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Luke Donahue Date

The Senselessness of an Ending in Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley, and Keats

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

Comparative Literature

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The Senselessness of an Ending in Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley, and Keats

By

Luke Donahue
B.A., Reed College, 2006

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

The Senselessness of an Ending in Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley, and Keats
By Luke Donahue

This dissertation investigates a particular form of destruction or erasure that repeats throughout romantic poetry and prose—namely, destruction that destroys ahead as it were, that destroys the possibility of being read in the future. I argue that this form of future-oriented erasure does not only put pressure on what we mean by terms like 'erasure', 'remainder', and 'trace', but also upon how we have conceived of Romanticism in the past thirty to forty years. Rather than understanding Romanticism as a discourse of survival—as a discourse that learns how to survive as its own fragmentation and disarticulation—I think of Romanticism as a discourse obsessed with the threats to that very survival. Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* and "Ode to the West Wind," and Keats's "Ode to Psyche," I argue, consistently figure that which is already only living as a ruin of itself as facing an even more devastating destruction, such that it cannot even survive as a ruin or ghost. Throughout my readings of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats, I pay particular attention not only to the destruction of texts, ideas, people, or things, but also and especially to the destruction of differences—differences, moreover, that seem to be indestructible and ineluctable in our past and future history. The romantics show us that dichotomies such as innocence/fallenness, mind/body, and imagination/science are unstable; but they also show us that these dichotomies might disappear even in and as their instability. What the mere possibility of this mode of devastation implies for futurity, survival, deconstruction, historicism, and Romanticism is the question that this dissertation begins to ask.

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Geoffrey Bennington's words and phrases and arguments and hesitations will be found scattered throughout this dissertation. Geoff once said that, once, in the past, when he was young perhaps, he did not believe in the unconscious; 'good luck with that' (he once said): although I'm young enough to continue to disbelieve in it, Geoff is certainly the unconscious of this dissertation, checking, forming, and always challenging both it and me, whether or not he says a thing. He is δεινός.

The central question of this dissertation develops from a certain disbelief in the readings that Cathy Caruth performed in her seminars at Emory. Perhaps I still don't believe in those readings. But the next few hundred pages amount to an argument as to why my reader, at any rate, should believe them. It always seems to be after the fact, years latter, that I come to understand Cathy. I trust that I cannot offer more thanks than that.

While only a little Greek made its way into this dissertation, the Greek (mainly Plato) that Louise Pratt taught me over the past six years has probably formed the basis of all my academic pursuits. Her patience and support and humor and questions or questioning form the background of this dissertation.

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Dark star crashes
pouring its light
into ashes

……

Through
the transitive nightfall
of diamonds

Mirror shatters
in formless reflections
of matter[i]

Prelude
The Death of a Ghost

I. Introduction

It is probably no accident that the romantic desire for the origin and the end emerges at the historical moment when the perceived stability of origins and ends begins to erode. In *The Sense of an Ending* Frank Kermode writes that, "on the whole there is a correlation between subtlety and variety in our fictions and remoteness and doubtfulness about ends and origins" (67). Romanticism has been classically understood as grappling with that "doubtfulness." It has been understood as a moment—very much our own—when the paradigm of origin and end loses credibility but cannot simply be dispensed with: "The survival of the paradigms is as much our business as their erosion" (43). Scholarship on Romanticism at least since Kermode has invested much of its critical energy in understanding how the romantics negotiate longing for what they simultaneously doubt. It is the thesis of this dissertation, however, that scholarship has passed over the investigation of final endings too quickly, thereby missing one of the romantics' most central if elusive insights.

At first glance, it seems that the romantic interest in the origin or the end amounts to a suspicion of their viability as foundational concepts. On the one hand, in their urge to demystify the ideology of Enlightenment reason, the romantics turn to the origin, to Wordsworth's original "one mind" or final "Characters of the great Apocalypse" that lift us out of human temporality with its disappointmented expectations and its forgotten

recollections (*Prelude*, VI.568). Or one thinks of the Wordsworth's desire in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to eschew mechanical figurations and mechanical industry and to return to the "real language of men" (595).[ii] The success of this return would be the return to a humanity prior to culture, contamination, and mechanism. Such a return, though, would amount to the end of humanity insofar as humanity is predicated upon the division between nature and culture, organicism and mechanicity. If Wordsworth is attempting to put aside the cultural, the fallen, the ideological, and the historical, then he shows his own death drive and urges on humanity's death drive. According to a disconcerting logic that is given its clearest philosophical expression by Kant, Wordsworth's desired end would in fact be *the end*.[iii]

On the other hand, close readings of Wordsworth's poetry reveal that while he may have desired a *telos* that returns to the origin, he also realized that that *telos* is and should be an impossibility. He insists, in the Preface, on the principle of "selection," by means of which the poet must select the proper aspects from the real language of men. In other words, the language of real men closest to nature needs to be purged of the baseness of nature. To be too natural is as unsatisfactory as not being natural enough. Even the original or final language of real men turns out to be a monstrosity in need of culture's policing. Moreover, the poet closest to a real and purified existence can obtain that existence only insofar as he is "slavish and mechanical," *imitating* the language of real men that is not real enough (604). The real man is lacking the poet's culture, and yet the poet can only purge himself of the excess of culture's conventionality and mechanicity through mechanically imitating the real man.[iv] To be human is to have too much or not enough; it is to survive as human while being deprived of immediate participation in

humanity's origin or end, which turns out to be constitutively elusive or absent. For Wordsworth nature "doth all she can/ To make her Foster-child, her inmate Man,/ Forget the glories he hath known,/ And that imperial palace whence he came ("Ode ('There was a time')," ll. 81-4). This inevitable loss is to be celebrated: "We will grieve not, rather find/ Strength in what remains behind/ In the primal sympathy" (ll. 182-4). We are condemned—but happily—to survive with what remains behind of that loss. The Wordsworthian desire for the end, it turns out, is in fact a meditation on how to survive in a world without an origin or *telos*.

Keats's desire for "[t]he feel of not to feel it" ("In drear-nighted December," l. 21), his desire to "swoon on to death" ("Bright Star," l. 14), or his desire to "ha[ve] no Idenity" (Rollins 295)—and Shelley's desire for "one will beneath/ Two overshadowing minds," which amounts to "one death… one annihilation" (*Epipschidion*, ll. 584-7)—testify to an almost deliberate death drive haunting romantic poetry. But as with Wordsworth, one would be hard pressed to argue that Keats and Shelley are interested in their simple end rather than in what remains behind of them, as "This Living Hand" and *Adonais* respectively evince most explicitly. According to this train of thought, romantic poetry does not concern itself with a simple origin or a simple end, but with how to bear an incomplete existence. It thus seems entirely improbable for a critical study today to focus on final ends instead of on the impossibility of final ends, but that is indeed what I seek to do.

II. The Death of a Ghost

One might surmise that turning to the spate of 'last man' novels in the early nineteenth century will prove unhelpful for thinking the romantic interest in final ends, since the mere fact of the narrator and the reader testifies to the survival of humanity rather than its end. Nonetheless, as a sort of introductory reading, I want to propose that the most famous of these novels, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, allows to glimmer, however briefly, the peculiar figure of the end of surviving rather than the figure of surviving the end. *The Last Man* ends with Lionel Verney wandering the earth in hope of finding a 'last woman', but by the final paragraph he has lost all such hope and is no longer a last *man* but has become "a monstrous excrescence of nature" (467). The novel's final words read:

> I shall witness all the variety of appearance, that the elements can assume—I shall read fair augury in the rainbow—menace in the cloud—some lesson or record dear to my heart in everything. Thus around the shores of deserted earth, while the sun is high, and the moon waxes or wanes, angels, the spirits of the dead, and the ever-open eye of the Supreme, will behold the tiny bark, freighted with Verney—the LAST MAN. (470)

The last man declares himself in a position finally to gain and record absolute knowledge, having not only "all the variety of appearance, that the elements can assume" at his fingertips, but also the accomplished archive of human history. Humanity's *telos*—the knowable world fully arranged and available to the mental encyclopedia—indeed arrives at humanity's end. Brilliant, the sun remains high even while the moon waxes and wanes.

Everything is apparent. And God, accompanying Verney on the turn "around" each shore, can finally be said to be singular and universal.

The approaching moment of total revelation and total destruction, with its "augury" of something to come, quickly points to futurity rather than finality: on the horizon is another rebirth or another destruction, both possibilities heralded in the pun on "fair" (meaning both beautiful and deserving). The rainbow above the ship-bound Verney, reminiscent of Noah, announces a renewed covenant between God and man and thus a future race. Moreover, Verney bears "witness," suggesting another mortal being to whom he bears this witness. To be a witness implies witnessing for another. Indeed, Verney's book—which is the very book that Mary Shelley wrote, except that his comes from a fictional future in 2100 AD—is written as a remnant of the future past for posterity, for the remaining who will read of what remains. His novel is dedicated not only "TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS DEAD" but also to the future "world [that might] be re-peopled" (466). In this way, as already suggested, contrary to figuring an end of humanity or a last man, *The Last Man* seems to figure the posterity of the future last man by virtue of being read in the future by a reader. It is a book about *survival*.

The future, however, bespeaks not only survival, but also an uncanny annihilation. The rainbow "menace[s]." And the "angels, the spirits of the dead, and the ever-open eye of the Supreme" do not only "behold" Verney, but seem to chase him around the globe. The sense of a ghostly chase—of ghostly spirits chasing a ghostly man—is legible even in the grammar: "Thus around the shores of deserted earth… angels, the spirits of the dead, and the ever-open eye of the Supreme behold the tiny bark." The act of beholding suggests still participants, but the preposition "around"

suggests that the characters are in motion, resulting in an uncanny still chase as if the background scenery and the distance between the pursuers and the pursued remain constant. The preposition "around" seems to apply to Verney in his tiny bark (as if it read "Thus while I sailed around the shores…") but in fact it grammatically applies to the pursuing host. While we at first read "around" as applying to Verney, we then realize it applies to the host and only secondarily applies to Verney. Following from the temporality of the grammar, the angels, ghosts, and the supreme (whether it is the all-seeing God or that more etymologically watchful divinity Lucifer) are already "around" the corners, ahead of him, awaiting him, as they pursue him from behind and above.

Not only is the chase itself ghostly, so is the destruction looming ahead of and before Verney in 2100. For in the context this destruction means something more than the death of the last surviving mortal man. The Noah figure at the dawn of rebirth is also a Cain figure, making him not only the first of a new race, but also the last of an old one. But this twenty-second century Cain wanders *after* the flood (or, in this case, pestilence). Instead of figuring the end of Cain's ancestry, Verney figures the survival of that dead race past its due date. He becomes the ghost of Cain, wandering the earth like Shelley's Ahasuerus or Coleridge's Mariner. The ghostly survival of Cain after his death, he is similar to the eternally Wandering Jew, the legend of whom is often understood as a rewriting Genesis in order to extend Cain's race to after the flood. A ghost having survived his death, a last man who is no longer a man but "a monstrous excrescence of nature," Verney and the knowledge that he has gained are approaching and fleeing an uncanny death that eludes any content or form. That is, the "Life-in-Death" that Verney 'is' looks ahead to and behind at the pursuing and anticipating host who threaten further

destruction. Ahead and behind or "around" looms the death of something that is already living as dead. Inscribed in Shelley's brilliant end of her novel is the possibility of the death of something or someone that is already only surviving in and as its death. Inscribed just beyond the end of the novel, where what is inscribed cannot even be a figure, is the corpse of a ghost or the death of a corpse. It is this type of peculiar and redoubled death that "The Senselessness of an Ending" investigates.

III. Why Romanticism?

In order to understand the romantic interest in the end that I seek to unpack in this dissertation one might turn to a number of historical factors that brought issues of the end into profile during this period. One might turn, for example, to the semantics and politics of revolution with all its relation to the end, to rebirth, to failure, and to survival. Or, one might turn to what E. P. Thompson and Morton Paley have taught us about romantic millenarianism, which was crucial for a progressive politics that, in Tim Fulfold's words:

> bespoke the need of many in the period to restore power to the human, in an [sic] country where more and more people were subjected to the inhuman discipline of factory, clock and technology and where knowledge was increasingly institutionalized and bureaucratized, taken out of ordinary people's hands. Southcott and Irving were, that is to say, simply extreme cases, physically literal versions, of a response that many in contemporary Britain felt compelled to make, turning to the Bible as one

> of the few authorities with which they could resist the domination of life by technology and institutions. (10)

Fulford implicitly points out here that apocalypse cannot be thought without a notion of new beginnings, new institutions, or new ways of life.[v] As such, a rhetoric of apocalypse is by nature not a rhetoric of *final* destruction: rather, it is a rhetoric of purgation, of destruction and renewal. Apocalypse signifies the possibility of living on a higher plane, beyond the destruction of human and fallen temporality. It only signifies the end of time as an arrival of eternity.[vi]

In order to find hints of a final destruction that does not lead to survival, one might turn to the more explicitly 'secular' and utopian texts of the romantic era. In *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, William Godwin argues against "reasoners" who contend that, "Man… is prompted, for some time, to advance with success: but after that, in the very act of pursuing further improvement, he necessarily plunges beyond the compass of his powers, and has his petty career to begin afresh: always pursuing what is beautiful, always frustrated in his object, always involved in calamities by the very means he employs to escape them" (476). In opposition to this account of a patterned and predictable future, perfected man, when he is "strong enough… to prevent the return of vices which have once been extirpated," will be in a permanent anarchist utopia without the possibility relapse, regress, decay, or destruction. And yet, in his speculative appendix "Of Health, and the Prolongation of Human Life," Godwin puts in place the possibility for the most devastating catastrophe of all (477). As a conclusion to his argument that the power of the mind will in the distant future attain complete control of the body and create the conditions for indefinite life, he writes:

> The men therefore whom we are supposing to exist, when the earth shall refuse itself to a more extended population, will probably cease to propagate. The whole will be a people of men, and not of children. Generation will not succeed generation, nor truth have, in a certain degree, to recommence her career every thirty years. Other improvements may be expected to keep pace with those of health and longevity. There will be no war, no crimes, no administration of justice, as it is called, and no government. Beside this, there will be neither disease, anguish, melancholy, nor resentment. (528)

This final generation of man will be protected from the disease and war and, in Godwin's mind, any possible existential threat. But this final and non-renewable generation is not protected, the careful reader notes, from accident or ecological catastrophe. The highest and most secure form of man's perfection and truth's march finds its open to the most total and irreversible of deaths: annihilation without survivors.[vii]

Thomas Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* sets out to reject the Godwinian faith in perfectibility. Malthus—one of those "reasoners" Godwin condemns—thinks that progress necessarily leads to decline, decline necessarily leads to progress, and so on. As population rises, food becomes scarce, misery increases, population lowers again, food becomes abundant, population rises. Any assistance to the lower classes, Malthus's polemic asserts, only increases their population and thus eventually increases their misery. The prescription of *An Essay on the Principle of Population* is to think human multiplicities on the level of a natural species and to let it be, to let it operate according to its own immutable and natural law, without the

intervention of governmental safety nets. The upshot of Malthus's reasoning reads: "And as far as I can trust my own judgement, this argument appears to be conclusive not only against the perfectibility of man, in the enlarged sense in which Mr Godwin understands the term, but against any very marked and striking change for the better in the form and structure of general society" (113). Malthus thus naturalizes the status quo and even asserts that the dialectic between growth and decay is eternal: "this necessary oscillation, this constantly subsisting cause of periodical misery, has existed ever since we have had any histories of mankind, does exist at present, and will for ever continue to exist" (66).[viii] He thereby suggests that humanity can never be destroyed once and for all since its decay entails its growth.

And yet, Malthus—who thinks that even imagining a better world makes the world worse—finds himself, against his own argument, imagining an absolute end.[ix] After writing that, "an absolute famine has never been known," he continues:

> Famine seems to be the last, the most dreadful resource of nature. The power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague, advance in terrific array, and sweep of their thousands and ten thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the

> rear, and with one mighty blow, levels the population with the food of the world. (61)

In other words, if the progressive agenda of economic safety nets for the busily breeding lower classes gets out of hand, if human intervention transgresses the laws of nature beyond a certain limit, and if the normal checks on population fail, then an apocalypse without revelation will come: the "human race" and "the population with the food of the world" will face a "premature [and total] death."[x] Why, one might ask, does Malthus imagine the possibility of total human annihilation if his entire argument rests on the immutable law that guarantees humanity's future to be an everlasting series of ups and downs? I would suggest that his apocalyptic fantasy is not just a rhetorical flourish in opposition to progressive thinkers. Rather, it seems to be a logical extension of our fantasies once we move to the level of the human species as such: death, in those terms, is not the death of this or that human, but the death of the species.

Malthus's argument can be squarely located in the narrative of *Security, Territory, Population*, where Michel Foucault locates the beginnings of biopolitics and its constitution of human multiplicities as a naturalized species in the romantic era, just as, in *The Order of Things*, he locates the invention of 'man' in the romantic era.[xi] The central argument of the former book is that "governmentality" (Foucault's term that is meant to displace the conception of a unified 'state') *creates* the conditions under which economics, trade, and circulation can be posited as and can thus function as *natural* phenomena. Through a normalizing statistical science that incorporates accidents, randomness, and undesireable behavior, biopower is able to operate not upon this or that group, but upon entire populations (and, in the process, able to operate all the more

discretely). Such an approach extends itself across the globe, as free trade has to open 'artificial' borders to their 'natural' state. The life and predictability not of multiplicities, but of a naturalized human species thus becomes the object of power.

What is of particular interest for me in Foucault's account of the emergence of biopower, however, resides not in the 1978 lectures of *Security, Territory, Population*, but in *The History of Sexuality*, written several years earlier:

> It is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them. Outside the Western World, famine exists, on a greater scale than ever; and the biological risks confronting the species are perhaps greater, and certainly more serious, than before the birth of microbiology. But what might be called a society's "threshold of modernity" has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies. (143)

Foucault's claim is twofold: on the one hand, life has not been totally integrated in the forms of power that seek to know, determine, and optimize it; on the other hand, even if the life of the species were to become totally optimized, it would thereby, in a perverse reversal, threaten to eradicate human life as such. The optimal point of life's security and efficiency is precisely its maximum exposure to insecurity and inefficiency. I would suggest that Foucault's fantasy of total nuclear war is already at work in the romantic era. It is already at work as soon as the question of humanity becomes a question of the life (or death) of the human species.

I have hitherto focused on the revolutionary, millenarian, and biopolitical influences on the 'figure' of the death of a ghost, the death without or of a remainder. But

the historical conditions for such a 'figure' should also be extended to romantic-era geology and the discovery of what we now call "deep time"—that is, an expansiveness of time that far exceeds that of humanity's time on earth. The work of Erasmus Darwin, Cuvier, and Lamarck—as well as figures lesser known today but equally important for the romantic understanding of geological time such as James Hutton, George Bellas Geenough, and more generally the Geological Society of London—gave the romantics a notion of ends that had hitherto been unimaginable: species die without revelation and without obvious remainder. One would also have to include in the historical background the debates between John Abernethy and William Lawrence concerning the principle of life.[xii] As Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* insists, the discovery of the origin of life would lead all too quickly to the thought of the end of life. The utilization of the secret origin of life produces a monster who "might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror," who puts at risk "the existence of the whole human race" (138).

One might add any number of additional historical backdrops that brought the possibility of a final end into profile. One might, for instance, address romantic Hellenism, which, guided by nascent archeology and anthropology, conjured the image of the end of civilization, especially by the sort of natural disasters that destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum, whose remains had been recently discovered.[xiii] One might address the Napoleonic Wars, which marked the advent not only of a global war, but arguably of a total war as well.[xiv] Or one might address the role of print media and the transformation of the public sphere. It is no accident that the concept and phenomenon of ideology arose with particular force in the romantic era. The proliferation of print, corresponding

societies, newspapers, magazines, and the public arena challenged the very thing they were supposed to support—namely, the progression from private and autonomous judgment to cultural consensus. Instead of valorizing and securing judgment at the seat of cognition and its passage into universality, print media and public opinion threatened the very autonomy and purity of the individual's reason. In the romantic era, the very seat of human reason came into crisis.[xv] In addition to the human species, the human as such was suddenly at risk. Man became a machine not because he was also an animal, but because the derivativeness of culture infected his organic core. The popularity and technological improvements of automatons were contemporaneous with ideological automata and the posthuman.[xvi]

With the growing conspicuousness of concepts and phenomena such as man, the human species, the nation state, the globalized economy, global war, ideology and public opinion, geological time, archeology, industrialism and machine technology, secularism and radical politics—it is no accident that the thought of a total end should come into relief. And yet, while all these factors help us situate the romantic interest in ends that I will develop in this dissertation, I want to focus on that peculiar type of an end that Mary Shelley helped us identify: the death of what is already dead, the death of a ghost. Scholarship working with the figure of specters, hauntings, and strange forms of present absences has become common in literary studies. And such scholarship has radically transformed our understanding of text and context, identity and culture, and time and history, showing that the objects of literary studies are much more ghostly, uncanny, slippery, and mobile than was once thought. Ruins and remnants and remains are scattered throughout academic volumes as figures for the disintegration of solid

foundations, the earliness or belatedness of temporal experience, and the inscription of an exterior and material culture into the interiority and phenomenality of our consciousness. Exerting pressure on our inherited notions of textuality and culture, these figures perhaps have had the strongest influence on our understanding of time and history. The task of contextualization—of squarely locating a particular phenomenon in a particular era—begins to erode as viable scholarly activity if it is performed without necessary qualifications and subtleties, since it will probably if not always turn out that what seem to be specific to a determinate historical moment exceeds that historical moment, either having roots well before or only coming to fruition well afterwards. In the realm of ghosts, synchronic historicism faces a diachrony that is neither linear nor a simple object of knowledge.

If it is thus difficult to historicize ghostly figures or figures of ghosts—since these figures precisely describe the figural and ghostly logic of time and history—then it will be *a fortiori* even more difficult to historicize what emerges in *The Last Man* as the death of a ghost—a death that cannot quite be called a figure, whether ghostly or not. Whatever import this 'figure' may have, it cannot be understood or accounted for by recourse to all the historical processes that I have laid out thus far. And yet, it does seem to make sense that such a 'figure' should arise during what we call Romanticism, when origins and ends come into crisis and the self begins to be figured as a sort of ghostly ruin. When this happens, it would be peculiar if that ghostly ruin were given a stable status in and as its very instability. The romantics, I now set out to argue, thus figure even ruins and uncanny absent presences as themselves facing a more devastating end than they have already undergone. When origins and ends come into crisis, so does the permanence of surviving

in what Frank Kermode calls the "middest" (7).[xvii] Final ends remain to haunt the figure of haunting and our confidence in the impossibility of final ends.

