visionary option or knot off an ironic one.

The Victorian Turn: Toward a Full-Voweled Novel

27. So far, given this session's gathering of Romanticists as audience (and leaving the brief remarks on Arnold and Stoker and Hardy aside), I've mostly been preaching, or at least intoning, to the converted. On, instead, to Victorian prose. No matter how consonant with romantic themes at the discursive level, the further indebtedness of later fictional language to Romantic experiment can only be told in the voweled curvature as well as the consonantal strokes of its patterned enunciations. Theme is only a precipitant. It is no surprise to say that, like Shelley's or Keats's, Dickens's social vision can at times seem like a waking nightmare, as with the fricative fever and fret of *Little Dorrit*'s last dozen words, their forced-air consonants (recalling "affliction of vain breath" in Shelley) jostling each other as "the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed" in the London rat race. Respite comes, as one might expect with Dickens, in equally phonemic terms, floated upon (in that same paragraph) the sibilant, assonant, and iambic bonding of "inseparable and blessed" to describe the union of the title figure and Arthur Clennam, the man whose fetishistic vision of her impoverishment has seen her until now as a "youthful figure with tender feet going almost bare on the damp ground, with spare hands ever working" (bk. II, ch. 27).
28. Recovering from fever in prison, the autumnal Clennam "sat listening to the voice"—Little Dorrit's voice—as it read to him" and "heard in it" (bk. II, ch. 34) much of comfort. We notice that he is not said to have audited her exactly, let alone her words, but instead to have sensed in its vocal aura, heard in rather than from it, "all that great Nature was doing"—including at the end "the harvests of tenderness and humility that lie hidden in the early-fostered seeds of the imagination." And so on, Wordsworth by the numbers. But there is also a Keatsian or Shelleyan phonology at

work in this, as well as the Wordsworthian tropology. Such is the naturalized harmonics not simply sealed tight by the inverted cognate object of "songs . . . sings" but conveyed along a cadenced phonic slope all its own—like the descent of grace itself—from the bonded vocalic plateau of "great Nature" through the interlaced assonance of "doing . . . soothing" and "all . . . songs" across the rolling iambic declension of vowel tones in "all the soothing songs she sings to men"—with a(h)men the very bracket of this phonetic span. Only Tennyson, among the Victorians, could top this descrescendo with the almost alphabetic rebus of sounded letters in the cosmic trope of "Aeonian music measuring out" (st. 95)—pacing off not just the "steps of time" but the metaharmonic intervals of nature's own scalar duration. With Tennysonian phonemics epitomized by example in this same stanza, the "silent-speaking words" of text, in this case the letters of the dead, give virtual voice to silence rather than merely speaking from it. They do so by lexical wrinkles like the paradoxical "silence-speaking" itself of this same junctural ligature. In Dickens, too, mute typography comes not alive but aloud. This is not paradox or mystification; it is merely a figure of speech for the way speech is somatically refigured in the suppressed articulation of the silent reader.^[4]

29. Such are aural resources that a Tennysonian syllabic ironist like Dickens can elsewhere mobilize, and in the context of epochal dissonance rather than the restorative harmony of *Little Dorrit*, when, in describing the roar of a locomotive in *Dombey and Son*, he generates, beyond onomatopoeia, a kind of phonetic Doppler effect of descending vowel tones in the horrific machine's "shrill yell of exultation." Apart from mimetic phonetics like this, an opposite thinning out of vowel tones can be used to mark the blinkered (or sonically baffling) suppression of the very engines of progress, and their laboring noise, in a passage like the following from Conrad. It is one that looms large for Fredric Jameson's political (rather than phonemic) reading of the hero's latter-day Romanticism in *Lord Jim* and its aestheticizing—and anestheticizing—effect. The tones are familiar ones, compact of assonance, alliteration, and their metered even keel:

. . . . the violent slam of a furnace-door, exploded brutally, as if the men handling the mysterious things below had their breasts full of fierce anger; while the slim high hull of the steamer went on evenly ahead, without a sway of her bare masts, cleaving continuously the great calm of the waters under the innaccessible serenity of the sky. . . ." (214, ch. 12).^[5]

Combining Mladen Dolar's passing Freudian schema with Jameson's abiding Marxist one, we might say of a passage like this that the unconscious of voice itself—its lost organicist mythos—surfaces from inscription along with the attempted return, from beneath the simultaneous meliorations of euphony, of a repressed political unconscious. If so, the euphony is, for Conrad, not just thoroughly but almost allusively Romantic. Think back to Shelley's dead Adonais as he "takes" his rhymed "fill / Of deep and liquid rest, forgetful of all ill" (*Adonais*; st. 7), obliterating thereby all conscious recognition of the "f all" into mortality itself, which only darkens the line on the slant—and no more so than does the "love" ("I of") that elegiacly redeems it. Amid such phrasing's chiasmic (f-ul [I])o-f and cross-lexical repletions, the threefold vocallic onset of "of all ill" could hardly, in the alliterative smoothing-over of its enforced rhythmic pulse, make the "liquid rest" designated by Shelley sound more like a technical phonetic description.

30. But no text of Victorian fiction puts the flow and reflux of phonetic play under more stringent requisition, as the very rescue action of plot itself, than does George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. In the process, Eliot goes Goethe one better. Remember Faust in Kittler caught worrying about how to translate into German "In the beginning was the Word." Eliot tries backdating the crisis in order to evade it. In *The Mill on the Floss*, romantic consciousness defines itself as always and already a translation of nature as langue: a Wordsworthian "language of the sense" thus paraphrased by Eliot as "the mother-tongue of the imagination" (bk. 1, ch. 5). Beyond examples I've noted elsewhere of Eliot's subvocal and cross-lexical effects in this novel, there is a kind of summary instance in the heroine's being described with "an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her" (bk. 3, chap. 5), with the contrapuntal play on straining—the effect (yearning) of an absent cause (harmonious strains)—serving to override, or overwrite, the hint of "near" in "an ear" (235).^[6] As any reader senses, this musical undertext leads inexorably toward Maggie Tulliver's lethal infatuation with Stephen Guest's unctuous baritone voice, which plays, Aeolian-harp-like, upon the heroine's "highly-strung, hungry nature," where, to mix instrumental metaphors, Eliot's phrasing pulls out all the glottal stops with its anagrammatic shuffle of r-ung into ung-r and even, kinesthetically, with the empty swallowing the whole phrase requires. Again (in Deleuzian terms): to speak is to starve. More to the point, I might sound out the gist of this paper so far by calling back a Romantic contrast to such Victorian prose. Put it that Eliot's "strung hungry" is Shelley's "underneath ethereal" under the further narrative pressure of romantic irony.
31. In Eliot, the character closest to Maggie has premonitions of her end that might be called phonemically figured.

Tapping again the relation of language to the unconscious, of sleep to poetry, her disappointed suitor Philip has a nightmare prefiguration of her elopement with Stephen, dreaming in lubricious glottal pulsations that "Maggie was slipping down a glistening, green, slimy channel of a waterfall, till he was awakened by what seemed a sudden, awful crash" (bk. 6, ch. 8). Though merely the sound of a door slamming open, the awfulness drops back into his dream as an partial anagram of the precipitating "waterfall." And when disaster approaches in waking life, the same liquid, guttural ligatures figure it in echo of its premonition. Drifting down the river in silence, the lovers indulge, by velar and glottal tension as well as ethical laxity, in a "grave untiring gaze" of reciprocated desire that seems released from the phonemic chiasm of "solitude" and "twofold" (bk. 7. ch. 13). This time the snare of participial juncture is smoothly mutual and binding, rather than viscous and thickening—as in Philip's vision of a "glistening green" waterfall. Yet no less treacherous. For in the further moral as well as syllabic riptide of this seductive fixation, such a blinkering "gaze" envelopes the oblivious couple, only a few lines later, in an "enchanted haze" that is also, by the lapsarian slackening of ethical vigilance (and the drifting dental sound of "d"), a spiritual "d(h)aze" as well, rapidly disenchanting. Liaison is the problem at the linguistic as well as the ethical level.

32. To resist it, however, produces a brutal recoil from desire, for just before the implacable death of Maggie that such metaphors prefigure, "anxiety . . . beat on her poor heart in a hard, d/riving, ceaseless storm of mingled love, remorse and pity (bk. 7, ch. 2). Erotic denial operates to convert a natural beating of to a traumatic beating upon the heart in a partly anagrammatized "storm" of "remorse" that is also an inner living even before the swollen river takes the heroine down. And in a further dead-ended turn from the same paragraph, again the fricatives of a hemmed-in life so chafe against Maggie in her blocked progress that vibratory soundplay stiffens to irony under the seemingly insistent, even when ungrammatical, double negation "never." For: "It seemed as if every sensitive fibre in her were too entirely preoccupied by pain ever to vibrate again to another influence" (bk. 7, ch. 2). From the midst of Victorian melodrama, phrasing has at this point, among its other effects, a Romantic exactitude in the prepositional relation of self to the world outside it, a relation that goes beyond the keenly plucked imitative echo of "fibre" in "vibr. . . ." [7] For the heroine's despair comes from feeling not that she will never fall "under another influence," but, less passively (and less idiomatically), that she will never "vibrate" (as in resonate) to such an influence—in the full sense of sympathetic vibration.
33. By the time the literal storm arrives, its floodtide "depths" have become a dead metaphor for her brother's final recognition of her love, only to recur as a subvocal epithet of vocality itself, not only in Tom's "deep hoarse voice" as he is "loosing the oars" (bk. 7, ch. 5) but just before that in the heavy stress of Maggie's "long deep sob." Her all but onomatopoetic cry harbors again (typography aside) that primal "ah" or "ach" of Kittler's romanticism, offering an inarticulate signified to the sublimed unitary homophone of Eliot's coming signifier in designating it as "a sob of that mysterious wondrous happiness that is one with pain." Beyond insinuating the "pain" anagrammatically back into "happiness," such is a victory not only at one with, but won from, ruin.
34. Without paying the final price of death, Dorothea Brooke has her own victory deliberated at the end of *Middlemarch* in a way that thematizes the very "medium" (Eliot's word via Hegel) of human life, akin to Tennyson's "element" in the closing stanza of *In Memoriam*:

One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

Moving to time's divine beat in both rhythmic and teleological senses, Romantic pantheism is recast by Tennyson not only as a cosmic masterplot but also as a pan-euphonic suffusion: a kind of phonocentrism writ large. Here, the primal "O" or "ah" of subapostrophic interjection seems hidden in the very principle of duration, as hypostasized in the appositional "one God, one law," and then taken up in chiastic echo within the effortless tip-toe alliteration of the chiastic "far-off divine event." The phonemic common denominator this time: "awe" itself, four times re-sounded in its eschatological chord changes. The open-ended "something ever more about to be" in Wordsworthian Romanticism finds here its more orthodox Victorian curtailment. Last things are immanent in the compensatory revelations of grief. The titles say it all. What was once no more than preludic is here vouchsafed in memoriam. To anticipate our closing return to the concepts of Agambem, Victorian potentialism (if I may coin that term) has channeled the prophetic strain of Romantic verse into a straitened perfectionism with clear teleological horizons.