Introduction

Romanticism Not Surviving (A Review of Scholarship)

I. Surviving Romanticism

This dissertation takes as its point of departure the claim that the figure of *survival* haunts scholarship on Romanticism. More specifically, romanticists over the past forty years have challenged, displaced, and undermined the notion of survival, thereby reconceptualizing it as a figure that does *not* remain intact and that does *not* depend upon an original trauma or a final cure. According to this tradition, the critical thrust of romantic poetry is the figuration of modern humanity as fragmented, disfigured, and disjointed. Humanity's temporality, historicity, culture, and language may change forms in the future, but Romanticism teaches us that it will only and ever survive as incomplete, imperfect, and inhuman. Whatever remains of 'us' in or beyond today's postmodern future will be *remains*. And just as human thought and history will never establish themselves as more than a ruin, our demystifications will never completely destroy whatever hopes and illusions we may harbor. In other words, romantic survival names not only the ideology and exteriority inscribed deep within us that we have to bear. It also names the persistent and uncompromising maintenance of the illusion of an authentic humanity, since that illusion can neither be entirely escaped nor entirely demystified.

In "The Senselessness of an Ending" I argue that the *futurity* of survival—the survival of survival—has not been seriously interrogated. The romantic question has not been interpreted as *whether* 'we' will survive, but only as *how* 'we' will survive. While

the answer to that *how* has become increasingly precise and nuanced over the past forty years, it has been restricted to the *how*. I would like to consider the *whether*. And I would like to do so because it seems to me that the romantics did as much. That is, it seems to me that our preoccupation with modes of enduring *as* disaster and fragmentation has overshadowed if not silenced the romantic question as to *whether* we will survive disaster and fragmentation. (It might even be suggested—although I will not set out to prove as much—that contemporary criticism relies upon the futurity of survival as its unquestioned blind spot.) There are, of course, profound reasons for focusing on the *how* rather than the *whether*, the most obvious of which is that focusing on the future beyond survival is a means of failing to confront what it means to survive today. Dwelling on the apocalyptic moment at the end of global warming, for example, amounts to the refusal to realize we are already living with the violence of global warming, a violence that is all the more powerful precisely because it does not lend itself to the easy fantasy of a final and total meltdown.[xviii]

Yet, I argue that part of Romanticism's intellectual force lies precisely in thinking the *end* of survival. To think the end of survival is an audacious and unlikely thought, since survival—especially as it has been theorized in the last twenty years—names that which lives on *after* the end. Cathy Caruth famously reads survival as the testimony or witnessing of a "missed experience"—that is, as the paradoxical afterlife of something that never quite occurred (*Unclaimed Experience* 60). For Andrew Bennett, in *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*, the romantic poet "writes so that his identity, transformed and transliterated, disseminated in the endless act of reading, will survive" (2). Identity survives only so long as it has already ended, so long as it does not remain

itself but is "transformed and transliterated." More recently, in *Romanticism After Auschwitz*, Sara Guyer writes that, "romantic rhetoric is a rhetoric of survival" (13). "Survival is linked to a failure of ends" (ibid.). This is because survival is essentially linked, in her understanding, to prosopopoeia, which not only gives us our humanity while disfiguring it (gives face while defacing), but also gives face to the dead or ended. Prosopopoeia gives meaning to anything that seems to be deprived of or past life and meaning. As such, survival names "a life that exceeds the end of life," whether that end is a literal death or the nonbeing at the heart of human being (74).

Considering that so much thought on survival and Romanticism has revolved around precisely the problem of ends, there is the suspicion that in speaking of the 'end of survival' I am simply speaking of survival as such. Indeed, for romantic and poststructural thinkers alike, survival is contingent upon something *not* surviving. Already in its very concept, then, survival names the end of survival: something only lives on (or survives) because something else has died (or not survived). A person can die, and her possessions, writings, and memories live on; a word's meaning in a text can be (and perhaps always is) erased, and new meanings live on in its place; an experience can be forgotten, but the effects of that experience on others remain in force; a neural pathway can disappear, but new pathways are built around and determined by it; history is avoided, but leaves its material mark within escapist texts. Whatever survives a death does not thereby overcome it, but lives on only as a trace of itself. Because there is a splitting and a scar within whatever survives—be it a person, a text, a name, a memory—it survives with its own death or end inscribed within it. Each remainder, each act or text or person remaining, is not itself but is (or survives as) split between its inside and

outside, before and after, meaningfulness and 'material' nonmeaning. Survival, then, paradoxically precedes both life and death, identity and its undoing.[xix] Hence also the emphasis in contemporary literary studies on the link between erasure, remainders, and performativity: an erasure not only retains a trace or remainder of what is irreversibly destroyed, but is itself an act, a performative creation of something new that will in turn be erased, and so on. Death or destruction—finitude or nonsurvival—is the very act of surviving and the very possibility of futurity.[xx]

While the rhetoric of survival insists upon death and finitude, it also insists that death gives life. It insists on the *future* of survival. Indeed, what survives not only survives and points towards the past but also survives the present and thus awaits us or comes to us from the future. In contrast, I wish to articulate a difference between a survival founded upon nonsurvival and the end of that very survival. More precisely, I wish to articulate certain deaths that leave no remainders at all, that entail the end of any form of their survival whatsoever. Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to such *absolute* endings by different names. But I do come back to two terms. The first is 'history'. History, in some traditions, names the singular, which only happens once, or, to extend the concept, names that which has a limited span, that which is contingent and finite. What does not survive—what does not have a future 'ahead' of us, however limited—does not repeat, will not repeat. Whatever does not survive might have an unlimited extension into the past—it may have been surviving for as long as we can remember—but it has no future. It is, or will be at any rate, historical. A sense of history thus emerges in this dissertation that names the failure to return, to haunt, to happen again or repeat in another form.

The second term I circle back to again and again is 'absolute erasure', a term I take from Cathy Caruth.[xxi] I privilege this term because it points to the deconstructive logic of 'erasure' and what Paul de Man, in "Shelley Disfigured," calls 'half erasure'.[xxii] *Absolute erasure*, then, both borrows from and displaces the logic of 'half erasure', which names an erasure that leaves behind a remainder and thus lives on in another form. To attempt to displace the logic of erasure is to attempt to displace the logic of displacement—not an entirely possible task.[xxiii] But nevertheless, with a few exceptions that I will mention, it seems to me that this possibility has not even been considered. And it further seems to me that this possibility is one with which the romantics were obsessed, whether knowingly or not. They were obsessed with disappearances that leave behind no remainders at all and, indirectly, with a mode of thinking that exceeds the thought of survival or thinking qua survival.[xxiv]

Before proceeding, it is incumbent upon me to substantiate that contemporary criticism on Romanticism is indeed understandable according to a central paradigm of surviving *as* disjointed and fragmented. I have hitherto privileged survival as it has emerged in deconstructive discourses, but I wish to show that the paradigm of survival in fact underlies nearly all criticism on Romanticism, whether new historicist, deconstructive, formalist, or somewhere in between. One of the first major works in the historicist turn of the late 1970s, of course, was Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology*. This much-debated work argues first that the romantics sought to escape their contradictory and divisive socio-economic context by taking refuge in the flights of a self absolved from material conditions, and second that the formalism of New Criticism and then deconstruction afterwards perpetuated this romantic ideology.

For McGann, while the romantics *erase* and *displace* their historical conditions, these conditions survive in their poetry (the italicized words are his own, 85 and 88). Of the material abbey in Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, he writes: "The abbey associated with 1793 fades, as in a palimpsest," which is to say that the erased history survives and inscribes its trace in Wordsworth's poem. Moreover, as many of McGann's critics point out, the trace of material history survives because Wordsworth himself pays attention to it: directly after his famous sentence that, "Wordsworth lost the world merely to gain his own immortal soul," he writes that, the "greatness of this great poem lies in the clarity and candor with which it dramatizes not merely this event, but the structure of this event" (88).[xxv] In other words, *Tintern Abbey* not only tries to flee the world for the soul; it also, according to McGann, *dramatizes* the structure through which one attempts to flee. Just as the erased historical conditions survive their erasure, Wordsworth's knowledge of his own conditions survives its abnegation or self-repression.[xxvi]

Over the course of the 1980s, historicist readings moved more and more towards an understanding of history as that which survives only and ever as an absence. In his tour de force *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, Alan Liu writes that "there 'is' no history," highlighting the strange absent presence of both history qua what is past and history qua our present cultural context.[xxvii] The accent lies not on material history but on how material history survives precisely as a *sense*. History never shows (or is) itself, but 'is' the fluid formation of discursive differences that makes anything like a shared understanding of the world possible. A past formation—or "grid" or "arabesque"—of differences can only be read through our own "interpretation[s], representation[s], and illusion[s]" (41, 42). History 'itself' becomes something of a ghost. And so has, of

course, the self: "*There is no self or mind. Therefore, there is no Imagination*" (39, Liu's emphasis). But the self and the imagination that links the self to itself is an illusion or ghost that results (or survives) from the denial of another ghost, history. And if we cannot fully witness history in its presence but must in one sense or another deny it, then we will continue to live divided—divided between the historical destruction of the self and the illusion of that self.

Just as historicist readings have increasingly questioned the meaning of 'history', so too have they increasingly questioned the possibility of a historical difference that separates us from our textual object. In *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and Case of Romantic Historicism*, James Chandler historically develops how contemporary historicism has its roots in the romantic period. By following upon the implicit suggestions of McGann, Levinson, Liu, and others, Chandler rejects their explicit thesis: the presumption to gain a critical distance from Romanticism turns out to be repetition of Romanticism's 'discovery' of historical distance. Chandler's elaboration of "romantic historicism" finds one of its most profound critical resources in Reinhart Koselleck's essays in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, which situate the development of modern concepts and experiences of temporality in the romantic period. In its barest form, Koselleck suggests that prior to the late eighteenth century, temporality and historicity were not figured as threatening or fracturing self-identity. Or rather, the notion of self-identity was formed with its crisis. As the classical figuration of a homogenous, natural, and repetitive 'temporality' gives way to the romantic figuration of a heterogeneous, human, and non-repetitive one, discontinuity and disjunction—which is to say, historicity—simultaneously give face to and deface modern man. The

"temporalization of history" produces both our ideologies of presence *and* our knowledge or experience of our own non-self-coincidence (Koselleck 37). Or, in Koselleck's words, it produces "the experience of the loss of experience" (252).[xxviii] Romantic thought figures the self as surviving its loss of self. This notion of survival is what I will term "romantic survival," which I think has survived as the limit and confines of our own conceptual framework.

In *The Order of Things* Foucault similarly argues that our notion of temporality and history was invented in the disjunction between the classical age and the modern age, "around 1800" (xii). The *episteme* of the classical age was centered on a spatial order of representation, with a homogeneity underlying the difference between words and things. As the reduction of all past and future times to the spatial order of truth disappears, a temporal divide insinuates itself between thought and its referents, and historicity enters the world. Another key difference between the discourses of the classical age (the analysis of wealth, general grammar, and natural science) and those of the modern age (political economy, philology, and biology) is that the former presuppose their *episteme* while the latter attempt to know their *episteme* and, more specifically, to know it as the precondition of their discourses that eludes the knowledge produced by those discourses. Modern man knows that his search for the origin grounding his discourses (labor, language, life) will fail in advance not only because his knowledge is finite (limited from without by economic, linguistic, and physiological determination), but also because there is no unalienated labor, pure life irreducible to death, and pure language irreducible to its publicness and historicity. Modernity's specificity lies in its desire to know its ontological foundation *as well as* in its knowledge that the foundation of knowledge

exceeds ontological determination. Modern man is divided between himself and his true self that is *not*, between himself and his origin, between himself and himself, such that our historicity forces us to survive as other than ourselves.

Foucault's project has much in common with Jacques Derrida's thesis that the displacement of western metaphysics simultaneously makes metaphysics possible and forever rends apart its confidence in the logic of self-identity. The primary difference between the two thinkers is that Foucault seeks to historicize the emergence of a threatening and constitutive non-self-coincidence while Derrida seeks to show that non-self-coincidence undoes any attempt to historicize it since it originarily opens the field of historicity. For Foucault we may not be able to think any past *episteme* without importing our modern concept of the *episteme*, but we cannot thereby universalize it. While for Derrida experience and thought as such are predicated upon something (say, "writing") that may become explicit or problematic in the late eighteenth century but that 'precedes' any given historical moment. Both writers agree that 'we' 'today' are survivors of Romanticism, but they disagree as to how far we can generalize romantic survival into the past and future. Both agree that romantic survival is historical, but differ on whether this history extends to 'western metaphysics' as a whole or is limited to the past two centuries.

Derrida and Foucault thus share a logic of a survival that contemporary criticism has taken up either as its central assumption or conclusion.[xxix] As the debate between new historicism and deconstruction has fallen to the wayside, so too has the question as to how far the concept of romantic survival can be extend into the past and future. In fact, whether more indebted to Derrida or Foucault, there seems to be a consensus among

leading critics that romantic survival exceeds historical delimitations but is nonetheless a historically singular problematic. The figure of survival may have a privileged historical relationship to Romanticism and it may always appear in historically singular ways, but it remains or survives as both 'our' condition and as any conceivable one. It seems to me, though, that the irreducibility of the logic of survival to a given historical moment allows scholars to extend survival to *any* historical moment. The *irreducibility* of the logic of survival thus risks becoming the *permanence* of the logic of survival, even if most thinkers will not use this word and actively work against notions of permanence. Because the romantics, in my reading, challenge the very survival of romantic survival in the future, they thereby question the extension or generalization of romantic survival to the future in ways that contemporary criticism has not yet realized. Importantly, though, the romantics do not simply historicize romantic survival. Rather, they continue to assert the irreducibility of the logic of survival *and yet* confront the possibility of a strange future in which this logic does not seem to apply.

A number of recent publications bear out the tendency to understand Romanticism as the discovery of ideas or figures that are both historically specific and excessive of that historical specificity.[xxx] In his 2005 *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* Thomas Pfau reconceptualizes mood as that which structurally underlies any individual's mood and precedes any discursive typology of given moods.[xxxi] Mood is the prereflexive, inaccessible, and elusive condition for "all possible experience, as well as for all discursive and expressive behavior" (13). But mood also reveals our historicity to us and is itself always specific to its historical moment. As an underlying ontological foundation, mood names precisely our historical disposition

and embeddedness. In other words, there is no ontological foundation that is not simultaneously a historical foundation. What makes Pfau's book so daring and brilliant is his attempt to historicize mood, which, in his own formulation is the condition of possibility of history. He locates a succession of three moods in the romantic era: paranoia, trauma, and melancholy. However incompatible these three moods may be, they all testify to the underlying notion of surviving as incomplete, failed, and divided. But while Pfau does much to enrich the historical specificity of romantic survival, he does not question his assumption of the *persistence* or *survival* of mood, the transcendental yet historically specific condition of experience. As such, even if his account is as rigorous as possible from within the paradigm of romantic survival, he never questions the possibility of its disappearance: as historically specific, mood, according to Pfau, will *a priori* remain or survive as the possibility of futurity and as incapable of destruction.

More recently, in their introduction to a 2012 volume of the *Romantic Circles Praxis Series—Romanticism and Disaster*—Jacques Khalip and David Collings conceive of Romanticism as a mode of thought that does not try to surpass disaster as an accidental, escapable, or sublatable event, but as one that survives or "abide[s] *with* and *as* disaster" (9):

> Insofar as disaster is not a referential event but an undoing of certain categories, it ultimately undermines any attempt to explain it as a dimension of a familiar history or to interpret it within the terms of any received historiography. To be sure, as we have argued above, the thought of disaster *as* this undoing emerges within a certain history, but precisely

> as a turn upon the discourses it inherits from that history, a turn that ultimately suggests that disaster floats free of any determining moment, or more radically lays bare a certain nontemporal negativity at the heart of modern historicity itself. (15)

While they privilege Romanticism as a historical moment in which the question of surviving *with* disaster (as opposed to surviving a disaster) emerges with a particular insistence, Khalip and Collings extend the condition of "abid[ing] *with* and *as* disaster" to that which is "proper to the act of reading itself" (9, 1). "[C]atastropic reality… is not meant to be withstood but rather accepted as our *ineluctable* present" (4, my italics). In the same moment they privilege modernity and its persistence up until today, they imply that the condition of romantic survival names the condition of historicity itself, extending to any conceivable future.

The general thrust of romantic scholarship today is that no matter how historicially determined Romanticism's insights may be, 'we' will continue to be split between the categories we inherit and the impossibility of giving them credence. Indeed, the thesis of Khalip and Collings' introduction seems to be, on the one hand, that subjectivity, community, and meaning are always already undone and, on the other, that we have to live with them in and as their displacement or in and as the disaster that that displacement is. This implies that no matter how undone subjectivity, community, and meaning become, they continue to survive as inherited and insurmountable illusions. If we could once and for all reveal the impossibility of a grounded subjectivity, a secure community, or a transparent meaning and thereby simply overcome or do without them, then we would not have to abide with and as disaster. According to Khalip and Collings,

Romanticism shatters the differences between word and act, self and other, and sign and referent, but it also tells us that there is no moving beyond these inherited, ineluctable, and irreducible differences, even if they no longer seem to hold.

Scholarship (even historical scholarship) thus remains profoundly indebted to Paul de Man's refrain that we will always and again relapse back to what has been deconstructed. It is worth briefly dwelling on one instance of this Demanian refrain. In "Shelley Disfigured" he asks:

> How can a positional act, which relates to nothing that comes before or after, become inscribed in a sequential narrative? How does a speech act become a trope, a catachresis which then engenders in its turn the narrative sequence of an allegory? It can only be because we impose, in our turn, on the senseless power of positional language the authority of sense and of meaning. (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 117)

Singular and non-meaningful *acts* ("material events") that resist the generality of *meaning* nevertheless become incorporated within systems of meaning or trope. And further, meaning incorporates these singular and absolute acts precisely by means of the very positionality (or, the non-meaningful power of an act) that it seeks to erase: "we im*pose*" meaning on "a *pos*itional act." "[T]he initial violence of position can only be half erased, since the erasure is accomplished by a devise of language that never ceases to partake of the very violence against which it is directed" (118-9). Meaning can "*never*" absolutely erase material events that disfigure it, since these events can only be "half erased." Likewise, the articulation of meaning can never be absolutely destroyed by the disarticulating power of material alterity:

> *The Triumph of Life* warns us that nothing, whether deed, word, thought, or text, ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything that precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence. It also warns us why and how these events then *have to be* reintegrated in a historical and aesthetic system of recuperation that *repeats itself* regardless of its exposure to fallacy. (122, my italics)

I underscore de Man's phrases "have to be" and "repeats itself" because they suggest the *necessity* that material events cannot but be reincorporated into meaning.[xxxii] This seems entirely obvious and indisputable: the material acts of history, for example, *a priori* exceed the tropes, narrative, and sense of human and textual historicization that nonetheless appear to contain them.

Yet, this entirely obvious proposition carries with it other propositions that are not entirely obvious. In particular, it assumes that part of the aesthetic or tropological system into which material events will be reinscribed is the (meaningful) opposition between action and meaning. De Man's deconstruction of this opposition only carries weight if the opposition *remains* with full force. Because it is *necessary* that meaning will be undone by acts ("I insist on the *necessity* [of the passage from trope to performative]" (*Aesthetic Ideology* 133, my italics)) *and* because it is *necessary* that acts will be reinscribed by meaning, it is also thereby necessary that the distinction between the two will remain. Other 'necessities' follow from this one: the necessity of the difference between meaningful trope and referent, self and other, aesthetic ideology and its disarticulation. Romantic survival, de Man implies, will ineluctably, indelibly, and irreducibly survive in

the future, because futurity 'itself' is originarily opened by these oppositions and their instability. Yet, the modality of this necessity is underdeveloped in the Demanian corpus (is it an *a priori* necessity, a historical necessity, a linguistic necessity, a necessity arbitrarily opened just before the beginning of the Western tradition?).[xxxiii] Regardless, from Romanticism itself to the debate between Foucault and Derrida to contemporary scholarship today, the legacy of this necessity has lived on. Romantic survival seems to entail the irreducible survival of romantic survival, thereby positing itself as unending. De Man writes: "The process is endless" (*Rhetoric* 120).[xxxiv]

II. After Survival

At the historical moment called Romanticism, writers brought to our attention the logic of survival. And at the historical moment credited with *both* the emergence of historicism *and* the emergence of the rhetoric of a universal and, as it were, prehistorical self-consciousness, writers figured survival as that which *both* can only ever be understood within a specific historical context *and* exceeds any given historical moment. In deconstructive discourses, this paradox has been called the "quasi-transcendental."[xxxv] *Transcendental* because it originarily opens the field of history. And *quasi* because, although making history possible, it has no transcendental being or identity outside of a particular historical figuration, since the logic of survival precisely puts into question the logic of identity, being, essence, and immutability (one survives as not oneself). *And yet*, however irreducible, ineluctable, indestructible, or indelible this quasi-transcendental romantic survival may be, the romantics also bring to our attention that this notion *cannot*

be comfortably extended into the future. The survival of the logic of romantic survival itself as well as the survival of certain opposition that seem *necessarily* to remain are challenged by the very thinkers who brought the complex logic of survival to our attention in the first place.

It should be said upfront and clearly that my argument concerning the end of romantic survival is not directed *against* its poststructural elaboration. Rather, my argument owes its force to this elaboration and *never* insists that it moves 'beyond' it. As I have mentioned in an endnote above, it may very well be the case that the end of romantic survival is already inscribed within romantic survival and the writers who elaborate it. And yet, I do intend to argue that, for the romantics, the thought of the *end* of romantic survival is just as crucial as the exploration of what it means to survive. I should also say upfront and clearly that the *end* of romantic survival does *not* insist upon a simple notion of the end. It would be preposterous to argue that there could be a clean break between 'our' condition of surviving as fragmented and some future beyond that condition. To argue this would be to believe in the possibility of an absolute revolution that succeeds in absolutely breaking that from which it revolted. The romantics have taught us, though, that such an absolute break has to be viewed with the utmost suspicion, since the rebirth that would succeed that break is often no more than the fantasy of a world purged of contamination or marginal peoples and ideas.

As such, when I discuss the *end* of romantic survival, I mean to suggest something that is properly unthinkable. As will be clearer in my fourth chapter, I take Percy Bysshe Shelley as my guide here, since he encourages us—in the name of ethics, politics, and aesthetics—to think precisely what cannot be thought. Not only is it

impossible to historically delimit romantic survival, it is *a fortiori* impossible to think a future present in which humanity would not be surviving however imperfectly. How could we imagine a future in human history that is no longer fragmented without thereby introducing a humanity finally united with itself, as if the romantic fantasy of an ancient unity could actually be accomplished? How could we imagine a future in which consciousness and materiality are no longer in an uncomfortable tension or in which meaning and nonmeaning are no longer effacing each other? In short, we cannot reasonably imagine these scenarios. Indeed, we simply cannot imagine them at all.

And yet, the romantics compel us, if we follow them closely, to confront the possibility of an end—not an end that is imaginable as a *simple* end, but an end that is *unimaginable*, that breaks with the limits of *imagination*. My question, then, is not how the imagination disarticulates the links or articulations it makes and is thus always an incomplete 'faculty'. Rather, my question pertains to the absolute disappearance of certain differences that the imagination tries to bridge, which means that my question pertains to the absolute erasure of the imagination in respect to various differences to which it addresses itself. Particular oppositions that seem to be both unstable and inescapable, the romantics suggest, face the possibility of a total disappearance, such that the opposition no longer appears *in any form at all*. A total disappearance of this sort resists even the most deconstructive logic, since the disappearance of an opposition should at the very least leave a remainder, whether it be a new opposition or the appearance of disappearance. Considering that any mark or event is predicated upon the *possibility* of its repetition, how could a destruction also destroy this *possibility* of repeating with a difference or returning as a ghost? How can a destruction not only

destroy what was, but also its own future archive, even and especially if that archive effaces, invents, or misarchives that which was archived? As I will put it in my fourth chapter, the romantics were specifically interested in destructions that destroy ahead, as it were, that preclude absolutely their future readability.

According to the romantics, I will argue, such a complete destruction has to be a possibility—if only a radically unexplainable and contingent one. In my readings of absolute erasure in romantic texts, I focus on particularly romantic oppositions such as childhood/adulthood, innocence/fallenness, mind/body, and imagination/science. What does it tell us about history, deconstruction, and Romanticism—the three terms around which this dissertation pivots—if we have to admit a possible future in which inescapable oppositions become radically obsolete such that what we hold to be the conditions of possibility of history, deconstruction, and Romanticism disappear? I also focus on moments in romantic poetry where the futurity of romantic survival is figured as the preclusion of any worthwhile future, where, in other words, the play between erasure and repetition appears predictable, a kind of stasis, even if this play seems originarily to open the future. If the romantics herald the poststructural thought of today, they also think a strange and futuristic thought that poststructuralism has yet to think, despite all its insistence upon the strange and the future.

My first two chapters confront one of the most crucial texts in the reception of Romanticism, Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Chapter One, "Time and History in *The Prelude* (Book Five)," begins by arguing that Wordsworth figures his childhood self as temporally disjointed. Even while portraying his youthful life as continuous with the rural countryside where the past and the present seem to mirror one another and where time

and history seem static and non-threatening, Wordsworth shows that temporality was in fact already rending the self from itself. And historical changes were already contaminating what seemed to be a timeless and pure existence. After working through his deconstruction of his innocent childhood, I then ask what happens when Wordsworth narrates the journey of this temporally disjointed self from the countryside to the city. What happens when a self that seemed to be whole but is known to have already been fragmented encounters Cambridge, London, and then Paris, where the force of historical and cultural interpellation is painfully apparent?

Entering the historical world of the city, Wordsworth does not simply realize that the pure self with its seemingly ahistorical imagination is in fact a defensive strategy for confronting historical contingency, technology, and change. Rather, I argue, the self that has always already been threatened by historicity faces a second and even more devastating threat. Wordsworth encounters "the monster birth/ Engendered by these too industrious times./ Let few words paint it: 'tis a Child, no Child,/ But a dwarf Man" (V.293-6). As I elaborate in the chapter, I read these lines as figuring a human that is no longer divided between the perception of his or her authentic childhood and the knowledge of his or her inauthentic adulthood. Historical developments produce the possibility of a "monstrous birth," a "dwarf Man," who no longer suffers what all humans necessarily do: the condition of being divided between innocent childhood and ideologically complicit adulthood. The constitutively insistent and constitutively deconstructed opposition between authenticity and inauthenticity faces an absolute erasure.

Together with the "dwarf Man" are

These mighty workmen of our late age
Who with a broad highway have overbridged
The froward chaos of futurity,
Tamed to their bidding;
……
…watchful men
And skilled in the usury of time,
Sages, who in their prescience would controul
All accidents, and to the very road
Which they have fashioned would confine us down,
Like engines… (V.370-83)

The "mighty workmen" threaten to bring a machine-like halt not only to the "froward chaos of futurity" but even to "time" itself and "[a]ll accidents." Moreover, these men who somehow existentially threaten time and history are, paradoxically, products of the very history they threaten: they are produced by "our late age" and "these too industrious times." The idea, I argue, is that if man is no longer divided between authenticity and inauthenticity, then human temporality cannot proceed, since that division is constitutive of temporality. The historical conditions to which Wordsworth points us assault the very possibility of history's future. The *Prelude*, I argue, needs to be understood not only as an account of how romantic autobiography challenges the very ground of the narrating self, but also as an account of how romantic historiography discovers the overlooked possibility of a historical devastation to a self that was already only surviving as a devastation.

Chapter Two, "One Image in *The Prelude* (Book Seven)," reads Wordsworth's portrayal of London in Book Seven as a 'figuration' of such an absolute or meta-devastation. I build from many critics who interpret Wordsworth's London as a sort of dystopian postmodern metropolis where symbolic value replaces both use and exchange value and where humans are perpetually dehumanized by being incorporated within the play of signifiers and commodification. However, I argue that these interpretations do not go far enough. I point out, for example, that the difference between real and alienated labor is strikingly absent in Wordsworth's portrayal of London. Humans are not dehumanized by an economy out of control; rather, there are simply no laboring humans, which is to say no humans at all. Instead of figuring the dehumanization of humanity, Wordsworth 'figures' the total disappearance of even the illusion of humanity. He does *not* deconstruct the difference between authentic human labor and inauthentic inhuman work by showing that each node of the dichotomy infects the other. He *does* portray an inhumanity that seems to have no memory or sign or presupposition of the human. At the same time as insisting humanity depends upon the act of self-reflectively creating an illusion of itself, Wordsworth offers us a 'humanity' that—impossibly—no longer has this illusion.

I then discuss the "blind Beggar, who, with upright face,/ Stood propped against a wall" (VII.612-3). The blind beggar seems to be an exception to the disappearance of even the illusion of a pure humanity since he is "a type,/ Or emblem, of the utmost that we know,/ Both of ourselves and of the universe" (VII.618-20). And yet, I argue that the blind beggar is not simply a dead man, but the corpse of an inhuman Londoner, the corpse of someone who was not human in the first place. The blind beggar is the corpse

of a ghost. I conclude the chapter by arguing that Wordsworth 'figures' London as an absolute image. By 'absolute image' I mean an image that has no referent, no possibility of an observer outside the image, and no substratum upon which the image is inscribed. The real, I argue, does not become derealized, and illusion does not become real; rather, in Wordsworth's image of London, the real—be it the paper 'below' the image, a potential viewer of the image, or the actual city of the past—is *absolutely* absent. Even the illusion of the real is absent. Without any exteriority or outside, the image of London thus becomes *one*. It becomes absolutely self-identical, which is to say that it becomes nothing. The oppositions between mimesis and reality, inhuman and human, sign and referent, or observed and observer become, in a paradoxical fashion, absolutely deconstructed (the latter term in each opposition simply falls out of the picture such that the oppositions do not even survive in mutilated form). Of course, the figure of an absolute image—the figure of the radical annihilation of figures—does not succeed: oppositions still precariously linger, even if Wordsworth, in my reading, is attempting to imagine their absolute erasure.

The upshot of my argument is that Wordsworth figures the singularity of modernity as its threat to erase absolutely oppositions that seem to survive in and as their instability. With such an argument I mean to put pressure *both* on deconstructive readings that would suggest that historical oppositions have always already been destabilized *and* on historicist claims that such destabilization arises with modernity. According to Wordsworth, modernity lies not in the unhinging of previously secure oppositions and categories, but in the threat to oppositions and categories that had already constitutively relied upon their own unhinging. In other words, the deconstructive reader is correct

when he or she argues that there never was stable language, and the historicist is correct when he or she argues that something changes with modernity. What neither the deconstructive nor historicist reader has considered is that modernity threatens to annihilate completely what has always only survived in and as its devastation. And if modernity—the modernity called Romanticism—figures the *possibility* of such a devastation in the future, then postmodernity, with its globalized neoliberalism and technological determinism and artificial intelligence and ecological catastrophism seems bent on announcing itself as the fulfillment of such a devastation.

Chapter Three, "Shelley's *Defence* After Poetry," begins by unpacking Shelley's figuration of poetry as that which "creates for us a being within our being" (533). Poetry *creates* or invents our own being, but it also undoes whatever being it invents by revealing its fictionality. And poetry not only creates and undoes our being, but also its own being, such that it forever invents and destroys its own essence. Because poetry's self-destruction gives it its life, Shelley insists that it is "eternal," "ever-living," "everlasting," and "forever" (513, 523, 524). For this reason, it is not terribly surprising that scholars have overlooked Shelley's comments about "the extinction of the poetic principle" and the "extinction of the energies which sustain the soul of social life" (524, 521). At first it seems that the technoscience, which Shelley presciently critiques, is the most proximal cause of this extinction. And indeed, Shelley brilliantly diagnoses technoscience's capacity for unbridled destruction as the capacity for calculating even and especially the random and the blind spots of calculation. However, it is not simply technoscience that exterminates poetry. Since, as Shelley is at pains to remind us, all science and discourse is in essence poetic, poetry itself is the ultimate source of its own

extermination. The most proximate cause of "the extinction of the poetic principle" is poetry 'itself'. Shelleyan poetry—which arguably names or enacts deconstruction—has its own death drive, the death drive of the economy of death. In this sense, *A Defence* leaves us with the philosophical claim that the conditions of possibility of finitude can somehow encounter a finitude of their own, even if a strictly unimaginable one.

As *A Defence of Poetry* shows, while deconstruction and poetry are the best antidotes to technoscientific capitalism, they are also more complicit with it than has previously been realized. More interestingly, *A Defence* spells out why the deconstructive logic of romantic survival is conditional upon the unthinkable possibility of its annihilation. A peculiar ethics emerges here. Once technoscience has "eaten more than we can digest" and invents faster than we can integrate—once, that is, technoscience becomes more inventive than poetry—it is imperative for poetry to take over the role of integrating what has been invented. Instead of pushing thought past its boundary, past the logic of romantic survival, it becomes all the more necessary to repeat this logic, to expand it, and to apply it to all possible domains. However, a contradictory imperative also emerges: to think 'beyond' the logic of romantic survival, to think that which cannot be thought, since thought itself only operates, Shelley teaches us, if it opens the still unthinkable. And precisely because the disappearance of the logic of romantic survival is utterly unthinkable, it is what we must think. Thinking, for Shelley, is only worthy of its name if it strives to think beyond its outer most limits. He leaves his readers with the seemingly impossible task of thinking in such a way that takes deconstruction as rigorously as possible and yet moves beyond it. Because deconstruction calls into question any such 'beyond' for myriad reasons, and because deconstruction is precisely

that which welcomes the other, Shelley's demand remains unanswerable, even if the imperative retains its force.

Chapter Four, "Annihilating Allusions in Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind'," builds from scholarship that has read the poem as figuring history as the eternal play between destruction and creation, revolution and counterrevolution, winter and spring. Destruction creates, and creation destroys. Moreover, everything in the ecosphere of "Ode to the West Wind" is in process of transforming and mutating, such that as soon as something comes into existence, it ceases to be what it is. While Shelley's poem thus seems to be meditation on becoming rather than being and destruction rather than creation, it also suggests that mutability and destruction are constitutive of life and futurity. It thus seems, as it did in *A Defence*, that nothing can be destroyed absolutely since destruction is the very force of creation. However, through closely reading the poem's imagery and following its allusions to Erasmus Darwin's proto-evolutionary biology, the Bible, and the mythic tradition from Virgil to Milton, I argue that Shelley figures the destruction of history's seemingly eternal play between creation and destruction. At the same time that "Ode to the West Wind" suggests that no destruction can be absolute since destruction is the engine of creation, it also suggests that the remainders that destructions leave behind can be destroyed absolutely, without a trace. In contrast to the Shelley of undetermined futurity, which is usually accepted in scholarship, I find a Shelley profoundly indebted to and in conversation with the discoveries of deep time, the geological record, and the precariousness of the species. I find a Shelley obsessed not with the indestructible future (since future, as non-existent, cannot be

destroyed), but with the looming annihilation of the play between destruction and creation that opens futurity in the first place.

Most peculiar is that the images of absolute annihilation in "Ode to the West Wind" do not quite occur within the poem. No doubt, once read closely the poem is permeated with these images. But the figures destroy themselves, and cannot quite be called figures. If they emerge at all, they do so 'outside' the poem. Many of these 'figures', for example, point to a future that would occur after the time that the poem narrates. Oddly, though, the future to which they point is the destruction of the possibility of such a future. As such, it is no surprise that these figures cannot emerge in the poem as figures, for they figure the end of figuration. While *A Defence of Poetry* urges us to think in a way that cannot be understood according to the logic of romantic survival, "Ode to the West Wind" challenges us to read 'figures' that cannot even be understood as under erasure. The 'figures' in "Ode to the West Wind" are not erased in the sense that we generally understand the term 'erased': they are not displaced by chains of signification, nor are they fragmented by the materiality letter or the performative power of the word, nor does their own logic contradict what they seem to mean. Rather, the figures are not even in the poem, but are in the future implied by the poem; and in the absent future beyond the poem's limits, they figure the destruction of that very futurity. In other words, certain figures point us towards their future, which is already non-existent qua the future, and then the implied but non-existent future figure 'figures' the destruction of the figure's futurity. While I limit myself to "Ode to the West Wind" it is my contention that such annihilation 'occurs' throughout romantic poetry, which is another way of saying that

romantic poetry thinks through a type of erasure more radical and unreadable than has been realized even by those readers who are most attuned to unreadability.

My fifth chapter, "Keats's Material Psyche and the End of Love," provides another example of a self-annihilating figure. At the end of the poem, the poet places the goddess Psyche within his mind as his psyche. And in the final lines, Psyche holds a "bright torch" and a "casement [remains] ope at night/ To let the warm Love in" (ll. 65-7). Scholars have pointed out that this scene alludes to Apuleius's Cupid-Psyche myth at the moment when Psyche lights a lamp in order to reveal the identity of her lover, which she is forbidden from knowing. But scholars have not noticed that Psyche lights the torch in Keats's poem *before* Cupid enters the room, in which case he cannot enter according to the mythological frame evoked by the poem. Keats reverses the order of events such that Cupid is cast outside. However, he is not simply excluded or exiled. Rather, he is excluded from the *mental landscape* of the fourth stanza, which I argue figures the confusion of the inside and the outside, the psyche and the body, consciousness and materiality. In the final lines—or just beyond them, in their future as it were—Love is not only excluded, but excluded from *both* the inside and the outside *and* from the confusion between them. Even more peculiarly, in the context of the mythological tradition, Keats's prose writing, and romantic brain science, Love is understood as the principle of difference or relation, as the relationality between mortal Psyche and immortal psyche, as relation between brain and psyche. Just beyond or outside the poem's end, Love or difference is excluded from the very play or difference between the material brain and the conscious psyche. The image that emerges is absolutely unimag(in)able, since we think the two things (say, the mind and the brain) without thereby thinking the difference and

relation between them. We simply cannot think the relation between the mind and the brain if Love or relationality has been absolutely excluded.

The extended metaphor of the fourth stanza figures the interiority of a conscious psyche on the one hand and, on the other, the materiality of the non-conscious brain according to Alan Richardson's indispensible reading. With the relation between the material brain and the phenomenality of consciousness excluded, the poem offers us a cryptic and unimaginable 'figure' of a mind that thinks but has no brain or of a brain that thinks but has no consciousness. It offers us, in other words, an account of artificial intelligence—and it does so *without* presupposing that the psyche has not always already been artificial, robotic, and mechanical. Artificial intelligence remains here a figure, and in the end "Ode to Psyche" can only *attempt* to point towards such a possibility—a possibility that still today cannot be thought without anthropomorphism, without bringing interpolating the Love that has been excluded. Even if the poem fails to figure the unfigurable—even if we can only read the poem by bringing Love back inside in the last instance—"Ode to Psyche" directs our attention to an unfigurable type of figure. Specifically, it directs our attention to an absolute erasure of the difference between the brain and the mind that was occupying both romantic brain scientists and poets.

In *Romanticism at the End of History* Jerome Christensen similarly devotes his attention to romantic images that can only arise in their future, that can only be read anachronistically after the fact. He finds in romantic poems a politics that could not have been registered during Romanticism but only retrospectively from today. The future politics he finds might be impossible then and now. But Christensen—and I agree with

him resolutely—refuses to give up hope in that impossibility and refuses to think that the future will mirror the present or the past:

> That occult, international affiliation is, of course, preposterous. We have no other evidence of the Carbonari in England, unless you count the Romantic intelligence of charcoal burners that, thanks to Marjorie Levinson, we now know Wordsworth buried in "Tintern Abbey." The action is as preposterous as a countrywoman teaching herself a fine Italian hand [which Mary Robinson or the Maid of Buttermere purportedly taught herself] or, for that matter, an illiterate proletarian audience reading *Invisible* on the chest of Jack the Giant Killer at Sadlers Wells [see the *Prelude*, Book VII]. The affiliation is preposterous because its possibility was not yet discursively constructed in the certifiably approved manner. (152)

The difference between possibility and impossibility can only be "discursively constructed" in the future. At present, though, the lines between possibility and impossibility seem to be drawn tightly, usually and successfully policing even those on the furthest extremes of the 'ideological spectrum'. Yet Christensen reminds us that the category of impossibility only applies to the present or the past present and can always be registered as possible from the future. Despite my agreement with Christensen on this matter, our projects diverge not only in emphasis. He endeavors to think the future possibility of the impossible happening. In contrast, I am endeavoring to think the futural possibility of the foreclosure or preclusion of futurity: historical events that erase the differences we hold to be constitutive of history. Especially in Chapters Four and Five I

read ‘images’ or ‘figures’ of the future (and readable only from the future) that preclude their future readability. I read, that is, ‘images’ or ‘figures’ of the end of romantic survival, which is the condition of reading. Such images of a self-erasing future could be simple referential—if still unimaginable—ones (hydrogen bombs, global warming), but they can also be insidiously imperceptible ones such as the erasure of already unstable dichotomies (mind and brain). And it is by no means obvious that they should give us what Christensen call “romantic hope.” While Shelley may find the end of romantic survival to be the condition of possibility of futurity, it may well turn out to be a nightmare. And against the Shelleyan hope of thinking ‘beyond’ the deconstruction he spells out, it seems to me that conserving and disseminating deconstruction is absolutely necessary today in the face of the most terrifying referential aberrations, to use a Demanian turn of phrase. But it also seems to me that part of conserving deconstruction or Romanticism is thinking it through to its end.

Each chapter of the dissertation attempts to locate the thought of absolute erasure in a canonical romantic poem that seems to announce the impossibility of such an erasure. And each chapter struggles with determining what the romantic insight into the end of romantic survival has to teach us today. That said, I do not think that locating such an insight requires justifying its relevance to today’s politics, ethics, and culture; I think it is interesting and important enough even if it only stands as an intellectual supplement to our historical understanding of Romanticism or to the deconstructive insights about erasures and remainders. And yet, I believe that the ramifications of the necessary possibility of absolute erasure have not insignificant bearings on our understanding of history and politics, cognitive science and artificial intelligence, and technoscience and

ideology. I will leave any commentary about those bearings to the chapters themselves, partly because I try to keep them in the idiom of the poem I am discussing and partly because the significance of absolute erasure for today's discourses would take me away from Romanticism and would require another dissertation.

Chapter One

Time and History in *The Prelude* (Book Five)

I. Introduction

Wordsworth's poetry is no longer read as a naïve attempt to return to a time and space prior to history and culture, but as a profound meditation on history and culture's very violences. His poetry is often read as understanding that there is no escape and that we are bound to bear the burden of the violences and fragmentations and disjointedness that are constitutive of (modern) life. This turn in Wordsworth scholarship seems to have taken place by the mid 1990s, when the debates between new historicist and deconstructive readings of Romanticism began to fizzle out. In his 1994 equally deconstructive as historicist *Wordsworthian Errancies* David Collings suggests that Wordsworth's perceived retreat in the face of political matters resulted from an "[u]nwilling[ness] to master the dissolution of culture or to recuperate it within a discourse of knowledge," such that Wordsworth "ends up suspending knowledge, dissolving even political and philosophical articulations of cultural dissolution" (6). Instead of avoiding the political, Wordsworth details the ineluctable violence and error of any political position while ceaselessly writing poetry that is, through and through, political. According to Collings, "If this poet ever endured a crisis of total disorientation, he emerged from it by making it the basis of his poetics" (7). The task of Wordsworthian poetics is not viewed as the attempt to *overcome* this disorientation, but to bear with it:

"In effect, he attempts to write a culture that survives in the form of its own destruction" (3).

In his 2009 *Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern* David Simpson makes similar claims. He reads Wordsworth as negotiating the historically intense period defined by the invisible movement of the ghostly commodity form; global economic circuits into which human subjects fit like mechanized parts; global wars causing massive death and disease and displacement; and by rural depopulation, mechanized temporality, and machine labor. Simpson writes of *The Prelude*: "So we have a paradox: a poem that seems to recommend the slowing down of time as a desired alternative to the quickening tempo of modern life, but which also invites an association between slow and regulated time and the passage toward mechanical inertia and death" (76). The escape from the "quickening tempo of modern life" constitutes life as life-in-death just as much as the tempo itself. The poet remains split between two choices, neither of which can be overcome and neither of which of which can be chosen without simultaneously affirming a certain dehumanizing "death."