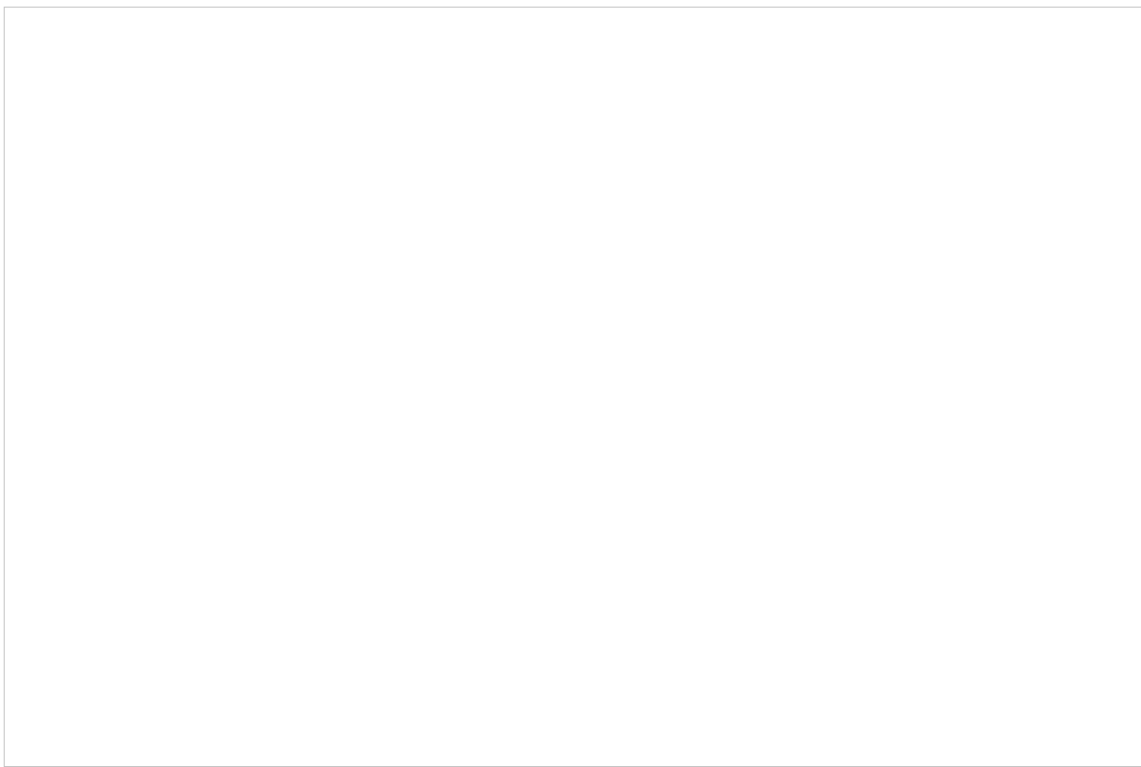
35. A similar socialization of potential operates in George Eliot, though without the Christian vector. Compared to Tennyson, her inestimably more modest but equally self-elemented textual incrementation of historical destiny at the

close of *Middlemarch* begins in the imagination of other secular ordeals presenting (and notice the vocalic escalation) a "far sadder sacrifice" — with an interlaced echoism now taking over — "than that of the Dorothea whose story we know." In Dorothea's case — thanks to narrative, and as emblemized by this pervasive fourfold assonance — personality seems altogether continuous with our knowledge of it, and this across the very "medium," medially refigured here, of alphabeticized story (even though "the medium" in which the "ardent deeds" of earlier heroines like Antigone and St. Theresa "is forever gone").

36. Despite being fenced-in by provincial constraints, "still" (that unstable adverb) Dorothea's impact persists: nonetheless, and even yet, spaced out across the double fold of symmetricalized i sounds: "Her finely touch spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible." To suggest the subtle pervasiveness of her aura, mention of its spread is carried in turn lexically and syntactically as well as phonetically. For "the effect of her being. . ." Here we would expect something like a participial complement: of her being there; of her being always alert to the needs she meets; of her being so grand of heart. Instead: it is "her being," her existence, that is a power in itself: a form of presence needing no epithetical content.^[8] For the sentence rounds itself out by rounding back on its own predicating ontological nomination: "But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive" — as if those last crimped syllabic units themselves were attempting to parcel out and quantify it, before giving up. After all the novel's divisiveness, here diffusiveness.
37. In the novel's last sentence, too, both "Ill" and "half" seem phonetically cured or otherwise fleshed out by the "full" of "faithfully," even as this phonetic cluster releases, in reverse phonetic pattern, f-l flipped to l-f, the heroically cognate object "life": self-definitional object of subjectivity's own duration. For "that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs." This is because, as testified to just above, "the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts." I once heard William Gass mention in passing, and with clear approbation, the deliberate awkwardness of the alliterative phrase "growing good" — by which he no doubt meant to include the snag induced by the middle g. No smooth liaison is permitted, certainly no swift elision.
38. Yet the diffusive linked progress of Victorian perfectibility seems instinct there nonetheless, grammatically as well as rhythmically, overriding the caesura and all the other shocks and setbacks of progression, not only in the emphatic glottal ligature of "growing good" but in the double semantic bond of the words. Marked by the thickened release of "good" from "growing," what we find inscribed from within narrative time is both a phrase for cumulative social improvement and an asymptote of its visionary teleology as well, Tennyson secularized: the immediate "growing betterment" (participial adjective plus noun) as well as, hard on its heels, the "growing [ultimately] good" (gerund plus adjectival complement) that shadows with visionary optimism all tragic sacrifice. In a compressed pivotal dialectic, the form of Victorian eschatology is formulated coextensively with its own historical force — as, so to say, the inherent "growinghood" of the world. To read it is almost to participate in it: the arduous growing pains of Victorian fiction's own evolution out of Romantic sonority. Or another, and forward-looking way, to put this: the very lexicon has been virtualized.

Evocality: the Phonic Imago

39. Dolar's *The Voice and Nothing More* has chapters on the "linguistics of the voice," the metaphysics of the voice, its physics, its ethics, its politics, on Freud's voices, and still in a strictly psychoanalytic vein, of Kafka's. Nothing on the poetics of voice. We made a start at this in my revamped Venn diagram above. But redrawing his set theory as the hierarchical suppression of voice by speech doesn't entirely do the trick. As often happens, Venn diagrams need reconfiguration by the semiotic square. I've given, below, one possible attempt, sprung from Schiller's dichotomy between speech and the spirit's constitutive silence, and overlapped here, vertically, with a variant on the attempt by Kittler's *Discourse Networks* to map the fundamental Lacanian triad onto nineteenth-century media innovation. It is in this way that, for Kittler, phonography records the Real of the voice, the typewriter inscribes the Symbolic order of discourse, and cinema projects the Imaginary of virtual presence (276-47).^[9] You'll note from the italicized categories at the left that I've quietly inserted into the zone of filmic virtuality in that top tier of immanence, instead, the mind's-eye screening (along with the linguistic "flicker effects") of literary reception.



If voice, in the bottom quadrant of this semiotic square, is the neither/nor of orality and literacy, organic noise without enunciation, even as it locates the repressed basis of each, it finds its unexpected contrary—and potentially its phantasmal return—in the uppermost synthesis of the founding dichotomy. Here, in the "imaginary" of literary mediation, unfolds the rolling image track of the script-generated signified, Saussure's "mental image" and its only slightly discontinuous apperception. It is this shifting frame of imaginative projection across which, as maximized by Romanticism, voice oscillates as the return of the repressed in the unreeling of a discrete alphabetic scroll. And it is there that accidents will happen, often on purpose.

40. Degrees of enworlding credibility (or mirage) aside, reading shares something of film's power in the phenomenal activation of a fictive (or at least absent) site. But acknowledging as much scarcely exhausts the sense in which the imaginary exceeds in reading the more obviously symbolic status of written language (rather than projected photo frames). One can insist on this, I think, but only if one goes cautiously. When reading engages coded alphabetic symbols and generates through them a poetic setting in the head, or a narrative scenario, the reader has not entered upon the imaginary via some magic auscultation, some occulted relation to a speaking authorial presence. But orality lies latent nonetheless. The reading of arbitrary symbols passes over to mental image even while recirculating through that imaging the reverbs of a silent enunciation necessary in the first place to differentiate symbolic clusters into given word signals (as in setting off "Poter" from "Potter," just for example).
41. Standard theoretical accounts, in this sense, clamp down on voice too soon. Lower-case it certainly is, that textual voice, but not voided or choked off. Its silenced strains are still in play. Its silence strains, in fact, against lexical constraints, loosing new words en route—or, at the very least, keeping the literary medium in mind, though not strictly in earshot. Even when not sounded out, the phonotext is, we may say, sounded-in: putting any imagined "din" under erasure at least as much as does that scriptive break of juncture in the phrase just italicized. The snags of phonemic sequence cling and linger. Even wholesale aural anagrams grab attention without meeting the eye in a manifest alphabetic shuffle, again sounded-in rather than spelled out. There is no price to be paid in theoretical savvy for noticing this sort of thing, this sorting of the things called lexemes: no sensible skeptic's credential to be surrendered. A salutary leveling of Voice in writing, rooted deep in the currents of postmetaphysical philosophy—or otherwise the deconstruction of the transcendental Word in all its various mystifications—can rightly disenchant the file of the signifier without going so far as to ignore the phonemic enchainment linked by letters but not coterminous with those scripted increments.
42. The imaginary of literary language thus includes the world it conjures and the phonic insurgence it generates. When these effects seem correlated in the reader's subvocal production of the text, suspended or inward aurality is rendered thematic as well as systemic. In any case, we may say that it is virtualitized: become not the residue but the checked

(yet still active) impulse of speech, less vestige than present instigation, an active potential under local constraint. This energy of the phonotext is a possibility lying fallow in the law of the letter—which is to say in the structure rather than the nature of speech. In literary writing, it is a liability in the positive sense, a risk in the form of a dispensation. I spoke above of repressed enunciation and its "potentially phantasmal return." I had better say instead its return as pure potential. In such irrepressible voicings, the generative void sings. This is where deconstructive commentary, to say nothing of media theory, tends to turn a deaf ear. Yet the imaginary phonotext—pulling the symbolic field part of the way back toward the real, and thereby obtruding the fact of sound back into the circulations of sema—eludes Dolar's post-Derridean model, with its arrest of all embodied vocality by an abstracting semiosis. Alphabetic—which is always to say phonemic—reading also falls outside the discourse network reduced to media technology in Kittler. Subtending even the local static of such a network and its inevitable interferences, isolated thereby in the imaginary sonics of phonemic silence (beyond any mechanics of impress), wording goes about its inscriptive work while continuing to reverberate in a toneless undertow not noted by manifest spelling. Accidents, yes, will happen. Accidence too. What lies fallow is as if allowed by the license of the letter under the rule of flaw.