While the word means a range of things to various critics, Wordsworth's poetry is read as a poetry of *survival*. Paul de Man writes that the "structure of poetic temporality" in Wordsworth "is thus an act through which a memory threatened with its own loss succeeds in sustaining itself" (*Rhetoric of Temporality* 64). Geoffrey Hartman writes of Wordsworth: "The mind of a poet, then, is a survivor's mind" ("Reading: The Wordsworthian Enlightenment" 33). And Sara Guyer asks: "Or is he rather a theoretician of the survival of the human despite its opening to androids and automatons…?" (67). It is unsurprising that scholars have focused so much on what remains after destruction in

Wordsworth's poetry instead of on the destruction itself. After all, Wordsworth's poetry is filled with living ghosts and ghastly men, with the persistence of fragility rather than with its absolute destruction.

Wordsworth's 1798 "The Old Cumberland Beggar" focuses precisely on one of these living ghosts. The poem barely imports volition or a psyche to this solitary wanderer. He is a machine of "idle computation" as he "scan[s]" "his scraps and fragments" (ll. 10-12). Or, he is an array of dismembered yet moving body parts: "On the ground/ His eyes are turned, and, as he moves along/ *They* move along the ground" (ll. 45-7, italics in the original). Wordsworth continues:

> …and evermore,
> Instead of common and habitual sight
> Of fields with rural works, of hill and dale,
> And the blue sky, one little span of earth
> Is all his prospect. Thus, from day to day,
> Bowbent, his eyes forever on the ground,
> He plies his weary journey, seeing still,
> And never knowing that he sees, some straw,
> Some scattered leaf… (ll.47-55)

While he is not blind, he lacks the perceptual field associated with consciousness, only and ever looking upon the ground below him. He lacks the ability, moreover, to create general concepts out of singular objects, as "common and the habitual" not only refers to Wordsworth's characterization of the "hill and dale" but ends up naming the power to make something common or habitual. He sees, but he neither knows *what* he sees nor

even "*that* he sees." And yet, at the same time that the poem describes him as lacking any will or cognition, it also depicts him as traveling along a regular and patterned route. It is as though he were preprogrammed, a mechanized ghost.

Unsurprisingly, the townspeople react to him in two divergent ways. On the one hand, the beggar demands—without having to actually demand anything at all—a particularly concerned response from those whom he passes. Like "[s]he who tends/ The toll-gate" and the "Post-boy,"

> The sauntering horseman-traveller does not throw
> With careless hands his alms upon the ground,
> But stops, that he may safely lodge the coin
> Within the old Man's hat; nor quits him so,
> But still when he has given his horse the rein
> Towards the aged Beggar turns a look… (ll. 25-31)

But on the other hand, "[b]oys and girls,/ The vacant and the busy, maids and youths" simply "pass him by" (ll. 63-5). Just like a ghost, the beggar both transfixes others and is invisible to them. Through and through, he is double: a ghost yet a machine, a spectacle yet invisible. Most importantly, the beggar does not count among the communities he travels through and yet he is the core of each community. Shuttling between villages, he has no community to which he belongs; he "breathe[s] and live[s] but for himself alone," only taking and never giving (l. 158). Yet he instantiates "Nature's law" that all people are "[i]nseparably linked" (ll. 73, 79). He is a living

> …record which together binds
> Past deeds and offices of charity

> Else unremembered, and so keeps alive
> The kindly mood in hearts which lapse of years,
> And that half-wisdom half-experience gives
> Make slow to feel, and by sure steps resign
> To selfishness and cold oblivious cares (ll. 81-7)

In addition to holding communities together as their wandering center, he holds each person together, providing "[t]hat first mild touch of sympathy and thought" that always remains no matter how forcefully we are compelled to forget it (l. 106). The beggar's demand of sympathy implants what Wordsworth takes to be our primordial selfsameness that society and history rend apart.

Precisely by giving nothing at all, he gives us a chance to be ourselves.[xxxvi] In a predictable reversal, he is the most useful, for "[w]here'er the aged Beggar takes his rounds/ The mild necessity of use compels/ To acts of Love" (ll. 90-2). These are peculiar lines, since it is neither necessary nor useful to give to the beggar or even to recognize him at all. Strikingly, the *necessity* of *use compels* us to that which should be free, spontaneous, and useless—namely, love. As he who usefully forces useless upon us, the beggar is the ultimately useful: he stands in for and makes us aware of the necessity that we are free. And by forcing our freedom upon us, he allows us to freely constitute him as a nuisance: he is the usefulness that is used and misused by use and reuse, the ignored but unforgettable groundwork upon which any concept of utility can form. No doubt, society's notion of use may very well try to render him not only useless and unnecessary, but also disposable. It might even be a necessity that we forget, repress, and marginalize all that the Beggar names.

Society deems the beggar "useless," but the poem portrays him as the precondition for anything like usefulness in the first place (l. 67). "[W]e have all of us one human heart," and the beggar is its manifestation or at least its avatar. If, according to *Immortality Ode* "[o]ur birth is but a sleep and a forgetting" of the "visionary gleam," then the beggar provides a glimmer of that gleam which is too bright to see (ll. 58, 56). While he provides us with only "a transitory thought/ Of self-congratulation," he himself is permanent: "Him from childhood have I known, and then/ He was so old, he seems not older now" (ll. 116, 22-3).[xxxvii] The beggar did not *seem* to be as old then as he is now, but *was* so old then as he *seems* to be now. He has not aged, but is a permanent if mobile fixture of the landscape. And yet, Wordsworth celebration of the vagrant beggar comes precisely in response to enclosure, which threatened common land and usufruct.[xxxviii] The poem is a reaction to the discourses of the liberal economists in the late eighteenth century who wanted to do away with 'the poor problem' by doing away with the Poor Laws, who wanted to increase the ratio of enclosed fields to open or arable ones, and who encouraged individuals to cease their charity so that the poor problem could 'naturally' 'take care of itself.'[xxxix] As such, while "The Old Cumberland Beggar" portrays the figure and function of the beggar as natural, permanent, and transcendental, it simultaneously acknowledges his historicity. These two 'attributes' come together in the *ghostly machine*, the adjective referring to his natural supernaturalness and the noun to his industrialized state. Indeed, Wordsworth prefaces his poem by writing that, "The class of Beggars to which old man here described belongs, will probably soon be extinct" (49).

The transcendental function of the beggar is not only embodied, but is in a precarious position: the unaging man might somehow die. One might argue, though, that

the possibility of the extinction of the "class of Beggars" is not particularly threatening from a philosophical perspective, since the transcendental 'itself' is not under threat, but only its embodiment. Indeed, one might argue that the transcendental function of the beggar cannot be existentially threatened by historical circumstances since the transcendental only and ever takes a historical form in Wordsworth's poetry. One can read the figure for the transcendental as changing from poem to poem: sometimes it is an idiot boy, sometimes the child's inability to differentiate between the dead and living, sometimes Goody Blake, sometimes a spot of time. It could even be argued that *The Prelude*'s discharged and discarded soldier, who uncannily resembles the beggar, replaces him after his coming extinction."[xl] The Cumberland Beggar would be replaced by the discharged soldier; one type of beggar (a ghost who wanders the village) by another type (a ghost who wanders the globe and then the countryside). A figure who already appears as the survival of his own death (the beggar), when on the brink of utter extinction, would survive as another figure (the discharged soldier), who also appears as the survival of his own death.[xli] Wordsworth's poetry reads like the repetitive positing and then loss of the transcendental, of a pure experience without books, writing, self-division, and temporal change. This transcendental, taking form after form, is shown again and again to be illusory and historically constructed, but it never seems to disappear for good. Both its re-emergence and its demystification seem to be irreducible.

As a total work, *The Prelude* is also about survival, about the survival of hope even after its utter loss.[xlii] More exactly, it is about the survival of the destructions of history or of history as destruction. In encountering Cambridge, London, and Paris, Wordsworth encounters history, a history that is figured throughout *The Prelude* as a

threat to the original state of humanity, language, nature, culture, or time itself. Wordsworth, however, does not survive the historical experiences of Cambridge, London, and Paris by sublating history's negation of nature nor by evading history and quietly enclosing himself in some imaginary bower. Rather, if he survives the historical, then he does so by returning to a nature he knows is not natural, a humanity he knows to be inhuman, a language he knows to be disfigured. He survives as an epitaph or as one of his poems' ghosts.

However, if *The Prelude* is about surviving history, then it is just as much a poem about the threat that history poses. Indeed, I will argue that while *The Prelude* tells a story about survival, it only does so insofar as it also figures the possibility of *not* surviving, of *not* remaining as a ghost. It opens the possibility that nature will not even survive as (un)natural, that humanity will not even survive as (in)human, and that figuration will not even survive as (dis)figuration. It figures history's threat and it does not assume, as the scholarship about it does, that this threat is known in advance to be survivable.[xliii] Unlike the scholarship that tends to treat the threat as *a priori* survivable and so, in the end, not very threatening, *The Prelude* figures the threat of history as a genuine threat, as a threat that may not be survived, as a threat that may be absolute.

II. Time (and Deconstruction)

The Wordsworthian dialectic is classically figured as beginning with the experience of the infant, "those first-born affinities that fit/ Our new existence to existing things,/ And, in our dawn of being, constitute/ The bond betwixt life and joy" (*Prelude*

I.582-5). The infant experiences "beloved Presence," in which "there exists/ A virtue which irradiates and exalts/ All objects through all intercourse of sense, …the filial bond/ Of nature, that connect him with the world… as an agent of the one great mind,/ Creates, creator and receiver both" (II.258-73). The loss of the bond with the mother and the rediscovery of it on a higher level amounts, for Wordsworth, to the progess of the "Poetic spirit of our human life" (II.276). It is not difficult to show, though, that the original communion between babe and mother—and hence babe and nature—never happened in the first place. Cathy Caruth has argued that this original experience to be regained on a higher level depends upon a mother who was never present to the babe: the mother becomes, in her reading, a materially inscribed word propping up but displacing the narrative of poetic growth, or, she becomes a mere prop, an unnatural excrescence like a prosthetic breast such that artifice lodges itself at the origin.[xliv] Wordsworth's infants (who have their existence fit to rather than divided from existing things) lose their perfect fitting as soon as they have memory or language or anticipation, which is to say: as soon as they are born. None of the infants in his poetry are pure infants at the origin of the dialectic, for Wordsworth *a priori* cannot figure the experience of the infant who is prior to figuration without relying on the very figuration he would have to bracket. To quote once again from the *Immortality Ode*, where the infant's experience is explicitly positioned prior to birth, "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting." While it is possible to interpret this line as referring to a pre-existent but always forgotten Being, Wordsworth cannot help but suggest here that the infant's original experience is precisely non-existent, since (on a figurative level at least) one's experience prior to birth is *nothing*, it is *not*.

Wordsworth celebrates the inaccessibility of the origin: nature, "with something of a Mother's mind… doth all she can/ To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,/ Forget the glories he hath known,/ And that imperial palace whence he came (*Immortality Ode* ll. 79-4). After all, the loss of the origin allows for the poet's progress to proceed. The question, then, is whether the origin is lost or whether it never existed. As I have been suggesting, only because it was never there in the first place (if it was, how or why would we leave it?) is the adult (or infant!) able to try *and fail* to return to it in the future. The temporality of subjectivity is the repetitively failed attempt to return to the dawn of life that exceeds the scope of both memory and existence. Or, it is the repetitively failed attempt to return to that which is always looming in front of us, to death, to the complete life that is not divided between natural finitude and the imagination's infinitude. We might even say that the self is only the self because it has survived its death, because it originarily was never its own true self. And while desiring to continue to survive, to continue as "Life-in-Death," the self also desires to cease, to return to full and true life in death. In short, the self is the survival of its death that strives to die.

While on some level *The Prelude* presents itself as a dialectical progression through time, the constant episodes of going astray—of forgetting nature or succumbing to apathy or excessive hope—do not get raised up to a higher level of unity. Rather, going astray again and again encourages Wordsworth to turn back to his early memories, to cling even more desperately to childhood, to attempt desperately to remember, recover, and record an innocence and selfhood that never existed. In Book One, Wordsworth retrospectively depicts writing the poem as a play between disappointment and hope, between failing to reconcile himself to his poem and trying to bring this reconciliation

about. We can read this internal commentary on *The Prelude* as descriptive of the poem's movement as a whole:

> Thus baffled by a mind that every hour
> Turns recreant to her task, takes heart again,
> Then feels immediately some hollow thought
> Hang like an interdict upon her hopes.
> This is my lot; for either still I find
> Some imperfection in my chosen theme,
> Or see of absolute accomplishment
> Much wanting, so much wanting, in myself,
> That I recoil and droop, and seek repose
> In listlessness from vain perplexity,
> Unprofitably travelling towards the grave… (I.259-269)

Of course, he will then regain hope, which will then be disappointed. Only in the sense that the negative brings him back rather than moves him forward—or moves him forward in order to turn back—is there progression. Rather than a dialectic, *The Prelude* reads like a constant series of repetitions: disappointment in the present leads Wordsworth to search for self-identity in the past, and the failure to find it in his memories gives him hope of finding it in the future or in a future memory, both of which will disappoint.

The Prelude opens with Wordsworth situating the self that is writing in the present moment of writing. The poet has returned home from adventures abroad—specifically, "from yon City's walls" (I.7)—and has finally "shaken off/ That burthen of my own unnatural self,/ The heavy weight of many a weary day/ Not mine, and such as

were not made for me" (I.22-5). Declaring himself no longer divided between his own self and his unnatural self, he opposes his present writing self to an unnatural self that has to do with the collusion of the "City," history—the "weight of many a weary day," which looks ahead to the "weight of Ages" (VIII.703)—and an external cultural that does not belong to him, that was "not made for me." And yet, the pressure of all that is outside of his internality is figured as properly his own: "my *own* unnatural self." Moreover, there is the autobiographical irony that at the very moment Wordsworth seems to unburden himself of his "own unnatural self" he begins to write a history of his self that reintroduces the divide between the self and its unnatural (or written) figuration.

In the first pages of *The Prelude* it becomes dizzingly difficult to differentiate between the time of writing and the time described, as the text shuttles between one and the other without notice or clear boundaries. In order to gain some control over these interpretive difficulties, it makes sense to hone in on one moment, on the very first time he moves to the past tense:

> For I, methought, while the sweet breath of Heaven
> Was blowing on my body, felt within
> A corresponding mild creative breeze,
> A vital breeze which travelled gently on
> O'er things which it had made, and is become
> A tempest, a redundant energy
> Vexing its own creation. 'Tis a power
> That does not come unrecognized, a storm,
> Which, breaking up a long-continued frost

Brings with it vernal promises, the hope

Of active days… (I.41-51)

The passage begins with a memory of a correspondence between the world, which impels and implicitly creates the inner breeze, and the creative power, which in turn creates the world.[xlv] The memory is of a past self that was at one with nature; and without a division between the self and nature, it is also a memory of the self's presence to itself, since if the self corresponds with its outside, then there is no delay in recognizing, remembering, or anticipating that outside. Predictably, though, the memory of reconciliation quickly becomes a memory of the reconciliation unhinging: the corresponding imagination *vexes* rather than merges with the nature that inspired it. The attempt to remember a past present in which the self and the outer world existed together in the same moment, in which the self was not divided by and hence deferred from nature, fails. It cannot but fail. Not only because the self reflecting on the past self divides that past present between itself and the reflection on it, and not only because the past self-presence had to have inscribed in it the possibility of being remembered and repeated, and not only because the past present has the status of a memory, which by definition cannot be fully self-present. Rather, the past present is immediately undone because there was never such a moment in the first place. As soon as Wordsworth remembers the reconciliation, he remembers that it was a division rather than a unity, a vexing rather than a reconciliation.[xlvi]

Wordsworth suggests that every moment is divided from within, yet he cannot but turn to "vernal promises" and "hope." Having survived the failure of reconciliation leads Wordsworth to *hope*. And in the tropological context of the passage, this hope can be for nothing but a future reconciliation. The hope is for "pure passions, virtue, knowledge,

and delight,/ The holy life of music and verse" (I.53-4). Passions and virtue, delight and knowledge, feelings and ideas, natural self and human self: Wordsworth hopes that the natural, animalistic passions will be reconciled with the rational and creative powers that transgress pure nature. The hope is that the knowing and imagining self can reflect upon the natural self without self-reflection re-insinuating self-division. Thus, if Wordsworth remembers his own disjointedness from himself, he cannot but forget this memory and hope that self-consciousness will amount to self-identity. These lines at the beginning of *The Prelude* tell the story of the deconstruction of temporality.[xlvii] They name both the impossibility and necessity of the presence of the present. The constitutive division of the presence of the present splits the self between memory and anticipation and thus constitutes the originary horizon of the past and future. At the same time, because the past and future presents that the self remembers and anticipates neither were nor will be fully present, the self cannot but appear to itself as living in the present. Even if it knows the present to be an impossibility, the self cannot but experience it.

Furthermore, the deconstruction of time described in the passage cannot quite be located at a determinate moment in the poem. The tenses of the verbs make it impossible to know when the experience happened: the passage begins with past tenses ("For I, methought, while the sweet breath of Heaven/ Was blowing on my body") and then changes to the present ("and is become," "'Tis a power/ That does not come unrecognized"). While the passage seems to follow from the previous verse paragraphs that described the very moment at which the writng of them occurred, we then learn that it in fact describes a moment in Wordsworth's youth. More than a description of the past, it is a citation of the past:

> Thus far, O Friend! did I, not used to make
> A present joy the matter of my Song,
> Pour out, that day, my soul in measured strains,
> Even in the very words which I have here
> Recorded… (I.55-59)

The lines about the reconciliation and its unhinging were not originally written in *The Prelude*; rather, they are self-citations. The remembrance of a past present in the initial lines is revealed to be itself a past present wherein Wordsworth was remembering the past. And yet, while we learn that the passage is a memory of a past memory in Wordsworth's adolesence, it is difficult to understand the "long-continued frost" as anything but his experiences *after* he left home for Cambridge, London, and then Paris. That it, the moment described in the passage refers undecidably to the moment of writing (after all the events recounted in *The Prelude*) and to a moment in Wordsworth's youth. The lines refuse contextualization or ascription to any determinate (or even indeterminate) moment in time.

In fact, the cited passage describes the logic of citation, since a citation both refers to its meaning in a past context *and* means differently in its own context. The passage describes the impossibility of a wholly present past moment, and, as Derrida has taught us, citations themselves structurally suggest the very same thing in that they refer to (or remember) a past moment and implicitly reveal that that moment was not wholly present since it can necessarily be quoted out of context. What is described in the passage also describes the passage itself, such that the deconstruction of temporality does not happen at a temporal moment but applies to the act of citation as well as that which is cited. The

deconstruction of temporality related in the passage does not happen *in* time, *in* Wordsworth's memory, or *at* the time of writing, but points to the possibility *of* time.[xlviii] The temporal structure that the passage describes and the citation performs is not so much a structure that is temporal, but a 'structure' that makes temporality possible in the first place.[xlix]

III. History (and Historicism)

Wordsworth's figuration of his own childhood self—of that innocent and selfsame being in the rural countryside where the past and present mirror each other—simultaneously disfigures it. The Wordsworthian child is disjointed from itself by what we might call, following Derrida, *temporization*.[l] But in addition to temporization, there is another constitutive threat to the self at work in *The Prelude*. Wordsworth's story is the story

> Of intellectual power, from stage to stage
> Advancing, hand in hand with love and joy,
> And of imagination teaching truth
> Until that natural graciousness of mind
> Gave way to over-pressure of the times
> And their disastrous issues. (XI.43-48)

History, with its "disastrous issues," threatens the "natural graciousness of mind." History painfully shows to the self that it is embedded in structures and genealogies of which it is unaware and that the self's own modes of self-understanding are historically constructed.

Throughout *The Prelude*, Wordsworth figures the deconstructed childhood self as if it lived in the presence of the present such that he can oppose the transcendental ego to history. But it becomes clear in the course of the poem that just as infancy is already disjointed by its temporizing, so it is also already disjointed by its historicity. The constitutive threat to self-identity is double: it is undone by temporization as well as by historical interpellation.

When Wordsworth leaves the naturalistic and seemingly ahistorical environments of the Lake District and enters into the environs of the city, he enters a historical and accelerating temporality, a contingent, manmade world rife with industrialism, commodification, advertising, rampant public opinion, and revolution. In the Lake District, one seems to live in a natural temporality where the present mirrors the past. But when Wordsworth wanders away from the countryside and enters the city, he enters history. He writes of London: "…Great God!/ That aught *external* to the living mind/ Should have such mighty sway! yet so it was/ *A weight of Ages did descend/ Upon my heart*" (VIII.700-704, latter italics are mine). History—figured geographically as Cambridge, London, and Paris—threatens the seemingly natural temporality of the countryside. In the retrospective Book Eight—which tells, according to its title, how "Love of Nature Lead[s] to Love of Mankind"—Wordsworth relates a typically triumphant response to history's negativity:

> With deep devotion, Nature, did I feel
> In that great City what I owed to thee,
> High thoughts of God and Man, and love of Man,
> Triumphant over all those loathsome sights

> Of wretchedness and vice; a watchful eye,
> Which with the outside of our human life
> Not satisfied, must read the inner mind. (VIII.62-68)

Deprived of external natural sights while in the city, Wordsworth turns inward toward human nature. This heightened appreciation of the imagination, in turn, leads him to love external nature more as well. Thus, the deprivation of nature in the city supposedly brings inner and outer nature into greater conformity, bringing the self closer to its origin or end. Yet, at work is not a sublation of history's negation of nature into a historical naturalness or natural history. Quite explicitly the city's negation of nature does not lead to a synthesis of nature and history, for history is strikingly absent in the synthesis that it leads to. Rather, by entering the city, Wordsworth learns to ignore it.[li] Wordsworth's intimations of reconciling history and nature decrease as *The Prelude* progresses: after describing the "utter loss of hope" consequent on the failed French Revolution, Wordsworth does not even try to capitalize on this loss but simply holds more obsessively to his memories of a seemingly non-historical place and time, a childhood supposedly untouched by the infestation of history, a *spot* of time in memory that can be recovered at will and so is immune to the finitude of temporality and devastations of history (XI.7). Instead of progressing dialectically in order to accomplish a historical naturalness, the historical is presented as a negativity with little worth save reminding one of what one has lost and compelling one to discover an ahistorical, universal human nature in the countryside. And as such, the devastating heterogeneity between nature and history remains to haunt and divide the self.

History is not only a negativity that remains only to remind one of the comfortable rhythms of daily rural life; it is also figured as having infected or contaminated the self from the start.[lii] The imagination is the meaning-giving faculty, and meaning—if not the meaning-giving faculty itself—is always historical, contingent upon time and place. Unlike nature, which cyclically reproduces itself if it is destroyed, the products of the imagination, inscribed in memory and on paper, are finite and irreversibly perishable. At the end of Book Eight, Wordsworth seems to distance himself from the historicity of meaning-making:

> 'Tis true the History of my native Land
>
> …
>
> Had never much delighted me. And less
>
> Than other minds I had been used to owe
>
> The pleasures which I found in place or thing
>
> To extrinsic transitory accidents,
>
> To records or traditions (VIII.769-781)

But he immediately adds that:

> …a sense
>
> Of what had been here done, and suffered here
>
> Through ages, and was doing, suffering, still,
>
> Weighed with me, could support the test of thought,
>
> Was like the enduring majesty and power
>
> Of independent nature; and not seldom
>
> Even individual remembrances,

> By working on the Shapes before my eyes,
> Became like vital functions of the soul;
> And out of what had been, what was, the place
> Was thronged with impregnations… (VIII.781-791)

Both memory and what might be called secondary or historical memory are said here to work on, and in part to create, the shapes of the natural world. While the imagination is unrestrained and thus infinite in comparison to nature, the meanings the imagination imparts are always historically specific, subject "to extrinsic transitory accidents,/ to records and traditions." Just before the above passage, Wordsworth writes:

> The Human nature unto which I felt
> That I belonged, and which I loved and reverenced,
> Was not a punctual Presence, but a Spirit,
> Living in time and space… (VIII.761-4)

Imagination, here, is not only 'productive' of temporality but is also *in* time, *in* history—not the products of the imagination, but imagination itself. The imagination, which is supposed to be a transcendental function of the ahistorical time of the self, is always historically singular, constantly threatened by the realization it has been nothing but the historical form given to an absence.

My claim that the imagination is historical rehearses similar claims made most famously and forcefully by Marjorie Levinson in *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* and Alan Liu in *Wordsworth: The Sense of History.* Both writers understand the imagination as predicated upon the effacement of the historical, as the agent and product of the aestheticization of history. Reading in Wordsworth's poetry the dissemination of what he

effaces, they suggest that the imagination is the historical 'effect' of the effacement of history. Defensively containing this dissemination, Wordsworth positions the imagination as the least historical (and most transcendental) while his poetry at times suggests it is the most historical (and least transcendental). Liu writes: "In the construction of the total *Prelude* in 1804, I believe, Wordsworth inserted background reminders of historicity in the Imagination passage as avenues toward a realization that 'the mind' must finally enroll… in a collective system authorized from some source 'elsewhere' than the self: in the grounded or demystified Nile that is history" (23).

While Levinson and Liu importantly show how the imagination is a historical effect, they do not take seriously enough Wordsworth's figuration of the *temporization* or originary undoing of the imagination. *In addition* to being constituted by a complex erasure and aestheticization of history, the imagination is *also* that which allows for history in the first place, since it names the self's originary disjointedness. In order to adequately historicize the imagination, we first need to confront the argument that imagination is the enabling (or disabling) condition of historicization. In short, I agree with Liu and Levinson that the imagination is thoroughly historical, but I think that if we are to understand this "thoroughly historical" in the most rigorous way possible, we need to address *both* the embeddedness of the imagination *and* that the imagination (qua its own deconstruction) allows for embeddedness. We cannot avoid Wordsworth's deconstruction of self-presence by pretending that the Wordsworthian self is simply a reactionary defense against history. Rather, we have to avoid *both* the purportedly deconstructive narrative that the temporization of the self happens prior to the historical singularity of that temporization *and* the purportedly new historicist narrative that

Wordsworth's imagined self is simply an effect of escapism. At their strongest and least caricaturized, these two critical positions are much closer than the debates of the 1980s and 1990s would give one to think: the illusion of the self is predicated upon its deconstruction, and this very deconstruction (which opens the possibility of historicization) is historically singular and constituted. Moreover, for both positions the self's ineluctable forgetting either of its temporization or its historicity amounts to the just as ineluctable illusion of selfhood. While the self is undone and constituted by the threats of temporization and historical embeddedness, it survives both of these externalities that serve as its conditions of possibility.

IV. Time and History and Little Men

I have sketched as briefly and schematically as I could the self's relation to time and history in *The Prelude*. From the first, it is doubly undone and yet survives this undoing. Or, the undoing of the self precisely gives rise to it. For Wordsworth, then, time and history constitutively rely upon the appearance of non-historical time, of the illusion of a self in the presence of the present. Such an illusion seems to be just as necessary as its debunking. And yet, *The Prelude* asks about a historical force that not only threatens to undo (and constitute) the self, but about a historical force that threatens the self already only surviving as its disarticulation by the weight of ages. If this is so, as I will proceed to argue, then the question becomes: what does it mean for our notions of remaining, surviving, and bearing if the seemingly irreducible appearance or illusion of self-consciousness could be destroyed *qua appearance or illusion*?

Wordsworth interrupts himself in the middle of Book Five: “Rarely, and with reluctance, would I stoop/ To transitory themes” (V.223-4).[liii] After dedicating his poem to Nature and turning to his mother, he addresses these “transitory themes,” which are precisely about the transitory, about the historical:

…My drift hath scarcely,
I fear, been obvious; for I recoiled
From showing as it is the monster birth
Engendered by these too industrious times.
Let few words paint it: ‘tis a Child, no Child,
But a dwarf Man; in knowledge, virtue, and skill;
In what he is not, and in what he is,
The noontide shadow of a man complete;
A worshipper of worldly seemliness,
Not quarrelsome; for that were far beneath
His dignity; with gifts he bubbles o’er
As generous as a fountain; selfishness
May not come near him, gluttony or pride;
…
…Briefly, the moral part
Is perfect, and in learning and in books
He is a prodigy.
…
The Ensigns of the Empire which he holds,

> The globe and sceptre of his royalties,
> Are telescopes, and crucibles, and maps,
> Ships he can guide across the pathless sea,
> And tell you all their cunning; he can read
> The inside of the earth, and spell the stars;
> He knows the policies of foreign Lands;
> Can string you names of districts, cities, towns,
> The whole world over, tight as beads of dew
> Upon a gossamer thread (V.291-337)

This passage, if not overlooked in scholarship, is often reduced to a foil for the Winander Boy or interpreted as a satirical (and less than Wordsworthian) instance of Wordsworth's critique of contemporary education.[liv] And indeed, it seems as if the dwarf man primarily serves to mock the dialectic of enlightenment that Wordsworth so presciently observes: "A rank growth of propositions overruns/ The Stripling's brain; the path he treads is choked with grammars" (V.323-5). Because the dwarf man "put[s] to question" "all things," "old Grandame Earth is grieved to find/ The playthings, which her love designed for him,/ Unthought of: in their woodland beds the flowers/ Weep, and the river sides are all forlorn" (V.346-9). The dwarf man's moral and epistemological perfection comes at the cost of his ability to understand nature and thus himself.

Before rushing to characterize the passage as a critique of enlightenment, though, we should first understand how exactly Wordsworth figures that enlightenment. Totalizing knowledge forgets its ground or origin in nature, thereby knowing everything except the one thing that matters, leading to less knowledge—because less self-

knowledge—rather than more. Moreover, by mastering the earth and the heavens, by mastering even what does not show itself (foreign lands "the whole world over" and the "inside of the earth"), the dwarf man leaves nothing untouched: his knowledge allows for no excesses, no unknowns or constitutive outsides of knowledge. Anything exceeding the reach of his knowledge will be brought into its sphere, will be known and hence destroyed as something in excess of knowledge. Thus, the dwarf man finds himself in a precarious position: by forgetting to forget, by insisting that he know everything that might elude the finite reach of his knowledge, his knowledge increasingly destroys its own possibility. For if knowledge depends on there being things unknown, then the dwarf man's knowledge suicidally seeks to destroy those unknowns or mysteries.

However, we would fail to fully grasp the logic of the dwarf man if we understood him as only suggesting that knowledge is no longer knowledge as soon as it knows/destroys the excesses of knowledge. For the primary excess of knowledge is not that which lies in distant realms and different times; it is not that which knowledge can bring into its domain with the help of excessive learning and better technologies of observation and prediction. Rather, the primary excess of knowledge is self-identity, the originary homogeneity between being and knowledge that knowledge simply cannot know. Thus, it cannot be the case that the dwarf man destroys the supposedly original similitude between the self and the self (or the self and nature) by knowing it, for it is unknowable—indeed, it is *not*. And were he to try to destroy it by negating it or forgetting it, it would remain as that which has been forgotten or negated: it would remain as something that is *not*, which is to say that it would remain just as it 'is.' It

seems impossible, then, to destroy the grounding and absolute excess of knowledge, for it is *not* and thus is not susceptible to destruction.

And yet, the dwarf man does the impossible. Childhood—the figure for the illusion of the one life—will no longer exist: "tis a Child, no Child." The dwarf man does not look back at his childhood in search of it, does not try to remember that which is beyond the reach of memory, but instead only and ever looks ahead, conquering more and more of the future. In order to appreciate this peculiar power of the dwarf man, we need to read in him contrast to Wordsworth's mother, the description of whom immediately precedes the dwarf man passage and succeeds the declaration of a reluctant willingness to "stoop/ To transitory themes." Wordsworth's mother is depicted as a sort of mirror to the infant, but with the intelligence that comes with adulthood. She has a "heart that found benignity and hope,/ Being itself benign"—the inside and outside tautologically converging in the participial hinge, the word "Being" (V.289-90). She is "herself from the maternal bond/ Still undischarged" (V.249-50). "[N]ot puffed up by false unnatural hopes;/ Nor selfish with unnecessary cares," she seems to live only in the present, neither looking too much ahead with hopes nor too much behind with cares (V.279-80).

Yet, like any other character in *The Prelude*, her seeming communion with (her) nature is constitutively undone. With her children "doth she little more/ Than move with them in tenderness and love,/ A centre of the circle which they make" (V.250-1). The "little more," though, crucial. She is almost perfectly fit to her children as their guiding and regulating center, but not quite, since she exceeds or falls short of her role by a little. Perhaps realizing that it is natural to exceed nature, Wordsworth preemptively contains

her unnatural excesses within her nature when he catalogues her virtues: "and therefore she was pure/ From feverish dread of error or mishap/ And evil" (V.276-8). She was *pure* precisely by allowing herself to succumb to error, mishap, and evil. Moreover, while she seems to live only in her present, she "[f]etch[es] her goodness rather from time past" and has a heart that found "hope," always looking into the past and ahead in the future in the hope that it might be like the past (V.267, 289). Not only is she pure by giving evil a chance, and not only is she in the present so long as she strives and fails to make the past and future mirror each other, she is also as natural as she is "not from faculties more strong/ Than others have, but from the times," from her historical embeddedness—a historical embeddedness, we might also say, of Wordsworth himself that compels him to turn so desparately to figures of ahistorical self-presence (V.285-6).

It is this sort of (deconstructed and historically contingent) figure that the dwarf man threatens. With him, the play between memory and anticipation that characterizes all of Wordsworth's other characters is strikingly absent. This is not entirely surprising, for with his prosthetic memory—"telescopes, and crucibles, and maps"—the dwarf man no longer needs to remember anything. What is surprising is that without a childhood he does not even (fail to) remember it in the past, and without failing to remember it, without the past even seeming like an innocent time, he does not go searching for it in the future. And without failing to find the communion with (his own) nature in the past or future, the dwarf man, impossibly, does not do what man *irreducibly and necessarily* does: he does not (fail to) unite his past and future selves, does not (fail to) synthesize the presence of the present. In this way, he threatens even the irreducible illusion of selfhood, even the appearance of its disappearance. He does not destroy it by forgetting it or

knowing it or negating it (for then it would not be destroyed at all), but by *absolutely* letting it be, *absolutely* letting it be as what it 'is', as *not.*

When the irreducible illusion of the identity is threatened, so is the originary possibility of time:

> These mighty workmen of our late age
> Who with a broad highway have overbridged
> The froward chaos of futurity,
> Tamed to their bidding; they who have the art
> To manage books, and things, and make them work
> Gently on infant minds, as does the sun
> Upon a flower; the Tutors of our Youth
> The Guides, the Wardens of our faculties,
> And Stewards of our labour, watchful men
> And skilled in the usury of time,
> Sages, who in their prescience would controul
> All accidents, and to the very road
> Which they have fashioned would confine us down,
> Like engines… (V.370-83)

The "workmen of our late age" would destroy the unknowability of the future—the "froward chaos of futurity/ Tamed to their bidding": futurity would no longer, in any meaningful sense, be "something evermore about to be" (VI.542). "All accidents"—and thus futurity 'itself'—would be controlled and eliminated. In addition to preprogramming the future, "the workmen of our late age" would, "work[ing]/ Gently" and imperceptibly

like the warmth of the sun, manufacture and manage even the absolute past of infancy as the sun regulates flowers. Presciently controlling the futurity of accidents and predetermining "infant minds" as cogs in a machine, the workmen would, through "the usury of time," eliminate temporality itself. Temporality is predicated upon accidentally going astray, upon originarily falling out of nature and into time and history. But without the accident, man cannot fall, cannot make mistakes, cannot err. And without falling, there is nothing to fall from, no origin or end, no origin from which or to which we are falling, no Nature we fall from and hence no fall into history. Thus, we would become nothing but fall, pure fall. The appearance or illusion of the origin and end of falling—of hanging suspended as de Man might have it—would disappear absolutely when the workmen of our late age "would controul/ All accidents." And without the conscious or unconscious assumption of an original past presence and a final future present, there can be no illusion of the presence of the present. Without the division—no matter how deconstructed—between the origin and the derivative (the fall and that from which one falls), the temporality of experience falls out of the picture. The dwarf man and the workmen of our late age form an image that is far from a mere satire: the "weight of Ages" becomes so heavy that man falls so hard and so fast that he is no longer falling from anywhere or to anything. It becomes so heavy that it evacuates the gravity that makes falling and weight possible. The image, then, is an impossible one of falling in outer space in a timeless vacuum of nothingness.

History here—or, the historically specific configuration of early nineteenth-century England—is figured not as contaminating but as annihilating that which, no matter how historically contingent and singular, allows for history in the first place. And

as if the destruction of temporality is not an odd enough thought, Wordsworth implies an even more peculiar consequence. By controlling and so destroying futurity, the historical situation—which is characterized as historical precisely because it is transitory, because it does not last—would be able to guarantee that it will not be subject to decay, destruction, or contingent change. As such, at the same time that it destroys temporality, it makes itself permanent. The historical circumstance, which should be transitory by definition, becomes eternal. And temporality, which should by definition be forever, becomes subject to decay and destruction. Unlike nature, which has its constitutive excess in cultural history, history here would have no excess, no natural temporality to which it is constitutively opposed. History would somehow survive (and survive as eternal moreover) after it absolutely destroys the most basic condition of possibility of time and history, namely, the temporization and historicity of Wordsworthian infants, children, mothers, and men.

In a particularly puzzling image, Wordsworth writes of the dwarf man: "In what he is not, and in what he is,/ The noontide shadow of a man complete." The shadow of ourselves is what we are not; it stands in for our past or future selves that we can never catch or catch up with. The shadow is a figure for our absolute past or future that divides us from ourselves. Wordsworth, though, is not talking about a shadow, but about the *noontide* shadow, about a shadow that is not there, about that one time when we do not have a shadow. The dwarf man is a "noontide shadow": he has no shadow, no excess rupturing him from himself. He is erect: a complete, selfsame man standing under the sun. And as we have seen, the sun illuminates everything for him, with no shadows lurking in corners unavailable to his senses. In fact, fatherless and no longer a son, he *is*

the sun—if not more powerful than it since his panoptic gaze sees everything "the whole world over" and beyond ("he can read/ The inside of the earth, and spell the stars"). And if this gaze emanates from a point, it has no obstacles; nothing is in its way, which means that it cannot be reduced to a point, cannot be located or pinpointed. Thus, unlike the sun, which cannot see there where it creates a shadow, the dwarf man's panoptic knowledge overcomes its location and with x-ray vision destroys every shadow it produces. There are no aporias, no destabilizing or debilitating self-reflection, no burdens of mystery: all questions, all shadows become knowledge, which infinitely expands its domain in space and time. He stands without a shadow, or, with a noontide shadow, because the instant he produces a shadow, in that very instant, the shadow is destroyed. He only has a shadow if it is lighted before it becomes a shadow: 'tis a shadow, no shadow. The dwarf man neither has nor does not have a noontide shadow, for a noontide shadow neither is nor is not a shadow. Instead, he, presumably, *is* the noontide shadow—presumably, because the verb is elided. In what he is and in what he is not, he ___ a noontide shadow. This "noontide shadow of a man complete" is neither the "man complete" (for he is the shadow of a man who cannot have a shadow) nor the shadow of him (for he is not a shadow but a noontide shadow). Instead, he 'is' the noontide shadow. Like the origin which already comprehends its other, the dwarf man has no excess: in what he is not, he is, without difference within or without. And like the oneness which neither is nor is not, the dwarf man neither is nor is not a noontide shadow. He 'is' one.

The conflation of absolute identity and the dwarf man is a paradoxical claim, but if one is going to destroy oneness, it is not entirely surprising that one becomes what one destroys. One of the most classical figures for such oneness is Rousseau's savage in the

Second Discourse. Prior to alienation and the self-division brought on by language, power relations, institutions and commerce, dissimulation and lies, Rousseau's savage is the natural human at one with nature in the presence of the present.[lv] Now, the dwarf man should be the antithesis of this savage. Overly enlightened, presumably for-profit and imperialistic, bent on technological mastery and control, the dwarf man should be Wordsworth's Prometheus to Rousseau's savage. Worse than Prometheus, he should be the telos of humanity's increasing distance from nature. And yet, the dwarf man resembles Rousseau's savage:

> …deceit and guile,
> Meanness and falsehood, he detects, can treat
> With apt and graceful laughter; nor is blind
> To the broad follies of the licensed world;
> Though shrewd, yet innocent himself withal
> And can read lectures upon innocence.
> He is fenced round, nay armed, for aught we know
> In panoply complete; and fear itself,
> Natural or supernatural alike,
> Unless it leap upon him in a dream,
> Touches him not. Briefly, the moral part
> Is perfect.

While "these too industrious times" threaten to destroy their condition of possibility, they also produce a type of perfection that circles back to an innocence prior to alienation and self-reflection, to a moral perfection of someone who is neither too suspicious nor too

trusting and who both is innocent and teaches innocence. The dwarf man is not "blind/ To the broad follies of the licensed world," but, impossibly, is not affected by them. Romanticism repetitively rehashes the biblical story: being too trusting leaves one susceptible to being tricked out of original innocence, but not being trustful also destroys one's innocence. One must know the follies of the world so as not to succumb to them, but one must not know the follies of the world lest they inevitably affect one and make one less trusting and innocent. Moral perfection is the impossibility of such a balance, just as the presence of the present is the impossible balance between memory and anticipation. The dwarf man is this impossible balance, "innocent himself withal." He is armed against all evil but somehow still completely innocent: "Briefly, the moral part/ is perfect." As the absolutization of the historical threat to temporization and historicity, he not only tends to reduce the irreducible and destroy indestructible; in so doing he also manifests a type of perfection—the perfection of simultaneously having innocence *and* knowledge.

The *perfection* of the dwarf man comes as a stark contrast to Wordsworth's usual description of *imperfect* children and shepherds. Again, the dwarf man is interpolated immediately after the description of Wordsworth's perfectly imperfect mother—who "was pure/ From feverish dread of error or mishap/ And evil"—and immediately before the boy of Winander, who brings to mind for Wordsworth "[a] race of real children, not too wise,/ Too learned, or too good; but wanton, fresh,/ And bandied up and down by love and hate" (V.436-8). Perfection comes only with imperfection: the real race, the natural race, is the imperfect race, neither completely moral nor self-present nor human.[lvi] To be human in *The Prelude* is to survive, to survive as (im)perfect, (in)human,

(im)moral. The dwarf man, though, is perfect, which is to say: he is *alien*. He is like Adam or Eve living in a world rife with that difference. He fits nowhere in Wordsworth's social landscape of *humans*, neither among the (in)humans of the countryside nor among the more inhuman (in)humans of city. Absolutely erasing even the illusion of identity, which is nothing but its own erasure, he is that which he absolutely erases, but no longer as an illusion.

Would not such a manifestation of the non-existence of perfect identity amount to a sheer nothingness? Would not oneness 'be' an *absolute* and *unthinkable* Zero, an absolute nothingness without even the somethingness of nothingness?[lvii] It is no surprise, then, that if Wordsworth gives us to think the possibility of the manifestation/absolute erasure of complete identity, he also suggests that it is impossible. Even at noon, there are still shadows. The dwarf man is not "man complete" but the shadow of this man, the shadow of him at a time where there *are* still shadows, even if these shadows are the stillest, the most unmoved and unmoving. The dwarf man is thus Wordsworth's attempt and failure to figure him. Wordsworth's imagination reaches its limit here. It might seem, then, that the scholarship on *The Prelude* has in fact missed nothing, that Wordsworth is in fact not terribly interested in the possibility that the threat of history could absolutize itself. Reaching this conclusion, however, would be both to dismiss and misunderstand Wordsworth's radicality vis-à-vis history. For the whole point of history in *The Prelude* is that it threatens to destroy that which was already living as the survival of its own destruction. Thus, although the absolute destruction of destruction's survival cannot be figured, the figuration can be attempted, and therein lies the daring of *The Prelude*.

One might argue, though, that if the dwarf man is an impossibility, then history's threat will *a priori* be survivable and will not be so radical after all. If the historical circumstances can never succeed in doing what they threaten to do, then they are no threats at all. However, to identify an impossibility and think about its significance is not the same thing as not thinking the impossibility at all. Even if the threat of history is impossible, the case still remains that history for Wordsworth does not simply threaten the purity of natural temporality or of a supposedly absolved and transcendental imagination. If one reads history in *The Prelude* as only threatening the imagination, then one does not read the historicity of history. To read history in this way is to overlook the truly *historical* aspect of the history Wordsworth was confronting. What was new about history was not—or not only—that it threatened the imagination with increasing intensity, for the imagination is nothing but its own being threatened, and if that threat became more salient, more explicit, it in itself was not new, was not a new historical occurrence. History's constitutive threat to the imagination is as old as time immemorial. What *The Prelude* figures as new is that the threat extends even to the imagination's survival. It is an absolute threat—or, a threat of the absolute.