43. In such moments we discover, but only by evincing it in ourselves, the productivity of text as subvocal performance. In this way the negative may in fact be paradoxically gainsaid by the inoperable positive. In literary writing, alternative phrasings audibly proliferate. And have their use value. For if subvocal production makes the exchangeable matter of writing a latent manner of speaking after all, virtualizing script as the sheer ongoing possibility (never the present fact) of transmitted utterance—giving thought to such utterance, as it were, rather than giving it voice—then a new conceptual horizon comes into view. Maybe such a Romantic legacy of phonotextual encounter could serve to model and propagate, in its own right, an "indwelling" ethics beyond negativity—as advocated for in other terms, though also by linguistic association, in a writer like Agamben. We're about to gauge the quite specific (if, I suppose, fitly elusive) idea of potentiality in his revisionary enterprise, and in so doing take some measure of the ethical implications of its paradoxical basis in the transgressed law of noncontradiction. But the point of the literary examples so far, as I'm hoping might be already clear, is a not unrelated one.
44. In terms of communicative chains forged from subacoustical links and phonemic kinks, the negated subjectivity of language, however aesthetically mobilized, is the very source of a textual ethics of intersubjectivity. Think of textual exchange as the mute sociality of reading, a textual commotion born of suspended communion—suspended, not cancelled. Arrested for redirection. The exchanged and commodified text is infused, then, with its peculiar utility in having been drained of all voice. Not just taken up in reading, the phonotext is given over as the reader's for the making. The resultant feedback loop of silent enunciation becomes, in part, an image of myself as Other: not a parasitic incorporation of the Other, as in the often telepathic metaphors of phenomenology, but an offering up of my own body to the energized page, and through it to the reach of thoughts beyond me, thoughts both floated on and plumbed by subvocal soundings. At stake here is not some idealized conversion of inert text to inner text, a founding voice resuscitated by our presence to it, with expression returned to the depths of an anchoring orality. Reading instead produces voice from scratch. We motivate in silence all that can survive and reanimate another's script. Vampires are us—though not so much in intake as by the energies of regeneration. Transforming the negative of the Other's inscription through the half-involuntary force of our subvocal enunciation, we are the Undead of text. Vampires are us, but only because the mouth of the silent reader is needed to sustain the afterlife of writing.
45. That afterlife—if I may put it this way again, and adduce now the fuller philosophical orientation that would invite it—is writing seen under the paradoxical aspect of its present potential. To explain this requires a review of explanations elsewhere given to a problematic far vaster than literary poetics but not, I think, entirely tangential to it. For Agamben, the problem for metaphysics converges with that of linguistics most obviously around the limits of nomination. Ontology tries declaring and defining the fact of "being" when it can only name it arbitrarily, just as linguistics, in naming "language," never brings the precedent fact of it to light, just its systemic inner workings. In this context, Agamben cites Wittgenstein on the way names fall out of normal discourse as a different kind of function from propositional statement. Quoting the *Tractatus*: "I can only name objects. . . . I can only speak of them. I cannot assert them" (69). Onomastics is not ontology. This is the conception that we may see Shelley, and the Romantic apostrophe at large, straining to outbid—even as the lyricist of the "O" or "Oh" turns its address back on the subject as a reified self-assertion. To wit, again: "Be thou me, impetuous one." Shelley, in not being satisfied simply to name the "West Wind," but in effect contriving an Ode to it that will personify its energy as coextensive with the speaker's, and hence permit the intersubjective gambit of the poet's own inspirational equivalence with it, tries the impossible task of asserting nature. But neither existence, nor for that matter coexistence, can be proven, let alone manifested, in our names for them. That's where Agamben digs in his heels on the most slippery of ontological grounds.

About "To Be": the Slipstream of Predication

46. When the study of literature took "the linguistic turn," as we all remember, such are the vagaries of academic and institutional trends that it was Derridean deconstruction and psychoanalysis, not linguistics, that became the interdisciplinary benchmarks for poetics and narrative theory alike. One reason comes clear from Agamben's magisterial review of the "linguistic turn" in philosophy, on the occasion of reviewing new work in language theory by Jean-Claude Milner.^[10] For philosophical thought had already taken up the crisis faced independently (or at least separately) by the science of language. Philosophy's millennial assignment to think thought itself—to define the grounds of being-in-the-world in a way that cannot, in fact, be hypostasized as inner voice—finds its close parallel in the far and paradoxical horizon of language theory. Which is to say the challenge, not faced up to (let alone faced down) by linguistics proper, to speak of the fact of language without a metalanguage: to speak voicing itself, the *factum loquendi* (73). Agamben borrows from Milner to show how linguistics doesn't really take language per se as its object of study, "but only as its axiom" (66). One may say that linguistics has no choice but to presuppose what it can only name (without asserting—or asseverating). As the science of being rather than speaking, ontology takes existence as given in a similar way. It does not in this sense probe to first causes. What comes to the fore, then, is not simply a close parallel between philosophy and linguistics, or even a deep homology. But something more, too.
47. Agamben arrives just at the brink of acknowledging that the problematic of each discipline comes down to the same thing, or the same imponderability of the thing: that thing called language in its role of naming existence, and at the same time that thing called existence as more than a name. Each impasse dissolves into the other in their provocation and insolubility: how, on the one hand, to voice the ground of being in the fact of speech; and on the other, for instance, how to say "I" without meaning something else—or less—than identity. (I am trying to pin down with examples the abstractions through which Agamben's discussion moves.) If "I am I" is one aggravated instance of the ontological and linguistic problem alike, in another sense it is also—in the circularity of its self-constitution—the escape clause: the egress into immanent contingency, into *potentiality as an ontological existent* rather than a mere alternative to what is. This locus of thought in the 1990 Agamben essay deserves a somewhat patient revisiting before attempting to estimate its immediate—because medial—relevance to literary praxis, by which I mean to its impact on reading as well as writing.
48. In pursuit of such an intersection of linguistics and philosophy, language and existence, the Hegelian legacy of the determinate negative has for Agamben been played out, even the Aristotelian law of noncontradiction. It must be possible, he thinks—as if by the very definition of possibility—for things to be in one and the same moment other than they are. Contradiction is not eradication. "Philosophy and Linguistics" appears nearly a decade after Agamben has worked through the Heideggerean bond between language and death that had come to define as well the notion of *thanatopraxis* in Derrida's thought (unmentioned as such by Agamben) during these same years: where the absence proven by the presence of signification runs all reference into the grave even while carrying the enunciating subject back to the unspoken conditions of speech itself. As hinted at the end of Agamben's earlier and exhaustive seminar published as *Language and Death*, the reason to confront with full rigor the equivalence between speech and absentation in philosophy is in fact to get beyond what the subtitle termed "The Place of Negativity."^[11] Unless language can be construed as more than the immediate nonexistence of its objects, the necessary deprivileging of voice would seem in its own right to close out any such move toward community.^[12]
49. In this respect philosophy is wed inextricably to a theory of language. Writing of the philosopher's role at the end of *Language and Death*, Agamben might as well be writing of the poet's: "A philosopher is one who, having been surprised by language, having thus abandoned his habitual dwelling place in the word [with 'habitual dwelling place' being Agamben's recurrent paraphrase of the Greek *ethos*], must now return to where language already happened to him. . . the taking place of language in a Voice, in a negative: that is, the *daimon* itself as *ethos*. . . ." (93-4). If the yield of that return seems opaquely imagined here, this is because it is by definition forever provisional: a permanent experiment, a perpetual gesture of the unsettled. The revisited bond between ontology and nomination in the 1990 paper "Philosophy and Linguistics" is somewhat clearer than this, at least, in its programmatic hopes, even in the very haziness of its utopic "place" beyond—beyond not just Hegelian dialectics but Aristotelian logic. Without the self-canceling move into otherness via negation, philosophy's assignment, as Agamben puts it bluntly, is to imagine how a thing might be what it isn't. The oldest rule in logic—the law of noncontradiction—must be breached by the ethical imagination. And not just as a retroactive possibility—but instead, one might say, as a proactive f(act), a performative potential. When Agamben asks climactically, and cryptically, in "Philosophy and Linguistics," whether

one shouldn't try saying "what seems impossible to say, that is: that something is otherwise than it is?" — "otherwise" rather than "not," multiplied without being first denied—he has posed his problematic in the sharpest interrogative terms.