The Prelude's daring lies in attempting to think the possibility of what cannot be possible. Indeed, if the dwarf man is *a priori* impossible, he is simultaneously all too real. One could argue that the dwarf man is more of a possibility than the real child. Unlike the child, the dwarf man is not the unexplainably (better: magically) produced illusion of self-consciousness from non-conscious materiality, but a *historical* possibility, a possibility in that one arena wherein new, unexpected, and previously impossible things happen. And the historical threat to survival is, for Wordsworth, radically new: a new

historical event in which, as is the case every time something *new* occurs, the *impossible* happens. He is like—and I will come back to this in my final chapter—a computer.

In the final words of *The Order of Things* Foucault also suggests that since the concept of the opening of temporality—of the play between the transcendental and the empirical—is historical, it is itself subject to erasure:

> If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edges of the sea. (387)

Modern understandings of time and history can be radically effaced because they do not name the originary condition of possibility of temporality, but because they are merely historical effects within a larger historical field which we cannot properly assess. That is, for Foucault at any rate, even if our histories and our thought can only think of past temporality as organized around that specifically modern concept of the *episteme*, even if we can only think of the modern *episteme* as the originary possibility of temporality, that *episteme* is, in the last instance, a historical concept or structure. It names not the 'actual' originary possibility of history but only what we as historical creatures assume it to be.[lviii] For Wordsworth, though, the possibility of temporality rests on a temporization and historicity that may always be historically but also exceeds any historical specificity. As such, the disappearance at stake in *The Prelude* precisely does not point to an unknown and unimaginable future but instead precludes futurity as such.

Chapter Two

One Image in *The Prelude* (Book Seven)

I. Introduction to "Scenes Different"

Wordsworth segues into one of the most unusual scenes in *The Prelude*—the Bartholomew fair at the end of Book Seven—with one of the most conventional romantic motifs: "Though reared upon the base of outward things,/ These, chiefly, are such structures as the mind/ Builds for itself" (VII.624-6). In standard Wordsworthian form, the reader is presented with a play between nature and the imagination, each fighting with the other over the claim to be the origin. Nature forms the base upon which the imagination can build. But the imagination builds that base. Finite nature threatens to reduce the imagination to the finite world, and the infinite imagination threatens to transform finitude into one of its creations. Only because nature is always threatened by the imagination and only because the infinite faculty is always formed by the finite world can both survive, can both survive as their own incompletion. The finite world constrains the infinity of the meaning-giving faculty and thus erases it as what it is or should be. Likewise, the infinity of the imagination projects its unlimited forms upon the finite world and thus erases it as what it is or should be. The survival of the internal and external worlds is predicated upon the erasure of each by the other.

Immediately after writing, "Though reared upon the base of outward things,/ These, chiefly, are such structures as the mind/ Builds for itself," Wordsworth continues:

"Scenes different there are,/ Full-formed, which take, with small internal help,/ Possession of the faculties (VII.626-8). But how could any scenes be different from those that are formed through the play of the imagination and the external world? If there really are "[s]cenes different," then they cannot be natural "outward things," since natural outward things are precisely formed through the mediation of the imagination. The "[s]cenes different" also cannot be inward ones, of course, since they precisely take "[p]ossession of the faculties," which include first and foremost the imagination. What, then, are these "[s]cenes different" that are "[f]ull-formed"? They cannot be pure internal or external ones, since those are not possible. And they cannot be scenes formed through the play between nature and the imagination, since these are precisely what Wordsworth differentiates them from. Wordsworth's differentiation seems to fall apart. On the one hand, something "[f]ull-formed" that takes "[p]ossession of the faculties" suggests something absolute, something unmediated by the imagination. On the other hand, since the possession of the faculties requires "small internal help," it it precisely not absolute but helped on by the imagination.

Wordsworth continues by pondering what these fully formed scenes could be, thinking of:

> …the peace
> Of night, for instance, the solemnity
> Of nature's intermediate hours of rest,
> When the great tide of human life stands still,
> The business of the day to come unborn,
> Of that gone by, locked up as in the grave;

> The calmness, beauty, of the spectacle,
> Sky, stillness, moonshine, empty streets, and sounds
> Unfrequent as in desarts… (VII.628-36)

The viewer of the scene is peacefully elided, as if nodding off and joining Nature's slumbering dream. In this pacific sublimity, this still and silent spectacle, humanity and nature mingle with other. And time expands and condenses into a single, barely-conscious present: the future, "the business of the day to come," is "unborn," and the past is unremembered, "gone," "locked up as in a grave." Wordsworth suddenly interrupts himself: "But these, I fear,/ Are falsely catalogued, things that are, are not" (VII.642-3). The described reconciliation between nature and culture exists only in the odd syntax of 'is, and is not', like an illusion or dream that has existence without substance. Thus, if something threatens the play between the imagination and nature, then it cannot be the unreal specter of their final reconciliation where the self and sky fill each other with their vastness to the point of identity. Far from being a threat, the impossibility of this reconciliation gives the self the desire to go on, to continue striving and hoping.

What, then, has the power to threaten the seemingly eternal play between nature and the imagination? It is that peculiar force that is neither natural nor human, that constrains the mind from without while being created by the mind alone. History alone can lay the "whole creative powers of man asleep" (VII.655). The relationship is particularly reflective when the "[p]ossession of the faculties" comes from forms full formed by the inner faculties, the "internal help": precisely what the imagination itself builds in the external can put the imagination to sleep. This might be thought of as another, more monstrous form of 'romantic self-reflexivity'. Hence the difference

between the mingling of nature and the imagination and the "[s]cenes different." In normal scenes in *The Prelude*, two heterogeneous elements (mind and world) intermingle and yet remain absolutely irreconcilable. But with historical forms built by the imagination that attack the imagination, a special type of autoimmunity irrupts. And with this rather strange modality of reflexivity, the historically made forms threaten the very play between the imposing world and the positing mind.

II. Introduction to "the Survival of his Ego"

Scholarship on Book Seven of Wordsworth's *Prelude* has, by and large, come to the agreement that the poet's figuration of his experience in London poses a serious challenge to his ability both to figure and experience.[lix] In *The Return of the Visible* William H. Galperin writes: "Caught up in a spectacular whirl that, even upon reflection, holds sway over the shaping powers of the imagination and symbolic control, the Poet is finally removed by 'the masses' away from the very station or identity which not two hundred lines previously appeared so 'inviolate'" (117). Yet it is far from obvious that the poet's identity, despite his own descriptions of it, was ever "inviolate." Rather, as I argued more completely in my first chapter, the Wordsworthian dialectic between the imagination and nature is originarily unsecure: instead of ever reaching a peaceful harmony the imagination and nature ruin each other until each is a ruin.

The assumption that Book Seven disarticulates what was previously a stable articulation is far from uncommon in the critical tradition. In order to register the devastation described in Book Seven, scholarship ascribes harmony to everything that

precedes it. E. W. Stoppard, for example, claims in that, "In Books 7 and 8 of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth poses the realistic degradation of humanity in London against the pure humanity of the Lake District shepherd" (42). In his *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime*, Neil Hertz argues that in London the "Wordsworthian modes of experience—seeing and gazing, listening, remembering, feeling" fail (56). According to Hertz, these modes of experience fail because London does not present itself to vision—indeed, because it does not *present* itself at all. Rather, it emerges as a text and thereby unravels the distinction between its presence and the representative capacity of Wordsworth's eye and pen. But it is unlikely that Hertz could maintain that the scenes prior to London were not equally textual. It is unlikely, that is, that any of the "Wordsworthian modes of experience" were not deconstructed from the start.

Alberto Gabriele's "Visions of the City of London: Mechanical Eye and Poetic Transcendence in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Book 7" is worth addressing in a little more detail because of its emphasis on temporality. Like Hertz, Gabriele argues that London destroys the representational model of vision that Wordsworth relies upon. Gabriele argues that in London the I/eye no longer establishes a simultaneity between interior and exterior but instead becomes an embodied, mechanical, and moving aperture in the city. As such, the sights in London force the narrator's eye to resemble not a camera obscura, but a camera that takes snapshots as it moves. Each shot combines to create a paratactic or disjunctive series, where image follows image with no continuum underlying them. Wordsworth thus loses the "surrounding space connecting all single spectacles and impressions" (372). The consequence (which Gabriele alludes to but does not discuss in these terms) is that the introduction of heterogeneity in a diachronic series introduces

heterogeneity into a synchronic moment. Only *after* the aperture closes, only *after* the image is separated from its referent, does the image become that image.

As persuasive as Gabriele's account of the temporal modernity of London is, it relies upon an assumption similar to the one Hertz and Galperin rely upon. Gabriele assumes that a stable model of representation and temporality preceded Book Seven. This model can perhaps best be understood by means of the privilege afforded to the epistemic paradigm of the camera obscura, which lasted up until the early nineteenth century. With the technology of the camera obscura, the referent is projected onto a screen such that both it and its impression seem to manifest simultaneously. Instead of a delay, vision seems to happen in the presence of the present, with an underlying homogeneity between the inside of the camera and its outside. And with the viewer not figured as the aperture of the camera obscura, but as standing inside it and contemplating the image, the passage from perception to thought and reflection upon that perception does not seem to be problematic.[lx] However, from the start of *The Prelude* the similitude between inside and outside, imagination and nature, is already disrupted—already a violent conflict rather than a peaceful interchange.

The critical tradition further suggests that while Book Seven unravels the dialectic constitutive of the Wordsworthian ego, that dialectic cannot be destroyed once and for all. Criticism suggests, in other words, that Book Seven assumes that re-figuration accompanies disfiguration or that re-narrativization accompanies interruption. For instance, in addition to arguing that the disorientation of London accomplishes a new type of poetics rather than its destruction, Gabriele notices that "[t]he novelty of the spectacle of the industrialized city of London is briefly entertained only to be superseded

by an intellectualized view more attuned to the prevalent aesthetic models of the sublime or of the picturesque" (378). Understanding Wordsworth's encounter with the blind beggar as a moment of disruption, William Chapman Sharpe writes that Wordsworth "must repress the lessons taught by the blind beggar… if he is to continue writing at all" (30). Hertz argues just the opposite, namely, that the encounter with the blind beggar "reestablishes boundaries between representor and represented and, while minimizing the differences between them, keeps the poet-impressario from tumbling into his text" (60). But their point is the same: history's assault on the self is survived, if not sublated. Lawrence Kramer says it most succinctly: "The preeminent issue of book seven is the survival of the imagination, which for Wordsworth is tantamount to the survival of his ego" (620).[lxi] By reading Book Seven as a disarticulation of the dialectic that will inevitably re-articulat itself, criticism reduces the historical force depicted in London to any other scene in *The Prelude*: the transcendental space uniting imagination and nature turns out to be an impossibility, yet it cannot but be presupposed. In contrast to this critical tradition I will argue that the historical specificity of London depicted in Book Seven resides in its assault precisely on the play between transcendental's non-existence and continual insistence. In order to properly read Book Seven, we have to appreciate fully that the "[s]cenes different" are different not because they are unstable while previous scenes were stable, but because they even threaten instability.

III. "IN OUR EMBERS"

Wordsworth describes the indifference that threatened to paralyze him while at Cambridge:

> …Carelessly
> I gazed, roving as through a Cabinet
> Or wide Museum (thronged with fishes, gems,
> Birds, crocodiles, shells) where little can be seen,
> Well understood, or naturally endeared,
> Yet still does every step bring something forth
> That quickens, pleases, stings; and here and there
> A casual rarity is singled out
> And has its brief perusal, then gives way
> To others, all supplanted in their turn.
> Meanwhile, amid this gaudy Congress, framed
> Of things by nature most unneighbourly,
> The head turns round, and cannot right itself. (III.651-663)

Single rarities are not single rarities here but barely readable marks in a depthless chain of substitutions. That which the "Museum" portrays disappears with the portrayal: the crocodile ceases to be a crocodile or even a sign for living crocodiles but instead points to what comes next. Like vanishing moments, each object turns into another: "all [are] supplanted in their turn." Not only do natural things cease being natural; they do not even point, as a dead letter would, to nature.

Once you are in the museum, there is no escape: the "head turns round, and cannot right itself." Wordsworth loses the ability to leave the museum. His head cannot

stop turning around like a whirligig. Any object his head tries to focus on and contemplate turns into another object. He cannot find the door in order to exit. There is the implicit risk that without being able to enter or leave at will, Wordsworth will cease being an observer and will instead become one of the spectacles in this Cambridge museum or museum of Cambridge. Although Wordsworth is not talking about the academy today, when one goes to Cambridge, one takes on the risk that he or she will never return home but will become an imagination-less and miserable academic "wishing to hope without a hope," with "indecisive judgments," "trained to stand unpropped," and whose "inner pulse/ Of contemplation […] fail[s] to beat" (III.77, 215, 230, 337-8). Cambridge traps you in its museum so you become yet another museum piece in a robe. Or, just another crocodile, one more animal-become-signifier. The figure of Cambridge as a museum is a figure for dehumanization, for the human's disappearance into the exchangeability of signs.

London goes further. It names the moment when the human's inclusion into the system of signs becomes explicit. In London, each encountered person is "one perhaps, already met elsewhere" (VII.217). Each person is the same, an anonymous and exchangeable unit in a crowd. And the crowds, reducing people to aggregative and mechanized flows, are "here, there, and everywhere, a weary throng,/ The Comers and Goers face to face,/ Face after face" (VII.171-3). Guiding the crowds is "the string of dazzling Wares,/ Shop after shop, with Symbols, blazoned Names" (VII.173-4). "Face to face,/ Face after face… Shop after shop": the repetitions suggest that no face is *this* face, this singular face, but a general or public face that defaces the individuality of the face. While every face has "already [been] met elsewhere," "the face of everyone/ That passes

me by is a mystery" (VII.597-8). No face leads to the person behind the face, but only to more and more faces, like a detective novel where all that matters is what comes next. The people in crowds become as exchangeable as the "dazzling Wares" and "blazoned Names" that guide them.[lxii] Humanity is evacuated from the human in London. Wordsworth writes of the prostitute, who can stand in for just about any character in London, that she is "from humanity divorced" (VII.425).[lxiii] Instead of humanity, Wordsworth presents a "motley *imagery*": "…Strangers of all ages, the quick dance/ Of colours, lights and forms, the Babel din/ The endless stream of men, and moving things,/ From hour to hour the illimitable walk" (V.150, 156-59, my italics, for reasons that will soon become clear).

The evacuation of humanity from humans is also suggested by a conspicuous absence in London, namely, labor and work. Contrary to what we might expect, not only is labor absent, but so is alienated labor. We might justifiably suppose from Wordsworth's proto-Marxist concern with alienation, commodification, and urbanization that *The Prelude* establishes a difference between the labor and alienated labor. We might suppose that the countryside is filled with laborers working the land and producing only enough capital for their family's subsistence and that the city is filled with workers who are not producing any products for their own use and who are living less well, less humanly than their country counterparts. But Wordsworth's London does not contain the dirty, impoverished, and alienated form of the pure, hard-working, and austere labor of the countryside. Book Seven of *The Prelude* does not contain the alienated form of the "endless industry" of a Michael of the eponymous poem (l. 97).[lxiv] Indeed, Book Seven barely has any merchants.[lxv]

Instead of alienated labor, London is filled with another type of alienation that is a characteristic concern of the eighteenth century, namely, leisure and luxury and entertainment.[lxvi] Rather than downtrodden masses, everyone is plugged into an entertainment apparatus. "At leisure let us view" (VII.244): the "raree-show" (VII.190), the "minstrel Band/ Of Savoyards" (VII.194-5), the "English Ballad-singer" (VII.196), the "[a]dvertisements of giant size" (VII.210), the "Frame of Images" (VII.229), "the Spectacles/ Within doors" (VII.245-6), the "troops of wild Beasts" (VII.246), the panorama painted by a "greedy pencil taking in/ A whole horizon on all sides" (VII.258-9), the models of "scale exact" created by the "more mechanic Artists" (VII.266, 265), the exhibitions of "shifting pantomimic scenes" (VII.283), Sadler's Wells with its "Saw Singers, Rope-dancers, Giants and Dwarfs/ Clowns, Conjurors, Posture-masters, Harlequins,/ [Who a]mid the uproar of rabblement,/ Perform their feats" (VII.294-7) and its performances of "ancient Comedy/ and Thespian times, dramas of living Men,/ And recent things, yet warm with life" (VII.312-4), the theater with its "lustres, lights,/ The carving and the gilding, paint and glare" and "Figures on the Stage" (VII.441-2, 445), "the antics and buffoonery" of "many-headed mass/ Of the Spectators" (VII.464, 467-8), "that great Stage/ Where Senators… perform" (VII.522-3), "the enchantment [that] spreads and rises" (VII.537), and "other public Shows/ The Capital City teems with" (VII.554-5), to name but "a few conspicuous marks,/ Leaving ten thousand others" (VII.567-8). There is leisure and spectacle "[i]n Hall or Court, Conventicle, or Shop/ In public Room or private, Park or Street" (VII.569-70). "Folly, vice/ Extravagance in gesture, mien, and dress,/ And all the strife of singularity,/ Lies to the ear, and lies to every sense,/ Of these, and of the living shapes they wear,/ There is no end" (VII.572-7).

In one sense, none of this is surprising, for the London Wordsworth visited in the 1790s and then in 1802 was a London of bookshops and theaters rather than the industrial London we imagine some decades later.[lxvii] But to find no impoverished workers and no one involved in any sort of manufacture—and barely anyone involved in trade—betrays something peculiar about Wordsworth's figuration of London. One way to interpret this absence is by reading it as his effacement of the material conditions of his artistic production, which is to say, his effacement of 'non-aesthetic' production or his aestheticization of anything non-aesthetic. While such a reading would have its interest, it is not what presently concerns me.[lxviii] Instead, I want to think through what Wordsworth *is* figuring (rather that what he is not) when he portrays London as an economy without production, as leisure without production, as consumption without production, as aesthesis without production.

The only work done in London is the work of entertainment. Economic value comes only from consumption leading to more consumption, pleasure leading to the pleasure of finding more pleasures, and imitation imitating itself on increasingly higher levels. In Wordsworth's figuration of London, this aesthetic work does not temporarily remove one from the private sphere or from economic systems of production but replaces or hijacks that system so that there is *only* consumption, *only* play and plays. Indeed, it is not even that exchange-value replaces use-value, for there is no capitalist or "Mr. Moneybags" in London who buys commodities in order to sell them rather than use them. Things are not consumed for their use, nor for their ability to be exchanged for the production of capital. Nor are use- and exchange-value replaced by a libidinal pleasure principle. Wordsworth's Londoners are not hedonists. Instead, there is only aesthetic

consumption leading to more aesthetic consumption without purpose or end.[lxix] As Jean Baudrillard writes, describing the postmodern situation that resembles Wordsworth's modern one: "Work (in the form of leisure) invades all of life…. You are no longer brutally removed from daily life to be delivered up to machines. But rather, you are integrated: your childhood, your habits, your human relations, your unconscious instincts, even your rejection of work" (*Selected Writings* 137). Those most private and aneconomic experiences do not precede their integration, as if they had an independent existence prior to the structures that make them possible. Baudrillard thus deconstructs the opposition between labor and work, work and leisure, and the true and the alienated: there is no self awaiting alienation. But for Baudrillard the illusion of self prior to its integration remains—indeed, part of the idea is that that illusion is itself capitalized on, bought and sold.

In Wordsworth's London, however, the scene is different. There is simply no labor and no work. Wordsworth's Londoners neither work for themselves nor for another. Most strikingly, they have neither the desire to labor or work nor the desire to find their humanity. The Londoner is reduced to a consumption machine and is *satisfied* with this reduction. In order to register the import of this satisfaction in the context of *The Prelude*, one only needs to examine, in contrast, Wordsworth's figuration of himself. Wordsworth—whether the figure 'Wordsworth' or the poet doing the figuring—continually searches for himself. Were he to find himself, he would no longer (not) be himself, would no longer be himself trying and failing to find himself. To become fully oneself, finally reconciled with the world, is to become a corpse. But not knowing or being oneself is only half of what it is to be human. The other half is trying to know

oneself, is continuing to believe, in the words of the *Immortality Ode*, "that in our embers/ Is something that doth live" (ll. 132-3). To be human for Wordsworth is to know that there is no humanity but to desire that humanity nonetheless. Now, what differentiates the Londoners from Wordsworth and the other characters in *The Prelude* is that the Londoners do not even want to return to their true natures, to return from their alienation or division to their original or final self. In an economy devoid of alienation, the illusion of the non-alienated disappears qua illusion, qua that which is, as it were, a disappearing act. The illusion of a self prior to its alienation depends on the illusion of alienation, of work that exploits the self's own labor. But this work is nowhere to be found. Londoners cease to be divided between their humanity and their inhuman alienation, which means that they are not human at all because they are not even alienated from their humanity, not even (in)human. In the Wordsworthian universe, to be (in)human is to desire to be human; to be (in)human is simply to be human. Londoners are *absolutely* inhuman. The threat of London is not that humanity might have to survive as alienated from itself or as (in)human. The threat of London is that even the (in)humanity constitutive of the human will disappear.

The exception to the absolute evacuation of humanity seems to be the blind beggar. Unlike all the other faces which give way to more faces, the face of the blind beggar presents itself to Wordsworth's line of sight and makes itself available to contemplation: "…lost/ Amid the moving pageant, 'twas my chance/ Abruptly to be smitten with the view/ Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face,/ Stood propped against a wall" (VII.609-13). Amid the constant motion of London, the blind beggar is the only "unmoving man" (VII.621). Amid the defaced faces and inhuman humans, the beggar

seems to be the one figure who might recover the humanity of London, for he is "a type,/ Or emblem, of the utmost that we know,/ Both of ourselves and of the universe" (VII.618-20). But the impoverished beggar does not wander around articulating or producing community as does the Cumberland beggar. Instead, he is "propped" up like an object, or, more precisely, like a signpost holding an advertisement, a "written paper, to explain/ The story of the Man, and who he was" (VII.618, 615). Having been cast out of the consumption economy, the beggar does not thereby try to work, does not thereby return to his humanity, but becomes an advertisement, another sign or spectacle in the big city.

Indeed, the similarity between the beggar's "upright face" and the dead man in Book Five who "bolt *upright*/ [and r]ose with his ghastly *face*" from the lake suggests that the beggar is dead as well (VII.612, V.471-2, my italics). There are some crucial differences, however, between the two dead upright faces. When Wordsworth sees the man in the lake, he sees "a spectre shape" (V.472). But when he "look[s at the beggar]/ As if admonished from another world," he does not look at the shape of the man, but looks "*on* the shape of the unmoving man," on the man, at his advertisement, at the advertisement he is (VII.622-3, 621, my italics). The man in Book Five is known to be dead, to have once been alive and now to be dead. It is not clear, however, that Wordsworth realizes the beggar of Book Seven is dead, a corpse with its epitaph.[lxx] The dead man in the lake is not labeled as such, but appears as a dead man, as organic manner that once had movement. The beggar, by contrast, is labeled with his epitaph, but because Wordsworth gets distracted reading it, he does not see the corpse underneath. He does not notice that the "unmoving man" is dead and reduced to a text, to (what) remains.[lxxi]

In fact, although he is given an epitaph, the blind beggar had never been alive. When Wordsworth saw the man in the lake, he was not scared, for he could aestheticize the sight:

> …and yet no vulgar fear,
>
> …….
>
> Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
>
> Such sights before, among the shining streams
>
> Of Fairy Land, the Forests of Romance:
>
> Thence came a spirit of hallowing what I saw
>
> With decoration and ideal grace;
>
> A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
>
> Of Grecian Art, and purest Poesy. (V.473-81)

He can aestheticize the man he knows to be dead. But he cannot aestheticize the blind beggar. For the blind beggar is already aestheticized, already marked up and adorned. And since he is not capable of being aestheticized, what should be as it were underneath or behind aestheticization literally disappears from the text. There is no body or corpse capable of being turned into a Greek statue, no nature in need of the supplemental but constitutive imagination. This is perhaps why Wordsworth could not see that the beggar was dead: the beggar does not have a body capable of death. He was not once a living human who is now a dead inhuman one. Even if we assume that he is supposed to be figured as alive when Wordsworth sees him, he is still the only "unmoving man" in all of London. That is, even while he was 'alive,' he was already dead, already unmoving. What had died was not once alive. Or, what used to be living as its death has died again,

absolutely. What had died was already an inhuman, already a text, already an advertisement, already a nonhuman Londoner. Like the dwarf man, the blind beggar is alien, "[a]s if… from another world" (VII.623). In contrast to the "unmoving" blind beggar, the dead man who was dug out of the lake still survives. Not only does he still have movement—he "bolt upright" and "[r]ose"—but he also survives as a figuration of figure's power to give life and face. In contrast, the corpse of the beggar does not survive at all, for it never even appears as a corpse in Wordsworth's text. It is as absurd as it is incontrovertible that he is dead. His advertisement or (de)signed sign survives, but his corpse absolutely disappears since it never even appeared in the text. Where Wordsworth perhaps thought he found a vestige of humanity in the city, he finds instead its absolute evacuation. After all, if, in order to witness human labor, in order to witness humanity, he has to turn to a dead and blind beggar, his chances are grim. Rather than combating the disappearance of humanity in London, the beggar suggests that even when Wordsworth has a moment to stand still and contemplate, even when his imagination is allowed to interact with rather than be possessed by what he sees, humanity is nowhere to be found. The blind beggar figures the death of death, the death of (in)humanity.

In the penultimate chapter of *The Order of Things*, "Man and His Doubles," Foucault famously argues that the modern concept of man was invented around the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. The invention of man was in fact the invention of man's inability to be man: once a difference between man and his inaccessible origin opened up, the origin ceased to place man in continuity with himself and put his true self in an absolutely anterior position. A temporal difference thus irrupts within identity, thereby constituting it in a paradoxical logic. But for Wordsworth the

emergence of such temporality is by no means recent: man has always already been torn from himself, no longer or not yet himself. What Foucault locates during Wordsworth's historical moment, Wordsworth projects to time immemorial. But even though human temporality cannot be historicized, it is not thereby immune from history. As decades of both historicist and deconstructive scholarship on Wordsworth have demonstrated, the seemingly ahistorical opening of temporality is always historically specific, always in a historical form that has no ahistorical content as it were.

As such, the historically new events around 1800 depicted in Book Seven are not new because they reveal the imagination to be through and through historical, for Wordsworth's poetry suggests that the imagination has always already been the survival of its destruction by history. History's contamination of the imagination is not historically new. What is *new*, what is *historically singular*, is that the historical events of London threaten *even the appearance* of that which is outside history, even the appearance of a pre-alienated time and place. The challenge of history is not that it divides man from himself and forces him to survive as his division. Nor is the challenge of history that it tragically reveals man and his imagination to be historical. Rather, the challenge of history, the threat of history, the threat of London, is that it will destroy even the 'ideological effect' of an origin to which man can return in the future: it destroys the ideological effect that we call consciousness. The question emerges as to how or if a difference—the difference between authentical and alienated existence in this case—can disappear. Differences, after all, never present themselves as such but 'are' their own disappearance. But with one side of the difference disappearing absolutely in London, the difference, which has no 'itself,' itself disappears. While Foucault understands history as

threatening the unity of man, Wordsworth understands it as threatening the disjunction of man, the survival of man. While Foucault might have understood Wordsworth's London as the appearance of man in all his duplicity, Wordsworth understands it as that place and time in which man in his duplicity disappears. Rather than having a self-divided man, we no longer have man at all, we no longer have a man divided from himself, we no longer even have a man who is not himself. In this sense, one might surmise that the Londoner will become one.

III. "ONE LIFE"

In London, Wordsworth sees everywhere "those mimic sights that ape/ The absolute presence of reality,/ Expressing, as in a mirror, sea and land,/ And what earth is, and what she has to shew" (VII.248-251). The difference between referent and image falls into disarray as "mimic sights… ape/ The absolute presence of reality." In his "Wordsworth, Panoramas, and the Prospect of London," Ross King reads these "mimic sights" as the panoramas to which they probably refer and elaborates on eighteenth-century viewers' anxiety that panoramas' exactitude would undo the difference between representation and the presence that was represented. And the threat to the difference between presence and representation, King argues, is devastating for Wordsworth's dialectic, which relies upon *both* the similitude *and* the difference between the imagination and nature. Thus, when Wordsworth encounters the panorama in Book Seven, he fears, in King's words, "that the distinction between the original and its

representation will be effaced" by the pure mimesis of the panorama (63). The difference "between spectator and spectacle threaten[s to] collapse" (67).

Wordsworth's anxiety about representation becoming just as if not more real than reality can be best appreciated with his "mechanic Artist," who "represent[s]/ By scale exact…

> …some rural haunt, the Falls
> Of Tivoli, and dim Frescati's bowers,
> And high upon the steep, that mouldering Fane,
> The Temple of Sibyl, every tree
> Through all the landscape, tuft, stone, scratch minute,
> And every Cottage, lurking in the rocks,
> All that the Traveller sees when he is there. (VII.265-6, 274-80)

The "mechanic Artist" copies with the power of a machine far more advanced than twenty-first-century machines. He reproduces with exactitude every "tuft, stone, scratch minute." The image he produces is certainly more exact than the image the traveler sees, which does comprehend every tuft, stone, and scratch. To Wordsworth's overactive and perhaps paranoid imagination, mimetic reproduction in London is mechanical reproduction, and the ability to ape the real becomes more powerful, more exact, than the eye's ability to do so. Representations become more real than phenomenological reality. Filled with stages—the Senate a stage, the Church a stage, the audience a stage—London becomes a stage that destroys the possibility of an offstage.[lxxii] Once the street becomes a stage, once the Londoners' movements and thoughts become scripted, there is no offstage, no audience, and no observer *ab extra* named Wordsworth. Michael Meyer

succinctly describes the stage of poet writing about the theater: "The writer imitates rather than opposes the art of theatre because he stages himself as a past spectator of London, which in turn is represented in the present theatre of his mind and externalized on the stage of the text."[lxxiii]

In the Lake District, the difference between imagination and nature, mind and reality, is always coming unraveled, but Wordsworth knows that it will survive as a difference. In London, however, the difference between representation and reality threatens to disappear altogether as the copy becomes more real than the original. To add to Wordsworth's anxieties, he figures London as threatening even the reality lying outside of the London borders. Even real people, innocent people from the Lake District, become nothing but their simulation. I mean, of course, Mary of Buttermere, the story of whose life was turned into a show, a play for Sadler's Wells. Her body was effaced by that of an actor's, and her life was effaced by a script. The woman 'herself' became secondary to her simulation. No wonder, then, that Wordsworth is so insistent, so anxious, about asserting her singularity and purity: "Without contamination does she live/ In quietness, without anxiety" (VII.354-5). Even his imagined 'real' Mary Robinson is a fantastic image of her: the 'real' woman becomes, even for Wordsworth, an "image" (VII.350).

Just as is the case with Mary Robinson, no one and no thing outside London remains outside London. It contains all peoples, all the people who by their essence should not be in London: "the Italian," "the Jew," the "Turk," the "Swede, the Russian," "the Frenchman and the Spaniard," "the Hunter-Indian; Moors,/ Malays, Lascars, the Tartar and Chinese,/ and Negro Ladies in white muslin gowns" (VII.229-243). To borrow

from Coleridge, London appropriates all essences "within [it] and abroad" ("The Eolian Harp," l. 26). From "East,/ To West, beneath, behind us, and before," whatever is not actually in London has its representation therein, and this representation is exact in its "life-like mockery," more real than whatever reality lies beyond its borders (VII.263-4). "[F]amous spots and things/ Domestic, or the boast of foreign Realms" are contained in London in "miniature" (VII.268-9). "St. Peter's Church; or, more aspiring aim,/ In microscopic vision, Rome itself" is located in London. Even that which is most alien to London—"Nature's circumambient scenery"—is contained within it. And it too is more natural than nature 'itself': having a "whole horizon on all sides," the panorama of nature is painted "with power,/ Like that of Angels or commissioned Spirits,/ [who] plant us upon some lofty Pinnacle" (VII.257-61). Nature is reproduced as if by divine artists. Even that which is neither inside nor outside London—even that invisible difference between London and non-London—finds its simulation therein: absence, invisibility 'itself' is conjured up: "Delusion bold! and faith must needs be coy;/ How is it wrought? His garb is black, the word/ INVISIBLE flames forth upon his chest" (VII.308-10).

Wordsworth figures London as destroying reality within it (the reality of London) as well as reality outside it (the reality of Nature and the whole world over). First and foremost, though, it destroys the ability to view it from without, to come to it as a tourist or observer. Thus, however much Wordsworth would abhor being a Londoner, he too cannot resist partaking in its simulation. He is not even outside London when he has left it and has begun writing about it. Even when he is describing the most un-London-like "rosy Babe" he saw while in London, he can only depict it as if he were the Londoner par excellence (VII.368). In contrast to the babe's mother, on whose "cheek the tints were

false,/ A painted bloom," and in contrast to the "chance Spectators, chiefly dissolute men/ And shameless women," the babe seems to be as natural and human as could be (VII.373-4, 388-9). Like the other infants throughout Wordsworth's poetry, the rosy babe from London figures the original communion between the self and the world. In fact, the rosy babe is "of lusty vigour, *more than infantine*"—"more than infantine" because he is more perfect than an infant (VII.379, my italics). As close as they come to being one with themselves, infants in Wordsworth's poetry are human, which is to say that they are imperfect, divided, remembering and forgetting. But this particular rosy babe is *more than infantine*, more infantine than the mere infant, more perfect than the newborn. He is even more like an infant in the cottages of the countryside than the infants in the cottages of the countryside: "[The rosy babe] was in limbs, in face a Cottage rose/ Just three parts blown; a Cottage Child, but ne'er/ Saw I, by Cottage or elsewhere, a Babe/ By Nature's gifts so honoured" (VII.380-3). He is "[a]lien" (VII.378).

The babe becomes an after-theater refreshment:

> …Upon a Board
> Whence an attendant of the Theatre
> Served out refreshments, had this Child been placed,
> And there he sate, environed around with a Ring
> Of chance Spectators, chiefly dissolute men
> And shameless women; treated and caressed,
> Ate, drank, and with the fruit and glasses played,
> While oaths, indecent speech, and ribaldry
> Were rife about him as are songs of birds

In spring-time after showers. The Mother, too,

Was present! (VII.383-393)

The spectators place the babe on a tray, to consume him either figuratively or literally. And since the babe is stillborn or "more than infantine," it is hard to decide whether or not they are cannibals. Wordsworth desires, of course, to save the babe from consumption, to "behold/ The lovely Boy as I beheld him then" (VII.395-6). But in the end, Wordsworth is a spectator, and even after leaving London and writing about the "rosy Babe," he can only depict him as the "dissolute men" do:

…He hath since

Appeared to me oft times as if embalmed

By Nature; through some privilege,

Stopped at the growth he had; destined to live,

To be, to have been, come and go, a Child

And nothing more (VII.399-404)

The spectators, setting the child upon a board and passing him around, almost turned the event into an Irish wake. Wordsworth goes further and "embalm[s]" the child. Contrary to our expectations, rather than figuring the child as one of the "race of real children, not too wise,/ Too learned, or too good," Wordsworth shows up the spectators and turns the boy into an embalmed but living corpse, frozen and, if rotting, oxymoronically rotting forever, "decaying, never to be decayed"—like the child living in his coffin in the *Immortality Ode* that so disturbed Coleridge (V.436-7, VI.557). Wordsworth converts the babe's past and future existence into a timeless (or, time-less), inhuman *picture* for the pleasure of his imagination. He takes a still image of the stillborn. The Londoners turn

the babe into an after-theater refreshment to be consumed and then defecated. Wordsworth turns it into the most gruesome of pro-life advertisements, showing the most authentic and natural form of human life possible. And then, for posterity's sake, he takes a picture of it. Or, he takes a picture of it out of that most natural love or lust for "lusty" babies, since not only is the babe stillborn, it is also a mirror of its prostitute of a mother, blooming and lusty (VII.379).

Wordsworth cannot but become a Londoner. When he tries to depict the city, he can only depict it through its mode of depiction. Wordsworth becomes a figure within his figuration. His figuration of the destruction of the excess of figure destroys him as the excess of figure that does the figuring. Thus, he can only see London as Londoners do, as a picture, a copy of that which has no original. If he tried to represent London as if he were outside of it, then he would treat it as if it were a real thing that he was re-presenting. But if he treated it as if it were a real thing, then he precisely would not present it as it is (i.e., a simulacrum). Insofar as reading relies on the ability to differentiate between surface and depth, signifier and signified, and sign and referent, London is unreadable. It paradoxically becomes absolute: there is no London that is figured and no poet doing the figuration. "There is no end," no outside, of London (VII.577). Nor does London have a past or future. It destroys that which preceded it, making a "microscopic vision [of] Rome itself" so that the real ancient Rome is not the one that is gone, non-existent, and lost to time, but the one in London (VII.273). And London destroys that which succeeds it: Wordsworth cannot write about London from the future as if he were outside of it, for he will forever be in London, a character in Book Seven of *The Prelude*. It is no accident that after his 'narration' of London he describes

the *imagination*, in Book Eight, as producing a "Spectacle to which there is no end" (VIII.741).

Just as its economy is an economy without infrastructure, without production, and without labor, so London is an image without a reality behind it. And just as the panoramas it 'contains' destroy the difference between the representation and the represented, so London destroys the difference between itself and the texts, images, advertisements, panoramas, stages, seeing machines, and mechanic artists that should appear in or on London. At the very first sight of it, Wordsworth exclaims: "Great God!/ That aught *external* to the living mind/ Should have such mighty sway" (VII.700-3). London threatens not only the interiority of the "living mind"; it also threatens its own self, its own externality to be measured against the internal mind judging it. It disappearing into the purely external, one of the few words italicized in *The Prelude*. Pure externality, it ceases to become a place that provides the ground for whatever happens in it and instead becomes an invisible and unreadable text with more text superimposed 'on top' of it. Without paper or parchment below the image, it is not even a palimpsest. Destroying difference within and without, Wordsworth's London threatens to unite with itself as an absolute image.[lxxiv] The paper the image is 'on' is in the image, and the spectator looking at it is in it.

IV. "AS A KITTEN WHEN AT PLAY"

Readers of the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* will be familiar with the way in which the historical event of London impinges upon futurity:

> For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for the extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. (599)

Like many thinkers of modernity, Wordsworth suggests here that what is new about London, what is "unknown to former times," is that it imposes upon newness precisely by accumulating "extraordinary incident[s]." The new, the shock, is produced with greater and greater frequency to the point where it becomes common. But as Wordsworth realizes far before his time, as soon as the times produce something *unknown*, as soon as the *new* becomes a radical possibility, so does the new possibility of the destruction of newness. The advent of newness, for Wordsworth, threatens to destroy the possibility of future newness.[lxxv] And precisely in this capacity, history *can* produce something radically new in a way that imagination never could, since it is never absolutely absolved from a determined world.

Every sight in London is new, a singular sight that can only be seen *now*: "how eagerly,/ And with what flashes, as it were, the mind/ Turned this way, that way! sportive and alert/ And watchful, as a kitten when at play" (VII.469-72). Londoners only and ever live *now*, *now this* spectacle, *now this* spectacle. The same, of course, applies to Wordsworth's figuration of London. Much of Book Seven is composed of paratactic lists

devoid of temporality and narrative: *now this* spectacle, *now this* spectacle. Even the groups of lists are barely related to one another in a coherent narrative. The first lists in Book Seven are book-ended by temporal and narratological markers ("And the *first* look and aspect of that place," "*Meanwhile* the roar continues," "*Thence* back until the throng," "*Now* homeward through the thickening hubbub" (VII.154, 184, 205, 227, my italics)). These temporal indicators arrange the lists of sights, which are devoid of narrative arrangement, into a temporal or narrative sequence. But by line 244 they quickly drop out of the picture, as if Wordsworth gives up on his attempt to narrate the narrative-less lists: instead of *first this* (list of things without temporal order)*, then that* (list of things without temporal order)*, next this* (list of things without temporal order), we get, *now see this* (list of things without temporal order)*, now see this* (list of things without temporal order)*, now see this* (list of things without temporal order). Instead of presenting us with paratactic lists arranged in a temporal order, that temporal order drops out, and the paratactic lists become paratactically arranged: "At leisure let us view, from day to day/ As they present themselves, the Spectacles," "Add to these exhibitions mute and still/ Others of wider scope" (VII.244-5, 281-2). After listing some spectacles, he does not say that he then goes and sees others, but *adds* to the list. Each sight, each paratactic unit or chain, is *now*, without narrative connection. The temporal ordering that the mind irreducibly brings to the scene disappears as Wordsworth becomes a digital camera taking snapshots and recording *now this*, *now this*, *now this*.[lxxvi] Even the lists prior to line 244 that seemed to have a narrative element all relied upon a present tense that cannot be explained away as a historical present: "Meanwhile the roar continues, till at length,/ escaped as from an enemy, we turn…," "Thence back into the throng, until we

reach…," "Now homeward through the thickening hubbub, where/ See, among less distinguishable sights,/ The Italian…" (VII.184-5, 205, 227-9). Everything in London happens *now*, without a presupposed transcendental Now uniting all the discreet nows into a temporal order.[lxxvii] Since no *now* in London affects any of the nows that preceded or succeeded it, every *now* is a radically new now, a radically absolved now. And since *now* can only be if it relates to past and future now by becoming-not-now, *now* drops out of the picture, evacuating itself even from its own self-evacuation.

When Wordsworth describes for entertainment or "for *pastime's sake*/ Some portion of that motley *imagery*," he does so by "[*c]opying the impression of the memory*" (VII.149-50, 146, my italics). He does not remember, does not describe or narrate his memories, but quite literally copies impressions, copies impressions that are already copies (of copies). Copying each impression as it impresses itself on him without filling in the gaps between one impression and the next, Wordsworth becomes one of the "mechanic Artists." Wordsworth's description of London suffers the same fate as the crippled boy who went to London and returned home even more crippled. When the young Wordsworth questioned him about the city, the boy's answers "[f]ell flatter than a cagèd Parrot's note,/ That answers unexpectedly awry,/ And mocks the Prompter's listening" (VII.106-8). Writing about the faceless crowd, Wordsworth says it most clearly:

> Thus have I looked, *nor ceased to look*, oppressed
> By thoughts of what, and whither, when and how,
> Until shapes before my eyes became
> A second-sight procession, such as glides

Over still mountains, or appears in dreams;
And all the ballast of familiar life,
The present, and the past; hope, fear; all stays,
All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man
Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known. (VII.599-607, my italics)

Wordsworth loses "the ballast of familiar life,/ The present, and the past; hope, fear." Temporality—memory, the present, and anticipation—leaves him. And he has not "ceased to look" at this sight-depriving sight, this time-depriving time. Wordsworth finds himself in a historical moment that has erased the very temporality it relies upon. A contingent, historical, and thereby finite city threatens the only thing that should be permanent, namely, the permanence of impermanence, the permanence of that which survives as its own destruction, the permanence of the impossibility of the presence of the present. History, which is nothing but a series of destructions, threatens the permanence of destruction. Those most impermanent of phenomena that we call historical events threaten to destroy the only thing that can possibly be conceived of as indestructible.