50. Agamben's speculative venture rests on the fact that the shared term between being and speaking, ontology and linguistics, is contingency. In science after Galileo, as he reminds us, and under the Aristotelian principle of a merely "conditioned necessity" (75), things can be deemed true without being absolutely necessary or essential. Again, examples can't hurt—even if not Agamben's. The sun couldn't revolve around the earth, that's right; but an earth like ours might have revolved around another sun. I am not you, true; but I needn't have been exactly this me. At macro and micro levels, such is the contingency principle in scientific empiricism. In this sense, and here lies Agamben's resistance, "possibility" has traditionally been confined to the pluperfect tense, an ontological rear-view mirror, attuned only to what could conceivably have been, not to what can be immediately conceived—as, for instance, still or even now possible. His envisaged wrench to philosophy amounts, therefore, to angling contingency into the future through the present: recovering for the age-old category of "the potential" a status as immanent rather merely prospective, let alone retroactive and outruled. The linguistics of this, so to speak, would be to cast the contingent not just into a grammar of the conjectural future or the conditional perfect but into a more active syntax of the present subjunctive. Not just "things might be other than they are." Or "might someday be." And certainly not just the weak epistemological sense that "Things might be other than they seem." Rather, Agamben is after the strong sense that (and I paraphrase here what we encountered before in its full paradoxical affront): "Things may, even now, be other than they are." The contrary-to-fact is not unreal, just unactualized. The virtual does not hover, it inheres. And if immanent contingency has a linguistics (even this only implicit in Agamben's essay), what about a poetics?
51. Rhetoric reminds us that speech needn't mean what it says. A philosophy of pure potential leaves entirely behind any such halfway house. We have come a long way in this kind of thinking from philosopher Stanley Cavell's Austinian *Must We Mean What We Say?* For Agamben, philosophy, to renew its power of thought, must be made to come into some radical and liberatory alignment with a theory of language whose rule of the negative (the nonpresence marked by sign) is so far overthrown that—as paradoxical as this would be meant to sound if Agamben had actually articulated the parallel between linguistics and philosophy on this score—things conjured in language need not mean what they mean. Custom can be dishabituated. In the final stretch (in every sense) of "Philosophy and Linguistics," however, as before at the close of *Language and Death*, any strictly linguistic valence of this immanent potentiality falls away from discussion. Yet what I just called the "liberatory alignment" between the two conceptual zones of antimetaphysics and phonemography, counter-ontology and phontology, can sometimes wait latent, to take just the example in hand as model, in something like the fleeting ambivalence (overriding even official pronunciation) of a single phrasing. In this case, the force of the "liberatory" might be shaken loose by the more openly liberatory (for oscillatory) effects of subvocal text production. But to librate (rhyming in fact with vibrate) is eventually to seek rest by balancing out its wavering motions. When given over, by contrast, to full phonemic viability, soundplay within and across lexemes may instead permanently unsettle a given designation—reassigning it (though undecidably) to an alternate junctural enunciation on the spot.
52. So let it be clear that, for all Agamben's veering from linguistic matters at just the point of their imputed convergence with philosophical ones, literary implications have scarcely fallen by the wayside. Indeed, almost a third of a century after the "linguistic turn," interdisciplinary literary study might after all find new legs on this paradoxical footing broached by Agamben, new habitus on this strange untrammelled ground—once its heady paradoxes are, by a poetics of contingency, brought down to verbal earth and its morphophonemic turf. For literature isn't simply the place where things never are, even as they seem—the place of sheer fiction. In literature, rather than in a metalanguage about it, and in poetry preeminently, things, more immediately, do not entirely or exclusively say what they say. Once "vocality" is reimagined from the waver and give of textual inscription, it is always at base equi-vocation, a case of present contingency—evincing, without vouching for, the existence of a potential otherness in one and the same wording.
53. Isn't this at least one thing that a poetics of alterity and ungrounded vocality might help school us in perceiving? Or at least in half sensing as we read? How far-fetched is it to think that such textual effects might, in turn, even go some way toward acclimating us, at least by analogy, to the always estranged—no matter how intimately engaged—habitus of the Other? The apostrophic embrace of nature's otherness in Romantic poetry would certainly not balk at such a possibility. But toward this end, the contingency of all being must be encountered not just straight on but deep down. Here is the sharpest wedge driven by Agamben's anti-metaphysical thrust. Here is what he's really asking, and asking of us in following his flight of thought: if contingency is an axiom of nontranscendental ontology, what then,

pushing harder on this postulate, is the being of contingency, its present-tense existence? And what, correlatively, is the being of potentiality—not its undeniable possibility, but rather its immanent existence? If the contingent and the potential are ontological givens, how can they be felt to exist in the now of their apprehension? And so we come, then, upon the resonant, the logically discordant, the rapt and provoking, the frustratingly opaque and at the same time utopically ingratiating, note on which Agamben ends. As already excerpted above, the question is so rhetorical that the present essay wants to imagine some part of its answer as lying with the phonemic underlay and ligatures of rhetoric's own subvocal figurations. "Is it possible, in other words," writes Agamben, "to call into question the principle of conditioned necessity, to attest to the very existence of potentiality, the actuality of contingency? Is it possible, in short, to attempt to say what seems impossible to say: that something is otherwise than it is?"

54. Again the intriguing intersection with Deleuze's reconfigured sense of Bergsonian "becoming" and the virtualities that manifest it in progress.^[13] Replacing "conditioned necessity" (in Agamben's sense out of Aristotle) with what might be termed instead an imperative contingency, the virtual stands to the actual, or subtends it, as its condition of possibility. And where better than in literary writing to find a sounding-board for the sense that alternatives can be copresent and animating rather than monitored by negation? Rephrasing Agamben: If it does indeed seem "possible, in other words, to call into question the principle of conditioned necessity," wouldn't it be precisely the "other words" of ontology's linguistic equivalent in vexed groundedness that might help acquaint us with the rhythm of all such suspended negativity, help us practice it, so to speak—by entertaining that othering from within that is the very function of literary words in subvocal speaking? Potentiality would in this sense be not proleptic, but, again, a present force in consciousness. It is here that wordplay itself could be seen to do the work of philosophy—where, for instance, to put it directly in terms of Agamben's triangularion of voice, death, and negativity, the ricochets of language can themselves remind us (via oronym and metalinguistic irony) that "never say die" is possible only for those who "never said I."
55. Taken verbally as well as ontologically, then, and directed back into romanticism, Agamben would thus help rethink Wordsworthian imminence as a kind of immanence in its own enunciative right. Alternate verses, like alternate universes, operate by "intimations." In the ode that goes by that shortened name, what is most to be blessed in recollection are "Blank misgivings"—like a kind of double negative, but not quite. Here instead is an uneasiness not cancelled or effaced but merely held latent in the face of a sense(d) sublime: "Blank misgivings," as the line continues, "of a Creature / Moving about in worlds not realized" (146-47). Complementing the overt philosophic cast of the last participle, for not yet "actualized" rather than merely not yet recognized, Wordsworth's verse, in and beyond the *Intimations Ode*, is often levitated on words as well as worlds that feel churning in a line without being fully conjured into print, fleeting evocations neither quite seized upon by the lyricist as yet nor brought to be in reading. But dormant and motivated, one may come to think.
56. In Wordsworth's *Ode* on intimation in recollection, pure virtuality is tagged in retrospect as engaged potential—and precisely in its revelation about the inner world of our "mortal Nature" (l. 148). Imminence becomes essence under the sign of potentiality. An almost tedious (almost, except for the ironic changes rung on it) leitmotif of the *Intimations Ode* is sounded early on in the cognate object "sing a joyous song" (l. 19): echoic token of that pastoral "There was a time" (l. 1) when birds were everywhere and full-throated—and where the epithet "joyous" was as taken for granted, in the tautologies of the prefallen, as that prelinguistic song sung. Later, we get instead the rather desperate "I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!" (l. 51)—and the immediate "But" that heralds the lone tree of known solitude. Sadder yet, in the scapegoat hero's compressed Bildungsroman, the "growing Boy" (l. 69) soon gives up "his joy" (l. 71) in the lingering glimmers of childhood, a bliss he travesties in the perverse "new joy and pride" (l. 103) with which he "cons" (l. 104) an adult's role, adulterating his every immediacy. Faced with "all that is at enmity with joy," the poet must now resort to the risked hollowness of apostrophe in urging upon nature what it once gave unbidden: "Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!"—where the sing-song nostalgia of this wish cannot be muted or overlooked. All told, what must be rescued from this vocabular excess of "joy" and "joyous," this attesting-too-much across the arc of the poem—and rescued as if dialectically—is something in excess of grief's opposite pole, nameable only by periphrasis in the transegmental slippage of the last line, so seldom quoted whole: "Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears," where "that do often" must be released from the "too often" (which its emphatic auxiliary also sounds) in order to celebrate those philosophic soundings that never can come frequently enough. I have written before about the allegorical setting, two stanzas earlier, for this tearless spiritual depth, when the "immortal sea / Which brought us hither" (ll. 165-66) can still be repaired to—and where we can "see" (and, by sibilant drift, hear) "the Children sport upon the shore"—as if that symbolic site were, which it is, their "port" of entry into this world (*Reading Voices*, 155). In such moments, the normalized growing child who "fits his tongue / To dialogues of business, love, or strife" (ll. 99-100) may seem counteracted in process by the reader whose loosed even

if unmoving tongue, never fitted exactly to the inscribed lexeme, slips over the crevices of poetic device, tracing "too deep" for text—like trailing clouds of uncloud glory, in all their silent possibility—those shadow words that lend a linguistic register to the otherwise ineffable "fallings from us, vanishings" (l.145). Nothing of the implausible metaphysics of this poem, let alone its specific Neoplatonic decor, need obscure what comes to light, and to ear, by such associations about a continuous human potentiality modeled in verse itself.

57. One more exemplary passage from this foundational Romantic text, and then a last novelistic comparison. Given the burden of "joy" in Wordsworth's poem, as it awaits this final conversion into a sublimity beneath tears, the iterated monosyllable (harboring always a tacit outburst of "o" at its heart) is all but manifest as the identified quintessence of the poem's genre form. For the very word "ode" of the title flashes momentarily up from lexical juncture in that pivotal but rather forced exclamation "O joy!" (l. 129)—ode/joy—and, in doing so, tunes the mind's ear in anticipation of the banked crosslexical metaphors by which the phrase "our embers," in the same line, is spread out syllabically (and fanned up figuratively) into the rekindled spark of "yet remembers" (l. 131). So once again, too, with such a textual effect in subvocal mind, a compelling line of descent sketches itself between Romantic visionary enterprise and Victorian novelistic sonority. For what breathes the oxygenating energy of the spirit's revival across the transformation from "—r embers" to "r(em)embers" is a phonemic distention not unlike that which, in Dickens's most Wordsworthian novel, is introduced to swell the silent—all but penumbral—last letter of "solemn" as it waxes into the new noun "moon" in David Copperfield's childhood reverie over graves "below the solemn moon." (ch. 2). There the dilation of one word into another is a rare syncopated function of silent lettering and phonic ligature together. Elsewhere, the paced and exclusively phonemic ripples of such effects may seem, channeled and contained by syntax, to be as barely perceptible and effortless as the intimated rhythms of ruminated duration itself.
58. Intimated, estimated, and closely timed: clocked by the fast paced—fast spaced—misfires of the determinate across the terrain of its own groundlessness. Even the famous peroration to book six of *The Prelude* allows this essay's meditated convergence of ontology and language to be heard "moving about" in a wording not wholly permitted, let alone "realized," by the graphic codes of punctuation, but there nonetheless. *The Prelude*, that is, always and already pre-visionary as well as provisional by title, takes as its true subject "something ever more about 'to be.'" And does so not just by addressing even while becoming its own imminence, but also by encircling it ("about" in this third, positional sense as well), rimming its very vocabulary with "underpresences" and overtones.

Contingent Seas of Thought

59. Newtonian positivism in *The Prelude* voyages upon unknown oceans for its discoveries, those "strange seas of Thought" (III, 64) by which fundamental conceptions get reoriented and eventually normalized. In Romantic phonology, by contrast, estrangement is retained within: the most venturesome wording latently othered to itself by way of phonemic contingency. It is as if any phrasing, whether involuted or apparently streamlined in structure, may offer a potent shell of meaning held up to the inner ear of its own potential: its own clear (or near) rehearing. For a final exemplary wash of sound and its phonology, we can turn back to Shelley. "All things exist" for the perceiver, Shelley writes in setting forth his "Defence of Poetry," only "as they are perceived."^[14] All potential is thereby constrained by the existent, curtailed: "But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subject to the accident of surrounding impressions" (790). One way of characterizing this lifted curse is to recognize it as in part a phonetic dispensation—a new linguistic license. Transcribing what the mind sees surrounding it, around and in front of it, poetry can sound out other images in the same descriptive words. The rescinded ban that would otherwise imprison audition within the said—confine it to suffocation—finds a quintessential phonemic instance within the final ontological regress of Shelley's own closing figuration in the *West Wind Ode*. Wind, as figure of poetic afflatus or inspiration, is an "unseen presence" (invisible; its effects on the subject strictly epiphenomenal). In its metonymic relation to the season, however, Shelley's wind, with all its surface effects, is also the recessional index of a further unseen presence. The latter looms as the organicist abstraction of Odic transcendentalism itself, where "thou breath of autumn's being" means not, as noted at the start, the pulmonary rhythm of an embodied creature but the vital pulse of a seasonal essence, manifested by gusts whose momentum, as now to be stressed, is temporal as well as spatial.
60. Nature moves, and moves the speaker: moves him to identify with it as human vessel of its external impulsion. At the same time, temporality moves forward in a calendrical inevitability that gets cathected as promise. The wordplay to this effect is suitably effortless, inevitable. What goes without saying is here a saying that barely needs phonemic channeling around the windy enjambment: "O Wind, / If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" What happens so

easily in language of this reflexive grain, so naturally as it were, is the revelation of sheer potential—its felt existence, not just its axiomatic status—made present in the internal slant rhymes ("wind"/"winter") of the closing syllabic run. Rounding off the line, the straggling disyllable "behind"—with its outdistancing echo of "be"—takes up the rear from the preceding "Wind" as well, and this with its purely inoperable sight rhyme, useless, inactive, and mute. Yet, just before, the apostrophic naming of nature—the encounter with language's primal otherness—finds so relaxed a link between the autumn "Wind" and its hardening through "wind-y" into "wint-er" that change and transformation, beyond all etymology, seem to inhabit the lexical register itself. The move to project the harbingering autumnal wind into winter so as to sweep through toward a vision of spring is, in extrapolation from Agamben's terms once more, a case of poetic language saying what it doesn't say in soundless echo of its own present eventuality.

61. But hold the line open in its possibilities, open to itself, for a moment or two longer—by apprehending something more than its stationed metrical upbeat. It is not just that iambic impulse in "can spring be far behind" telescopes the two-word adverb into its one-word adjunct, in the process turning the ultimate predicate of existence into a mere prefix ("be" into "behind"). It isn't, in short, just this folding over each other of the Kantian intuitions of space and time—collapsed into a strictly temporal dead metaphor of topographic lag—that is enforced upon attention by this phrasing. Time is put more severely out of joint yet. And precisely by being made to seem contingent in its very sequence. "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?": out of context, an entirely logical query, so logical as to circle round on itself as a so-called rhetorical question, answering only to its own indubitable premise. But in the present apostrophic and figurative context—in a phrasing addressed to the essence of autumn, one season back—logic is eroded by a more anxious reach for visionary prognosis. In this sense, Shelley's phrasing harbors an extreme limit case of "conditioned necessity" that only an environmental (as well as ethical) crisis like global warming, for instance, helps make felt in post-romantic retrospect. In the poem's historical moment, however, his is an address, an appeal, that can count on the natural cycle of the seasons, can readily steep its tropology of restoration in the certain circuit of their transitions.
62. Consider, then, the gist of his peroration in a far more sensible alternative: "O [wild autumn] wind. . . when winter comes, can spring be far behind?" What would thereby be gained through such an alliterative onomatopoeia (in echo of the opening line's triplicate breathiness) would at the same time have to tally its losses in forfeiting the feathery overtone of "windy" in the given line's "wind, if." More importantly, the heavier alliteration (effected by "when" instead of "if") would also surrender the inherence of the contingent even in the inevitable, thus normalizing the whole gesture of the question. As stands, however, the line asks en route, if just for a hovering moment of verbally self-availed possibility: "O Wind, if winter comes, can spring be. . . ." In temporal rather than strictly logical terms, not only is it a vernacular impossibility—short of some apocalyptic sense of last days—to say "if winter comes" (even within some general figurative sense of "the winter of our discontent"); so, too, is it anomalous to ask, in any familiar (rather than rigorously philosophical) sense, whether—in the grip and midst of such a winter's coming—spring too can be: can subsist as pure potential, even before the icy season subsides. But so the poem, in a temporal passing of its own, has the sound of asking. Its closing interrogative hinge marks, in sum, the pivot of a spectral because lectoral reciprocity. With time itself lifted into the contingent, imminence and immanence lose their distinction. The future is as much now as anywhere, springing upon us, springing up in us.
63. Certainly Shelley's text, in its aspirations (in the full etymological sense) toward being the "trumpet of a prophecy," is about the ethics as well as the aesthetics of the virtual, about the hope of the regenerative, as breathed through poetic speech. Nearly two centuries later, Agamben's writing has increasingly come to offer one Continental rallying point, along with the work of Levinas and others, for the spate of Anglo-American scholarship in the ethics of literature. And beyond his influence on Dolar's thinking about voice, Agamben places a recurrent definitional stress on ethos as the "accustomed dwelling place," where zoe, as sheer animal existence, enters upon the biosphere of communal subjectivity, and where, given the moral ravages that have resulted from difference as negativity, it is indeed a compelling utopianism to imagine others as not what they are, to imagine the different rather than just the plural of constitutive differences. Think of it (my terms again, not Agamben's) as the otherwise before it hardens into an otherness. But literary study has no obligation to think any such newly immanent contingency just as a feature of the real as represented. Why not look as well to where such contrapositive energy has always been found in literature: as a function of literary representing per se, the writing itself? The real lair of the potential lurks not so much in textual meaning as in the production of that meaning, always in process.
64. One unspoken lesson of Agamben's "Philosophy and Linguistics" and the luminous essays that surround it in the opening section on "Language" in *Potentialities*, as of *Language and Death* before it—even though the very issue of

linguistic potential is not pursued to its own conclusions in either case—can readily be educed as follows. Language, up against its limits in naming its own existence, eludes them from within by the continuous repotentialization of its signifiers. Metalanguage cedes to undertext, in new and unbidden circulations of the reading act. This does not generate a definitive philosophy of language, to be sure. But it may disclose the philosophical working of language as constituting in its own right a refreshed poetics. What, then, would keep us from contemplating this zone of linguistic interplay as a place of ethos as well, even a laboratory for it, rather than some separately conceived field of hermetic fluctuation?

65. Why shouldn't the byplay and counterplay of literary writing help us, in short, to conceive ethos as the experienced space of cognitive duration, an always shifting habitus of articulation within temporality? Located there would be the "accustomed dwelling" of the communicative word under continuous renewal—both rehabilitation and perpetual rehabilitation. Such is the place where, up from the indwelling could well a difference inherent to it, not quelling representation but expanding it. Let us readily accept as given that the dethroning of Logocentrism is the beginning of a secular ethics in the social sphere, empirical, contingent, where alternatives might become immanent, purposeful, and reciprocally conversant. But in exploring more particularly an ethics of literature, why isn't there a potent (because always potential) way to return from ethos through logos—and this by passing beyond the toggle of the dualistic to the freer oscillation of the virtual, where, for instance, ambiguity resolves itself not dialectically but in the relentless becoming of flux itself?
66. The interdisciplinary wager of this essay—its venture in, if you will, the philosophy of linguistic oscillation—should allow us to sum the matter in the broadest terms. Where desire speaks, there there is lack. That we've well learned. And nothing can take up this slack. So too, for traditional philosophy as well as for psycholinguistics: Where being speaks, there there is absence. And two nugatory positives make only a negative. There is no there there. Where being speaks, there are only words; whence being speaks, there is no saying. The origin of voice cannot be named by speech. But why can't literature—again, not as a metalanguage but as an undertext—make it possible to voice that placeless source, and the virtualities of its constitutive otherness, precisely in such a way that each verbal incident comes to us shadowed by the present tinge of the contingent?
67. The literary ethos in this quasi-spatial sense, as marking out its own accustomed place of imaginative outlay and divestment, is perhaps the complement—but certainly the opposite—of anything taken up from the sociological work of Michel de Certeau and advanced as the route to critique and reappropriation within cultural studies. Given the requisite flexibility of linguistic "double articulation" (morphemes comprised of phonemes even before they can go to compose lexemes), reading is vagrant—multivalent—by definition well before it can be construed as "nomadic" by choice (de Certeau 165-76). In the latter respect, as in all others, reading is of course, in de Certeau's often borrowed title, *A Practice of Everyday Life*. It is also a praxis of response to everyday linguistic production, a response manifest in the processing of "ordinary language" as illuminated by its philosophy, rather than sociology, from Austin to Cavell.^[15] With readers "poaching" what they want from a text in de Certeau's sense, targeting the happy anomaly, skimming the cream, they must also submit at a more elementary level—and as made evident by certain efforts of literary exaggeration—to the skid of its lettering as such.
68. In Romantic poetry, for instance, and its Victorian derivations and attenuations, anything nomadic is anticipated by the sporadic: those irregular phonemic rhythms entrained to signification in the first place—but not entirely enchained there. Conceived as delimiting a verbal habitus or ethos, verse instigates a traverse whose unruliness is grooved deep into the genesis of phrasing—and of its evoked and self-raised alternatives—rather than merely awaiting some transgressive gesture on the reader's part. Poaching, lifting, stealing, peeling off: all common. But so, in the other and prior sense, is the drifting along of latency and reactivation from word to word: the stealing of phonemic suggestion across the ridges of script, its audiovisual sidle and slide. Laterally, collaterally, meaning is leached from the phonemes that unleash it. Words, in short, encroach upon and poach from each other even before we from them. Every day.
69. In literature, though, it happens by design rather than by default. Each sense of verbal impingement, whether associations are stolen upon or by us, has, no doubt, its ethics of resistance. If less often than one might wish to think, tactical scavenging can indeed undermine, or at least chip away at, an ideological edifice of representation. And more often than one might stop to think, the frictional resistance of phonemic apprehension keeps the semiotic basis of representation itself from facile stabilities. Automatically even before nomadically, by the oxymoronic license (once again) of present contingency, just as an effusive and climactic "O joy!" fuses into the recursive titular phantom "Ode joy," so every "Ode to the West Wind" is otherwise, yet at one and the same time, an "Oh to the West

Wind." Voice is no sooner subsumed to the formal genres of print poetics than it resurfaces there in manifestations immanent even if "not yet realized." In the overlapping schemata of fig. 3 again, voice returns from the double negation of both speech and silence into the imaginary of the virtual, potentiated there—as potential still, of course, rather than actual—by the act of reading. An immersion of this sort in the deep ethos of literature, in its placeless disposition of indwelling effect, refuses the complacencies of the inscribed. Its vigilance remains more nervous. This is to say that, in any phonemanography of response to the silent babel of text, reading will not be policed by script into leaving lost tones unturned.

Notes

¹ By contrast, and to anticipate something closer to the turn of Agamben's thought perhaps, the generalized apostrophe "Beware of the dog"—as speech act rather than common noun in clausal context—absents the animal's presence (regardless of its visibility at the moment) but under precisely the sign of its potential (as threat). The imperative is to "be" in a state of expectation, in the form of wariness.

² See Brandreth, where the phenomenon is placed under the sign of the quizzical in the subheading "What Did You Say?" (58-59). Brandreth's obscure and unexplained coinage (alluding to an either/or ambiguity, perhaps, rather than to the technical term "oronymy" for the onomastic class "names of mountains"), a term which has nonetheless had considerable circulation since, is defined as follows: "Oronyms are sentences that can be read in two ways with the same sound"—as in the rather self-examplifying 'Are you aware of the words you have just uttered' vs. '. . . just stuttered.' Or more fully discrepant: "The stuffy nose can lead to problems / The stuff he knows can lead to problems." All of his examples, however, turn in this way on the junctural equivocation of two (or three) abutting words, so that such phrasal alternatives (rather than full-sentence variants) are predominantly dependent on what I have called the wavering phonemic juncture of a "transegmental drift." See Stewart *passim*.

³ Both for her spirited send-off to our panel when it was composed of talks rather than articles (where, even then, I was borrowing formulations off the cuff as fast as I could remember them or jot them down), and for her brilliant advice since in overseeing the expansion of my paper into an actual essay, I compound my longstanding debt to the private as well as printed wisdom of Susan Wolfson.

⁴ "Between Shakespeare and Joyce," writes William H. Gass in an essay called "The Sentence Seeks its Form," "there is no one but Dickens who has an equal command of the English language" (275)—and he means by this to stress the aural dimension of the novelist's effects. "Language is born in the lungs and is shaped by the lips, palate, teeth, and tongue out of spent breath. . . . It therefore must be listened to while it is being written" (273). Written—and then read, its origins thus recovered in its destination. There is nothing undeconstructed in this. As Dolar would agree, and before him Agamben, and of course Kittler too, speech is not the work of spirit but strictly enunciation, "spent breath" and its articulated blockages. In Dickens, long before he reaches the podium with it, such printed language waits to be audited, precisely by being silently released from, typography's pent breath. Gass's most striking evidence from Dickens is a sentence that carries a slight additional interest for the present essay, rather than for his, in the way it is sustained upon the nonapostrophic and recursive lower-case moan of o. David Copperfield's lament is given here with my further typographical highlights on the kinds of anaphoric returns and alphabetic reversals by which Gass is intrigued: "From Monday morning until Saturday night, I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no assistance, no support, of any kind, from any one. . . ." (275). Gass's own stress falls not on the negative trailing off of the non-echoic "one" (with its slant reprise of the opening "Monday") but rather, before that syllabic denouement, on the overt graphic flips from "no" to "on" and the alphabetic and half phonic return of the latter twice over, after the aggrieved "no counsel," in the impacted nugatory parallel of "no consolation."

⁵ Quoted in Jameson, where the lines are treated for their lyric reification of the sea voyage, but without attention to the phonetic wavelets that serves to swamp the turmoil of below-deck labor—or at least float euphonically above it.

⁶ See other examples in *The Mill on the Floss* in *Reading Voices* (above n. 2), 212.

⁷ This is a relationality of subordinate phrasing on which no one writes more grippingly than Christopher Ricks. See "William Wordsworth (2): 'A Sinking Inward into Ourselves from Thought to Thought.'"

⁸ The way this redirected expectation—from "being someone," or "being something or other" (as, say, "intuitive" or "munificent") to simply the named fact of her existence as a force for change—the way this might, in Eliot's manner of putting it, "vibrate to" the being present of potentiality itself in Agamben's writings (the existence of nonexistence as a positive rather than a negative force) anticipates the remaining direction of the essay.

⁹ See also the separate treatment of the mediations in Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*.

¹⁰ See Jean-Claude Milner, *Introduction à une science du langage*.

¹¹ The point is not an easy one—this relation of thought to non-voice: "We can only think if language is not our voice, only if we reach our own aphonia at its very bottom (but in reality there is no bottom). What we call the world is this abyss" (Agamben, *Language and Death* 108). Cognition is distance. Among the several reiterations of this central Heideggerian inference, here in Agamben's own italics: "Thinking death is simply thinking the Voice. Turning radically back, in death, from its having been thrown into Da, Dasein's negative retrieves its own aphonia" (60). It is not just, after Hegel, that things come to consciousness only by being the negation of what they are not. Further, the consciousness to which they come is the negation of exactly that voice which is negated in their naming. For this philosophical tradition derived from Hegel, the only way, in any sense, to be "positive" about the world is through such double negations. Agamben's self-appointed task, always by definition provisional, is to forge another route.

¹² The world emerges from the infinite regress of speech (or thought) tracking down "its" voice to the impossible "there" of its being. To think the condition of being that is indexed, rather than ever truly uttered, by voice requires a medium other than that voice. But if the realized world is defined in this way as the sheer negation of voice, as all that remains outside that voice, signified by the very language that cancels its sound in the enounced sense of other things, then the recognized distance of thought from voice is an essential ethical as well as a philosophical idea: route of the only proper descent from self-enclosed logos into the groundless but no less immanent reality of ethos, where one must share a non-individuated space with others.

¹³ Certainly, in this closing high note of Agamben's, one can hear overtones of a pervasive Deleuzian intuition—most obvious or clear-cut, perhaps, in the latter's engagement (so different from Kittler's Lacanian application) with the "imaginary" of film: namely, that the virtual, as part of the real, may be the opposite of the actual, but not its negation. See Deleuze 7.

¹⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in Wolfson and Manning 874.

¹⁵ In "Being Odd, Getting Even (Descartes, Emerson, Poe)," Stanley Cavell sees (hears) Poe's prose as "a parody's of philosophy's" (111) in just this respect, its iterative paranoia and "impish" wordplay as the mad antithesis of any overcome skepticism about the credited and signified world. In Poe's story "The Imp of the Perverse," on which Cavell focuses, the stray phoneme "imp" breaks into discourse as invasive prefix as if it manifests the return of a linguistic repressed that must be patrolled by a normative everyday discourse. Recall in this disruptive sense the rising visionary stress of a phrase like Shelley's from *Ode to the West Wind*: his triple impish pun on fused subjectivity released from the monosyllabic trigger of "imp-et/you/us/one."

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"Soundings of Things Done": The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era

Captivation and Liberty in Wordsworth's Poems on Music

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1. In 1818 Hazlitt called poetry "the music of language, answering to the music of the mind" (23).^[1] Within the next twenty years, as melomania swept across the Atlantic, American readers found the music of language in Wordsworth's stanzas. Let me here single out the anonymous essayist on Wordsworth in Richmond, Virginia's *Southern Literary Messenger* for December 1837.^[2] Setting out to write on Wordsworth's *Sonnets dedicated to Liberty*,^[3] he gets waylaid by general considerations of Wordsworth's "eminently lyrical" genius. "There is no poet," he writes, "who seems to have a more exquisite ear for the musical qualities of language, which he selects and combines for his varied purposes, with an instinctive sense of melody and harmony truly admirable." As an example of Wordsworth's "music-breathing mellifluence," the essay quotes "The Solitary Reaper" in its entirety, asking of it: "Is not this the very music of language? Do not these words float in airy waves, until the sense is charmed and lulled into delicious reverie, as by the 'lascivious pleasings of a lute'?" This last phrase comes from the opening soliloquy of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, in which Richard conjures the once forward-marching figure of "War" who now "capers nimbly in a lady's chamber / To the lascivious pleasing of a lute" (1.1.9-13). The quotation, which appears to drift into our reviewer's reverie, aptly recalls him to a sense of purpose: "But we have been irresistibly seduced into these general remarks. We must now proceed to the more immediate subject of this paper." He then turns, dutifully, towards a discussion of Wordsworth's sonnets, in which the poet is said to "speak with the voice of a sage" in inculcating "the cause of freedom and of man." In short, our Richmond reviewer, having briefly succumbed to the siren-call of Wordsworth's music, regains his liberty and turns to his task of popularizing Wordsworth's sonnets on behalf of "an erect and republican spirit."
2. Emerging from this review is a theme that I'd like to develop in this paper: the Orphic power of music to seduce and distract—to wring the will of its freedom—in a way that is not incompatible with civic liberty. To flesh out this theme, I'll look at two poems from Wordsworth's 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes*: the entrancing "Solitary Reaper" and the poem in which Wordsworth directly addresses the allurements of sound, "The Power of Music." In these poems, "the music of harmonious metrical language"^[4] mimics the power of vocal or instrumental music to distract from both meaning and purposeful activity. But music, for Wordsworth, is no mere drug; still less is it a threat to society. Although sound may induce reverie, it nonetheless brings individuals together, apart from an over-busy world. The immersion of musical pleasure serves as a counter-force to the commercial spirit over which Wordsworth no less than many of his American reviewers worried. It is a commonplace from Shakespeare's best-known plays of Rome and Venice that the unmusical person is a threat to the state: in *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, Lorenzo, while addressing "the sweet power of music," contends: "That man that hath no music in himself, / Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, / Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils" (5.1.79-85).^[5] Wordsworth's concern with the unmusical man is not, however, with the restiveness of faction, but rather with the restlessness and isolation of economic man. Absorption in melody and rhythm make for solidarity in a present moment that is political insofar as it harkens back to an imaginary past of primitive equality and ahead to a future of equality restored.

3. Before I elaborate this argument, let me first glance at the metrical structures of Wordsworth's poems on music—their own music, as it were. Each is based on a different kind of ballad stanza. "The Power of Music" is written in a form not always recognized as such: the anapestic or iambic-anapestic tetrameter found in eighteenth-century amorous and comedic ballads by, among others, Matthew Prior, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and William Blake.^[6] Wordsworth experimented with an anapestic ballad stanza of alternating tetrameter and trimeter in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* ("The Convict"); for the 1800 edition Wordsworth settles on a Prior-like iambic-anapestic tetrameter stanza for "Poor Susan," "The Two Thieves," "Rural Architecture," and "A Character, in the Antithetical Manner."^[7]
4. The more familiar type of ballad stanza, with its alternating line lengths of 8 and 6 syllables (and/or 4 and 3 stresses) is one that Wordsworth rarely employed in its standard form.^[8] He more often modified it for his purposes, as, for example, in "Lines written in Early Spring."^[9] Wordsworth works both within and against the phonic expectations of the form, and does so with a craftsmanship that involves by his own account "a more impressive metre than is usual in Ballads" (*Prose Works* 150). The modified ballad stanza of "Lines written in Early Spring," a stanza of 8, 8, 8, and then 6 syllables, draws attention to the last line by having it come up short. The thematic surprises of this poem unfold in stanzas that end on notes of mystery—what are those "sad thoughts"? What "has man made of man?" These successive mysteries unfold in curtailed lines of six rather than eight syllables, so that as we come to the end of each stanza, we have a rhythmic as well as semantic sense of something missing.
5. This modified ballad stanza returns as the first half of the 8-line stanza of "The Solitary Reaper," where it is followed by two tetrameter couplets. "The Solitary Reaper" is arguably as much about its own stanza-music as about anything else: form here is almost co-extensive with content. The poem testifies to the power of metrical arrangement and long vowels ("profound"/"sound"; "bore"/"more") to distract pleasurably from the very words that formulate a speaker's response to a song with no known meaning. Material signifiers gain aria-like ascendancy over immaterial meanings. "The Solitary Reaper" is, like "Early Spring," a poem of "semantically rich craft," as Susan Wolfson has shown (111-13). The careful reader may trace the junctures of sound and sense in the poem's stanza structure: here, for example, we first stop short on the hexasyllabic line, "Stop here, or gently pass," our progress further impeded by its opening trochee. But thinking through the poem's artifice is only one way into it, and on the poem's own terms it is not necessarily a better path than the one pointed to by the rhetorical question of the *Southern Literary Messenger*: "Do not these words float in airy waves?" As words convert to waves, their very signification is what gets left behind. It is hearing the word "sound" as sound that appears to have attracted Dorothy Wordsworth to the end of the poem's first stanza: she writes, "There is something inexpressibly soothing to me in the sound of those two Lines . . . I often catch myself repeating them in disconnection with any thought" (*Letters* 650). The poem's overflowing sound invites the evacuation of sense. The *Beau Monde* reviewer of Wordsworth's *Poems* of 1807 strikes a chord with his bald assessment: "Solitary Reaper and Stepping Westward are poems both innocent of all meaning" (Reiman 1:43).
6. But of course there is also a false note in this review. The poem means at several different levels, and this reviewer helps us to see one of them by adverting to the *sequence* of poems in Wordsworth's 1807 volumes. "The Solitary Reaper" is followed by "Stepping Westward," another poem about "a sound"—here, "Of something without place or bound." It is preceded by "Rob Roy's Grave," a poem still more clearly about the sound of liberty. "Rob Roy's Grave" ends with an image of the faces of the Scottish poor that "kindle, like a fire new stirr'd, / At sound of ROB ROY's name"—that is, at the name of their Robin Hood-ish hero, a man whom we are told "didst love / The *liberty* of Man," who "battled for the Right," who protected "the poor man" from the depredation of the rich. The name stirs in herdsmen and reapers sentiments of loyalty and liberty, and in the narrator nostalgia for the old days in hope that they will become the future days. The reviewer who called "The Solitary Reaper" "innocent of all meaning"

did so in relation to what he perceived as the criminal or radical tendencies of this first piece in Wordsworth's sequence of Scottish poems, which he nervously dismissed: "the strains of this poem might be dangerous if it were not so foolish." But within a poetic sequence no poem is innocent of the poem, and so here the "dangers," that have come before. Sound carries, and with it meaning.^[10] For the sequential reader of Wordsworth's 1807 *Poems*, the sound of liberty overflows into the sound of the reaper's song, as well as into the speaker's reflection on time, the unspecified lost thing—call it freedom—"that has been, and may be again."^[11] Meaning may retreat in reverie, but like the repressed it always returns. Wordsworth's poems ask us to negotiate between surrender to musical form and the recuperation of meaning both within and between the individual pieces he ordered with care.

7. The last piece I would consider, "The Power of Music," suggests the social meaning of music's suspension of practical sense. Music here figures as a fiddler who captivates a humble London crowd. In Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* "The Power of Music" follows another poem of London life, "Star Gazers," but in his 1815 *Poetical Works* it is placed in the "Poems of the Imagination" after a poem with which it is more closely connected: "Poor Susan" from the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*. Both "Poor Susan" and "The Power of Music" are written in the ballad stanza of iambic-anapestic tetrameter, a showy meter associated with comic ballads that Wordsworth generally reserved for his lighter compositions and, in the case of these two poems, his treatment of urban themes. "Poor Susan" and "The Power of Music," which may best be described as tragic-comic, both address the power of song—the thrush's song or the fiddler's—to distract from the dreariness of labor, poverty, and urban displacement. (Wordsworth's Highland reaper, by contrast, is distracted—as we the readers are distracted—only from her labor, the "reaping" that ever gives way to "singing.")
8. In an irony that unfolds during the course of "The Power of Music," the street-corner fiddler is identified in the poem's opening line as "An Orpheus! An Orpheus!," as though he were an avatar of the legendary pre-Homeric poet with the power to civilize animals or brutal humans. Horace, in his *Ars Poetica*, recounts: "While men still roamed the woods, Orpheus, the holy prophet of the gods, made them shrink from bloodshed and brutal living; hence the fable that he tamed tigers and ravening lions; hence too the fable that Amphion, builder of Thebes's citadel, moved stones by the sound of his lyre" (ll. 391-96, Loeb trans.).^[12] The familiarity of Horace's lines is attested by their appearance in the homely verse of William Brimble, described on his title page as "of Twerton, near Bath, Carpenter":

Let hist'ry boast fam'd Amphion's powerful call,
 When stones came dancing to the Theban wall,
 Leap'd from their beds right angl'd, smooth and strait,
 And in harmonious order rose in state
 How Orpheus' power, nor rocks, nor trees withstood,
 But follow'd to his harp a dancing wood;
 How savages of fierceness was disarm'd,
 And from their currents listning rivers charm'd
 Still music's power, unrival'd, stands confess'd,
 And fiercer foes can charm than savage beast.

9. Brimble thus begins a couplet ballad the narrative of which is largely summarized in its title: "On TWO MUSICIANS of BATH being attack'd by a Highwayman, who, on their presenting a FIDDLE, rode off without his Booty"—the comic twist being that it is not the fiddle's music that deters crime but rather the notorious poverty of fiddlers (*Poems*, 11-13). The mock-Horatian strain of a ballad such as Brimble's—as well as the rude artfulness of its making—may lie behind the opening lines of Wordsworth's poem on music's power:

An Orpheus! An Orpheus!—yes, Faith may grow bold,

And take to herself all the wonders of old;—
Near the stately Pantheon you'll meet with the same,
In the street that from Oxford hath borrowed its name.

10. Orpheus is alive and well, but not in the Pantheon, the masquerade-hall named after the Roman seat of all the old gods,[\[13\]](#) but rather on the street, among those whose unsophisticated receptivity is offered as something of an ideal:

What an eager assembly! what an empire is this!
The weary have life, and the hungry have bliss;
The mourner is cheared, and the anxious have rest;
And the guilt-burthened Soul is no longer opprest.

For his services, the fiddler commands a fee, and the sign of the faithful is that they give all they have:

He stands, back'd by the Wall;—he abates not his din;
His hat gives him vigour, with boons dropping in,
From the Old and the Young, from the Poorest; and there!
The one-pennied Boy has his penny to spare.

11. The poor boy gives his all to the fiddler who enchants him for a brief while: the image is like a bell that tolls us back to the new historicist critique of Romantic writing. This scene invites a Marxist objection not only to "The Power of Music" but also to Wordsworth's larger corpus of poems on the pleasures of sound. Somewhere, someone must, I suspect, have written or lectured on this poem in search of a victim, and from a certain angle victims are here a-plenty. The poor boy parting with his coin may seem a comment on art's ability to mystify material relations, to distract the poor from their needs and rights. Music is here the opiate of the masses.[\[14\]](#) Just as the fiddler stupefies his audience with sound so would Wordsworth stupefy his in poetic numbers, blinding them to revolutionary imperatives.
12. From a certain point of view these objections are unanswerable. But at least for a moment we might consider a different point of view, which I believe to be Wordsworth's, according to which the blessing of verse as well as violin is precisely the ability to forget about money and the economic base of all relations—about "getting and spending," to quote from the 1807 *Poems*' best known sonnet. Music brings together a community in pleasure that matters more than the material. However, the power of music is lost on a genteel audience that believes only in acquisition. This audience enters Wordsworth's poem as the adversarial figures of the poem's final stanza—though it has been present all along in the poem's early nineteenth-century and a fortiori its contemporary-academic readership. The "you" of its final stanza cuts several ways, and it includes us:

Now, Coaches and Chariots, roar on like a stream;
Here are twenty souls happy as Souls in a dream;
They are deaf to your murmurs—they care not for you,
Nor what ye are flying, or what ye pursue!

13. The fiddler's street-corner auditors don't care because they alone in this scene are absorbed in present pleasure; all around them, busy worldlings fly from the past or pursue an uncertain future.[\[15\]](#) And, to illustrate that flight through formal means, Wordsworth trots his reader along through the headlong rhythms of anapestic verse. Wordsworth's meter here does not, as in "The Solitary Reaper," reproduce a sense of his lyric speaker's entrancement; rather, it exhibits its own theatrical power to whisk us past the scene it describes. As we come to the end of the poem's comic prance we are left with a criticism of

the pace we've pursued.

14. Wordsworth's critique is of commerce, luxury, and propulsion itself insofar as these things threaten the bonds that constitute community. Our *Southern Literary Messenger* author, writing in 1837—the year of Reed's American edition of Wordsworth, and also of a financial crisis in America—invokes Wordsworth's power to counter-act "the progress that luxury has made in these United States," and one feels the weight in this line of "progress" as well as of "luxury." He laments his countrymen's "vain efforts to emulate the ostentation and parade of European society, by which we have impaired our stern republican virtues" (710). In "The Power of Music," the people's temporary trance is hardly stern but it is a civic event or even a civic religion: they stand apart, together, in a concentrated present. In contrasting their ritual presence to the *differance* of purposive endeavor, Wordsworth seems to hearken back to an anecdote in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*: "Sir, you observed one day at General Oglethorpe's, that a man is never happy for the present, but when he is drunk. Will you not add,—or, when driving rapidly in a post chaise?' JOHNSON. 'No, Sir, you are driving rapidly *from* something, or *to* something'" (3:5).[\[16\]](#)
15. Those in chaises and chariots are in at least one way like political critics, of either the 1830s or our own day: they look before and after, and pine for what is not. Music is now, while politics is always braced in time. But to understand Wordsworth fully is to understand him dialectically: for he too is a politician, not just an ear in a crowd. Some of Wordsworth's sympathetic nineteenth-century readers saw in Wordsworth's backward glances—to the idealized past of Rob Roy's Scotland, say, or perhaps to an absorbed crowd passed by on the street—a blueprint for a future that wouldn't need a future: that is, a utopia. As the American critic Edwin Percy Whipple wrote in 1844, Wordsworth's heart lies in "a period when universal benevolence will prevail upon the earth"; he "is emphatically a poet of the future His England of a thousand years past is the Utopia of a thousand years to come" (381-83).
16. The final ironies of "The Power of Music" are political, involving both a transformation of the mythic role of Orpheus's music, and the narrator's detached view of the new Orphic role he describes. Traditionally, Orpheus had figured the benevolent ruler who brings order and hierarchy to the base elements of nature; he has stood for the ordering power of music, in opposition to the Dionysian power of music to whip maenads into a lascivious frenzy (Keilen 32-88). But Wordsworth's story is not one of social order imposed by an Orpheus figure on a discordant mob; on the contrary, this Orpheus, or Orpheus-Dionysus hybrid ("he abates not his *din*"), (re)calls his hearers to a once or future state of life and bliss *outside* the social order as it is presently constituted. This Orpheus supplies salubrious retreat from a commercial metropolis that has lost all sense of, to use two of Wordsworth's favorite words, being and breathing:

That errand-bound 'Prentice was passing in haste—
What matter! he's caught—and his time runs to waste—
The News-man is stopped, though he stops on the fret,
And the half-breathless Lamp-lighter he's in the net!
17. Yet what the fiddler does to his passers-by is what Wordsworth does not do to his reader: immobilize, assuage, and band together ("O blest are the Hearers and proud be the Hand / Of the pleasure it spreads through so thankful a Band"). Wordsworth, rather, hurries us onward in anapestic strides, imaging successive auditors (the apprentice, the newsman, the lamplighter, et al.), and ending with "pursue!" There is irony, of course, in the apprentice's "time run to waste," for here Wordsworth pictures time redeemed, *kairos* rather than *chronos*. The irony, however, is not entire. The reader of "The Power of Music" is suspended, finally, between content and form, absorption and theatricality, arrest and bustle, civic unity and commercial profit. Our guide through this scene of captivity, who has simulated the liberty of motion, has perhaps shown us as well the freedom that may lie in music's chains, as well as

the enchainment of a purely market liberty.^[17]

Notes

¹ Cf. Herder (1769) on poetry as "the music of the soul" (quoted in Abrams 93) and, ultimately, Plato on lyric poetry as the means of introducing harmony into the soul (*Protagoras* 326a, *Republic* 400c-403c).

² The essayist is not identified in Jackson, *Contributors and Contributions to The Southern Literary Messenger*. The essay appears eleven months after Poe had been sacked as editor of the journal on account of heavy drinking.

³ Henry Reed's first American edition of Wordsworth's poems (1837) contains two headings of "Sonnets dedicated to Liberty" ("Part First" and "Part Second"), 211-223, also included in Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807).

⁴ A phrase from the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *Prose Works* 150.

⁵ Cf. Caesar on the subversive potential of Cassius: "he hears no music" (*Julius Caesar* 1.2.204).

⁶ See, e.g., Prior, "Down-Hall: A Ballad" and "For his own Epitaph"; Montagu, "The Lover: A Ballad" (a poem much admired by Byron); John Cunningham, "Newcastle Beer"; Blake, "Chimney Sweeper" in *Songs of Innocence*.

⁷ The iambic-anapestic stanza, chiefly used for comedic verse in the eighteenth century, was applied to moralistic or didactic subjects in two poems that Wordsworth most likely read *after* completing "The Power of Music" and the 1807 *Poems in Two Volumes*: Scott's "Hellvellyn," published in William Whyte's miscellany *A Collection of Scottish Airs* (1806-7)—a stanza from which Wordsworth singled out for praise in the Fenwick note to his own poem on the same topic, "Fidelity"—and Cowper's "Poplar Field," published in Southey's 15-vol. *Works of William Cowper* (1835-37), but not in eighteenth-century collections of Cowper's poems. Thus Adela Pinch may be mistaken in attributing the meter of "Poor Susan" to the moralizing model of "Poplar Field" (101).

⁸ Wordsworth used a strict ballad stanza for two pieces in the original *Lyrical Ballads* ("We are Seven" and "The Tables Turned"); four out of his five Lucy poems ("Strange Fits of Passion," "She dwelt among the untrodden ways," "I traveled among unknown men," "A slumber did my spirit seal"); three other poems in the enlarged 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* ("Lucy Gray," "The Two April Mornings," "The Fountain"); one poem in the 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes* ("To the Cuckoo"); and in a few later, minor works (e.g., "George and Sarah Green").

⁹ In the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* see also "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," "It is the first mild day of March," "Simon Lee," "Anecdote for Fathers," "The Thorn," and "Expostulation and Reply."

¹⁰ Peter Manning comments incisively on the importance of sequencing in *Poems in Two Volumes* and in particular in the section "Poems written during a Tour in Scotland" (258-68). I would question only Manning's claim that in "Rob Roy's Grave" Wordsworth defuses the radical charge of "liberty" by associating it with "traditional society" (264). Wordsworth's *Beau Monde* reviewer, by contrast, is clearly made nervous by the poem's "Jacobin" implication that the poor would be justified in violently seizing their rights, or having rights seized on their behalf.

¹¹ Of course, Wordsworth's speaker briefly describes the lost thing not explicitly as freedom but simply as "some natural sorrow, loss, or pain." Inasmuch as this might (also) reflect the reaper's own pain, we might say of this poem what Adela Pinch says of an episode of *The Vale of Esthwaite*: "Hearing others' cries of pain produces a spontaneous music independent of the minstrel's will" (93).

¹² Wordsworth's translations from Virgil's *Georgics*, dating back to his Cambridge years, include portions of the Orpheus and Eurydice story, although the line in which Virgil expresses Orpheus's power over brutes and the wilderness—he mourns, *mulcentem tigris et agentem carmine quercus*, "charming the tigers and moving the oaks with song" (*Georgics* IV.510)—is rendered by Wordsworth freely, "The solemn forest at the magic song / Had ears to joy" (*Early Poems* 642).

¹³ The Pantheon was built in 1770, designed by James Wyatt after the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. It burned in 1792 but was re-built. Later converted to a theater, and still later to a bazaar and warehouse, it was demolished in 1937.

¹⁴ This charge is still more applicable to Wordsworth's late poem, "The Power of Sound," in which music mitigates the sufferings of slavery and forced labor—and thus, by extension, helps to preserve these institutions (stanza 4, ll.49-64); even here, however, music as possible opiate is counter-balanced by music as the engine of "civic renovation" and "of Freedom" (ll. 65-71).

¹⁵ Cf. Coleridge's 1819 *Philosophical Lectures*: "Music . . . produces infinite [or 'infantine'] Joy—while the overbusy worldlings are buzzed round by night-flies in a sultry climate" (168).

¹⁶ Wu suggests that Wordsworth read *The Life of Samuel Johnson* in August 1800 (27).

¹⁷ I would like to thank Kim Wheatley and Erin Minear for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

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