V. "Upon Some Showman's Platform"

When we read Wordsworth's visit to the city in the context of *The Prelude*, it seems unbelievable: he leaves an already deconstructed humanity, reality, and time, for a historical moment that threatens even the survival of humanity as (in)humanity, of reality as (ir)reality, and of presence as its impossibility. Book Seven figures London as a threat to the permanence of impermanence, as becoming a pure image. In the final pages of

Book Seven, Wordsworth turns to "a type not false/ Of what the mighty city is" (VII.696-7). The picture that Wordsworth then paints is the "blank confusion" of Bartholomew fair, yet another example of the "[s]cenes different" that are "full-formed," *added on* as yet another image of an image (VII.696):

> …there see
> A work that's finished to our hands, that lays,
> If any spectacle on earth can do,
> The whole creative powers of man asleep!
> For once the Muse's help will we implore,
> And she shall lodge us, wafted on her wings,
> Above the press and danger of the Crowd,
> Upon some Showman's platform: what a hell
> For eyes and ears! what anarchy and din
> Barbarian and infernal! 'tis a dream,
> Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound. (VII.652-62)

What follows this account of a "full formed" "work that's finished to our hands" is a list of those monstrous colors, motions, shapes, sights, and sounds:

> And chattering monkeys dangling from their poles,
> And children whirling in their roundabouts;
> With those that stretch the neck, and strain the eyes,
> And crack the voice in rivalship, the crowd
> Inviting; with buffoons against buffoons
> Grimacing, writhing, screaming; him who grinds

The hurdy-gurdy, at the fiddle weaves;
Rattles the salt-box, thumps the kettle-drum,
And him who at the trumpet puffs his cheeks,
The silver-collard Negro with his timbrel,
Equestrians, Tumblers, Woman, Girls, and Boys,
Blue-breeched, pink-vested, and with towering plumes.
—All moveables of wonder from all parts,
Are here, Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs,
The Horse of Knowledge, and the learned Pig,
The Stone-eater, the Man that swallows fire,
Giants, Ventriloquists, the Invisible Girl,
The Bust that speaks, and moves its goggling eyes,
The Wax-work, Clock-work, all the marvellous craft
Of modern Merlins, wild Beasts, Puppet-shows,
All freaks of Nature, all Promethean thoughts
Of man; his dulness, madness, and their feats,
All jumbled up together to make up
This parliament of Monsters. Tents and Booths
Meanwhile, as if the whole were one vast Mill,
Are vomiting, receiving, on all sides,
Men, Women, three-years' Children, Babes in arms. (VII.668-95)

In this "parliament of Monsters," "one vast Mill" vomits forth even "three-years' Children" and "Babes in arms." What is vomited from the mill is immediately received

back into it via a closed circuit. The "Men, Women, three-years' Child, [and] Babes in arms" of line 695 who form the audience are indistinguishable from the "Woman, Girls, and Boys" of line 678 who form the fair's core. The "modern Merlins" have invented a Möbius strip, one side of which contains machines, animals, ventriloquists, puppets, and invisible people, the 'other half' of which contains the spectators who have come to take a peek.

Unsurprisingly, Wordsworth too finds himself at the heart of the machine. In his figuration of his own figuration, he calls upon that most mechanical piece of rhetoric, namely, the Muse. One thinks of Rev. James Bowyer's comment to Coleridge: "'*Harp? Harp? Lyre? Pen and ink, boy, you mean! Muse, boy, Muse? your Nurse's daughter, you mean! Pierian spring? Oh 'aye! the cloister-pump, I suppose!*'" (*Biographia Literaria* 10). Relying upon that high-rhetorical, inhuman guide, he asks to be protected from "the press and danger of the Crowd," from the danger of pure aesthetics. And where does he ask to be placed? "Upon some Showman's platform." At the very moment he asks to be placed outside the fair, over and above it, he rather explicitly places himself squarely in it, upon a Showman's platform with the Muse—two more freaks of nature standing together on the μηχανή, the mechanical crane in ancient Greek theater that allowed characters to descend from a sky, as in a *deus ex machina*. Like the audience, Wordsworth is a deformed and deforming performer.

It is not even the case here that while Wordsworth hopes for an escape, his text betrays its impossibility. Rather, he quite explicitly asks to be taken, by the muse, to the showman's platform, where he can serve as the headliner. His hope is not that he may depict Bartholomew from without, but that he may win the fair's prize for the most

impressive ventriloquism of it, the most exact mimesis of it. As such, Bartholomew undermines not the possibility of escape, but rather the desire for it. Having become the crowd's demagogue and the headliner of Bartholomew, he has completely given up on the illusion of escape, on the possibility of what he knows is a fiction. *The Prelude* is no longer fictional at this moment. And if to be (in)human is necessarily to experience and desire fiction, then Wordsworth has ceased to be even (in)human. He figures his imagination here neither as that which removes him from the scene and delivers him to some spot of time entirely independent of it, nor as that which allows him to co-create the scene that is already fully formed. Rather "the whole creative powers of [him have been laid] asleep"—even and especially at the time of writing, at the moment of the performative act of putting pen to page, an act which should by necessity exceed the text's 'inside'. The trace of the extratextual, which only remains in a text under erasure, is put on display, here and now.

It should come as no surprise that if the imagination has something to do with temporality, then the laying to sleep of the imagination should somehow lay time to sleep as well. As I have insisted about London in general, Bartholomew has to be read in contrast to the other recollected vignettes that puncture the narrative of *The Prelude*. No matter how imagistic these vignettes may be, they are through and through temporal, both in that they deal with temporal problems and in that they are narrative. One thinks of the Boy of Winander or the spots of time, both of which are concerned with death, memory, and expectation. The standard vignettes that interrupt the narrative of *The Prelude* are not images but small narratives. They show that the interruption of temporality is irreducibly temporal, whether because they will be inscribed within a temporal narrative or because

they are themselves temporally extended. In this sense, narrative temporality in *The Prelude* is the survival of its own interruptions, and the interruptions of temporality are irreducibly temporal. The moments that interrupt the temporal narrative are not *instant images* that would pause the poem by turning its cinematic expansion into a single frame. Rather, like all instants, they contain their past and future in the complex interchanges of memory.

In contrast, Bartholomew is not a narrative that interrupts the narrative but a still shot. Since Wordsworth makes recourse to the Muse, it should be remembered that the muses and Mnemosyne do not simply remember. In *Theogony*, for instance, the muses do not help Hesiod remember a story. Rather, they "breathed a divine voice into [him], so that [he] might glorify what will be and what was before" (ll. 31-2). With their "deathless voice" or "deathless song," the muses know "of what is and what will be and what was before, harmonizing in their sound" (ll. 43, 69, 38-9). The Hesiodic muses perfectly remember absolutely everything and they do not speak to the poet but literally sing through his mouth. But to remember perfectly is not to remember at all, it is to do the impossible: to *re-present perfectly*, which amounts to the impossible conflation of presencing and representation. The muses are a transcendental video camera, in which to replay is to re-experience the past as the present. In this sense the mother of the muses and the goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, is utterly deprived of memory; she is utterly deprived of the human temporality that makes something like memory possible. It is no surprise, then, that when acting as the "servant of the Muses," Hesiod is effaced: he "forgets his sorrows at once and does not remember his anguish at all" (ll. 100, 102-3). The muses thus strip the poet who invokes them of his temporality, his memories and

hopes and fears. With temporality literally out of the picture, the muse's representation exactly re-presents, exactly manifests an image that is more original than the original. Likewise, upon the platform, Wordsworth is in the position to ventriloquize the fair, to see absolutely everything in it, including his own position.

Instead of describing his memory of his visit to the fair (what he did there, who he met, when he did what), Wordsworth becomes a muse and paints everything that he had seen during the time he was at Batholomew as if it were a single vision in a single moment, without the intervening of temporality, without the passing of time during the fair and without the passing of time between its present and Wordsworth's re-presentation of it. From lines 668 to 692, the imitative power of London holds such sway over him that he does not imperfectly narrate his memory, but presents an image. As with London, the chaos of Bartholomew is imitated so mechanically that the creative function of aestheticization drops out of the picture, leaving nothing but a paratactic list of sights, "sights" naming the conflation of subject and object. The depicted characters are not even granted smallest parcel of depth, of mental or temporal lives, but are reduced to sheer sights, to minimally descriptive units.

When Wordsworth turns to the muse and begins his list of freaks, he presents the grotesque version of Homer's Catalogue of Ships. But the Catalogue of Ships at least contains temporal indicators: "First came the Boetian units…, Then men who lived in Aspledon…, Then Shedius and Epistrophus led the men of Phocis" (II.584, 601, 607). Wordsworth's version of the Catalogue of Ships, however, is void of logical, temporal, and narratological connectives. The image of Bartholomew has no temporal ordering whatsoever. The only thing that gives it a semblance of temporality is that we have to

read it in time. Besides that, the Catalogue of Freaks could be completely rearranged with only the slightest change in effect and sense. Bartholomew, as "one identity," is an *image*, a *still* composed of discrete, paratactical units devoid of the photographer, photographed, and photographic paper. However, while Bartholomew contains the same logic of the *now* as London does, it nonetheless contains movement. The monkeys are "dangling," the children are "whirling in their roundabouts," the buffoons are "writhing, screaming," the man is "grind[ing]/ The hurdy-gurdy," those leaving the mill are entering it. But the temporality included in the image does not make it less of a snapshot, less of a narrative-less still. Rather, the still image paradoxically and impossibly contains movement: a snapshot with movement. One thinks of Achilles' shield or, perhaps better analogies if not as well known, of the moving images, the tableaux vivants, dispersed throughout Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* or Michael Haneke's *Seventh Continent.* Bartholomew thereby figures the atemporalization of temporality. It figures the erasure of temporality to such a degree that temporality can only survive impossibility within a still shot, can only survive as the minimal degree of temporality necessary for a paratactic list to be readable. And in this way, Wordsworth figures not the interruption of temporality that temporality is, but the possibility that temporality could be absolutely interrupted, the possibility that an interruption of temporality could *not* be irreducibly temporal. While Bartholomew's shock to temporality is not absolute, it depicts the absolutization of the shock, the possibility that the rhythm between the interruption of temporality and the reinscription of the interruption could be halted by the force of history. Like London, it marks, if not pure image, then becoming-pure-image.

Bartholomew either has no differences (fantastic imitation machines destroy the difference between reality and the imitations of it) or it is composed only of differences without a reality or a real Bartholomew underneath and sanctioning these differences. Concluding his depiction of the "blank confusion" of Bartholomew fair, Wordsworth writes:

> Living amid the same perpetual flow
> Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
> To one identity, by differences
> That have no law, no meaning, and no end. (VII.702-705)[lxxviii]

The differences emerge two-dimensionally, without a surface behind the differences upon which the differences rest and which would provide depth. In this miniature of London, the differences 'within' it have nothing they are different from: there is no real London that the differences differ from, there is no land outside London that the differences differ from, and there is no poet who figures the difference that the differences are different from. Without "law," "meaning," and the delimitation of an "end" or border, London (or Bartholomew, the imitation of it) destroys in advance any assumption of a transcendentality undergirding it, such that the difference between differences and indifference radically disappears. Just like the Londoner who has no illusion of authenticity and alienation, London, at the moment it splits between itself and Bartholomew, itself becomes itself. The dialectic has finally been resolved: all differences constitute one identity. If complete reconciliation emerges in *The Prelude*, it is not at Snowdon, but here, amid the signifier (the fair) for what is total signifier (London). As this worst type of infinity, self-proximity absolutizes itself.

While the "reduc[tion]/ To one identity, by differences/ That have no law" brings to mind Hegel's bad infinity, we would do better to understand Wordsworth as anticipating what Jean Baudrillard calls, late in his career, the *perfect crime.* The perfect crime will have happened when the irreducible if illusory difference between sign and referent, signifier and signified, true and false, good and evil, or nature and humanity is itself destroyed. When the difference between, say, nature and humanity, does not even appear as a difference, there we have the perfect crime. The perfect crime is not the deconstruction of the opposition between nature and humanity but the absolutization of the deconstruction. It is the *success* of the deconstruction, the impossible success of that which cannot succeed: the point at which what has been deconstructed does not even survive as deconstructed. For Baudrillard the perfect crime is on the horizon when the image is more real than the referent, when the recording of reality is more real than the appearance of reality (photographic inscriptions of light, telescopic and microscopic and x-ray technology, theoretical physics, critical knowledges, digital imaging, etc.), when the recording and measuring of time is more exact and more instantaneous than phenomenological time (real time), when the digitalization of music is more exact than music (high fidelity), when thought is more exact than thought (artificial intelligence), when sex is more sexual than sex (pornography), when the body is more automatic and determined than the body (the genetic code, cellular engineering, transplantation, medical technologies' prolongation of life).[lxxix]

This is precisely the threat of Wordsworth's hyperreal London. Again, the historical events and technologies figured in London do not simply undermine the imagination's supposed transcendentality (for the imagination has always been

constitutive upon being undermined). Rather, taking on, as its external form, the imagination's abilities, these historical events and technologies *imitate* the imagination's power to aestheticize and efface to such an extent that they efface and/or conflate with the imagination. In effacing constitutive differences and yet disseminating differences such that it absolutely mimics (the absence of) the indifferent or selfsame, London erases the one thing that remains indelible since it is *not* or 'is' its own erasure—namely, difference. To be an image of indifference requires that the image is selfsame, that there is only the One Image without that of which the image is. Wordsworth 'evasion' of history does not worry that history is resistant to aestheticization or that it undermines the purity of the aestheticizing imagination. The imagination does not threaten to efface history: history threatens to absolutely erase the imagination.

Such an erasure, though, is impossible: the success of the threat implies the destruction of even the *possibility* of reading the destruction from the future and the *possibility* of future destructions. In order to figure the absolute erasure of difference rather than the erasure that difference 'is,' the figure of absolute erasure would have to absolutely erase itself. In the *Perfect Crime*, Baudrillard puts the impossibility of the threat most elegantly. While he says that "the perfection of the crime lies in the fact that it has always already been accomplished—*perfectum*" (1), he continues:

> Fortunately, the objects which appear to us have always-already disappeared. Fortunately, nothing appears to us in real time, any more than do the stars in the night sky. If the speed of light were infinite, all the stars would be there simultaneously and the celestial vault would be an unbearable incandescence. Fortunately, nothing takes place in real time.

> Otherwise, we would be subjected, where information is concerned, to the light of all events, and the present would be an unbearable incandescence. Fortunately, we live on the basis of a vital illusion, on the basis of an absence, an unreality, a non-immediacy of things. Fortunately, nothing is instantaneous, simultaneous or contemporary. Fortunately, nothing is present or identical to itself. Fortunately, reality does not take place. Fortunately, the crime is never perfect. (7)

Similarly for Wordsworth: temporality remains, the illusions of humanity and reality and nature and the imagination survive. *The Prelude* continues, and we continue reading it. At most, we can catch "glimpses" of the "hiding-places" of Wordsworth's figuration of the absolute erasure of figure, but as we "approach… they close" (XI.336-8). He never imagines the far side of the limits of imagination; he never imagines what he knows can never happen. However, Wordsworth *does* figure the impossibility (of thinking) history that has become absolute. And he *does* figure the possibility that if history cannot absolutely erase the originary play of erasure, then it can impact, accelerate, mutate, or deform it. History *can* and *does* transform the opening of history, the opening of history that is always historically specific but nonetheless is not within history and so should not be able to be effaced by it. In Book Seven Wordsworth questions what is perhaps the one *a priori* that still remains in our postmodernity: destruction can never be so absolute as to destroy even the possibility of reading or misreading the traces of the destruction from the future.

VI. "AROUND 1800"

It has become common to associate Romanticism with both the rise of historiography and modernity. As I have mentioned, in *The Order of Things* Foucault dates modernity and its temporality—where the desire for the lost origin and identity of man coincides with the knowledge that the origin cannot be regained (or, that it never was), thus constituting man as divided and deferred from himself—"around 1800" (xii). In the essays scattered throughout *Futures Past* Reinhart Koselleck argues that historiography first arises in its modern sense at the end of the nineteenth century, when the past, present, and future no longer seem to mirror each other as if human history were a mere extension of the cyclical change of the seasons. What was new about modernity for Koselleck was precisely the concept of newness, of historical events or structures or experiences that had no prototype in the past. A crisis of the present results, since the present could no longer be understood according to the past and since it contained multiple temporalities within it as different cultures were thought to be simultaneously at different stages of development. Time no longer was seen as the medium within which a continuous and repetitive history unfolded, but as historical, since the rhythms and accelerations and speed of events depended upon historical contingencies. Likewise, history no longer was seen as a repetitive and continuous medium in which events recurred naturally, but became properly *temporalized*. Hermeneutics arises as a response to this crisis of the present, even if its means of containing it amounts to admitting its failure to do so: the past could only be understood according to the language of the present, and the present could only be understood after the fact in the future. Hermeneutics is tantamount to our modernity in which we are disjoined from our own

present: the "experience of the loss of experience" (252). In reaction to the loss of experience, modernity invents pure experience—the imagined community with nature at the Beginning—which it knows to be false, yet another Biblical myth.

The privileging of Romanticism in respect to modernity is not, of course, limited to writers whom we generally think of as historians. Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida also grant a similar privilege to Romanticism.[lxxx] In "The Rhetoric of Temporality" de Man famously argues that Romanticism did not in any simple sense valorize the symbolic capacity to unite subject and object, surface and depth, sign and referent. Rather, focusing on French, German, and British romantics, de Man argues that the power of Romanticism lies in its disarticulation of identity, whether this power is in the form of an allegory that leads to an absent anteriority or in the form of irony that divides the self from itself in a single moment. Both allegory and irony break up the transcendental spatiality that the symbol assumes unites two heterogeneous elements, even if they cannot but re-establish the very assumtion of spatiality and continuity. I mean to underscore only that de Man locates at a historical moment which he dates to "around 1800" (210). And around this date, allegory and irony "are linked in their common discovery of a truly temporal predicament," or, they "are determined by an authentic experience of temporality" (222, 226). But unlike Foucault or Koselleck, de Man's text refuses the very historicization it proffers. "[T]he discovery of a truly temporal predicament" is precisely "determined" by that predicament, which is to say, for de Man, that while the discovery perhaps could only have happened around 1800, the predicament also precedes and makes possible its discovery and de Man's narrative about it. The predicament of temporality in modernity

cannot be historically delimited, since it calls such delimitations into question and challenges the identity assumed by periodization.

Similarly, in *Of Grammatology* Derrida reads Rousseau as "the first one to make a theme or a system of the reduction of writing profoundly implied by the entire age" (98). That is, Rousseau, and "the entire age," took writing most seriously as a constitutive threat to the western metaphysics of presence. Located between the Cartesian *cogito* and Hegelian *Geist*, a combat and a crisis arose between externality and the interiority of auto-affection. "The place of this combat and crisis is called the eighteenth century" (ibid.). "What threatens is indeed writing. It is not an accidental and haphazard threat; it reconciles within a single historical system the projects of *pasigraphy*, the discovery of non-European scripts, or at any rate the massive progress of the techniques of *deciphering*, and finally the idea of a *general science of language and writing*. Against all these pressures, a battle is then declared" (99). The displacement of western metaphysics may be constitutive of metaphysics from time immemorial, but it is made a theme explicitly in the specific historical context of the eighteenth century (which, for our purposes, can be extended to Romanticism, especially considering the affinities between Rousseau and Wordsworth).

For all their disagreements and differences, Foucault, Koselleck, de Man, and Derrida locate a particular upheaval around 1800. The date serves as a pivot for what is commonly called 'modernity'. No doubt, one could find countless counterexamples that locate modernity earlier or later, but in our intellectual history the "circa 1800" retains a privileged status as the moment in which division and disjointedness are highlighted or underscored with particular attention.[lxxxi] I do not mean to challenge this dating or what it

entails for various thinkers, whether philosophical, literary, or historical. But following Wordsworth, I do mean to suggest that the picture is more complicated than it appears. *The Prelude* compels us not only to see a heightened sense of fragmentation around 1800, but also a heightened sense of the possible disappearance of that fragmentation. In other words, at the advent of modernity, Wordsworth sees also its unimaginable disappearance. Like Derrida and de Man, while Wordsworth privileges the historical changes around 1800, he also understands the disarticulation of the self to have been at work from (or before) the beginning. What separates off "around 1800" from earlier and later times is not (or not only) that disarticulation arises with acute awareness, but that the disappearance of the very disarticulation constitutive of futurity becomes a possibility. If the logic of erasure really has been at work from (or before) the beginning, then the specificity of Romanticism cannot simply in the awareness of this logic. Rather, the specificity of Romanticism must lie in its unthinkable and unimaginable disappearance.

Chapter Three

Shelley's *Defence* After Poetry

I. Introduction

Diotima describes Eros in the *Symposium* as follows: "καὶ οὔτε ὡς ἀθάνατος πέφυκεν οὔτε ὡς θνητός, ἀλλὰ τοτὲ μὲν τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας θάλλει τε καὶ ζῇ, ὅταν εὐπορήσῃ, τοτὲ δὲ ἀποθνήσκει, πάλιν δὲ ἀναβιώσκεται…" (203e). "And Eros is neither like an immortal nor like a mortal, but within one and same day he blossoms and lives when he is full of resources, and then he starts dying, and then he comes back to life."[lxxxii] Love is always in the process of either surviving or dying: as soon as he is about to die, he comes back to life, and as soon as he has come back to life, he begins dying again. Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* figures poetry much as Diotima figures Love here. *A Defence*, though, does not treat poetry as ultimately leading to Beauty itself; rather, it devotes its energy to exploring what it means for poetry to be predicated upon its own death. One of Shelley's primary conclusions is that because the destruction of poetry gives it life, poetry can never be destroyed entirely. Poetry, neither fully dead nor alive, is therefore "eternal," "ever-living," "everlasting," and "forever" (513, 523, 524).

In "Shelley's Poetics: The Power as Metaphor" and *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works*, Jerrold E. Hogle similarly argues that, in *A Defence*, poetry gains its life in and through its death. For Hogle, Shelley's poetry is exemplary of "transference," which names the process wherein the loss of

meaning produces meaning. Rather than grounded upon an original unity or presence, meaning is predicated on it own incompletion and its transfer to another meaning, which in turn is not a complete meaning but a transfer to yet another incomplete meaning, and so on. Hogle calls this "endless process" "eternal transference" (294, 260, 295, 319). Transference, by his account, is not only endless because meaning as such can never arrive, but also because every attempt to produce meaning and finally destroy transference is the "eternal stress" that keeps meaning (or its incompletion) alive (307). In this way, even the attempt to bring transference to an end guarantees its *eternal* survival.

Hugh Roberts presents a similar argument for the eternity of the poetic process in his *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry*. He understands Shelley as uniting two opposed traditions, an Enlightenment skepticism[lxxxiii] that insists on the possibility of radical change and a therapeutic idealism[lxxxiv] that insists on the impossibility of a radical break from tradition. According to Roberts, Shelley's Lucretian poetics asserts both radical change and the inevitable incorporation of that change into tradition. Shelley unites historicism and discontinuous breaks—necessity and the openness of the future, organization and disorganization—into a single process of atomic flux, which includes both atomic determination and the randomness of the *clinamen*.[lxxxv] In Lucretian terms, atoms are always configured in determined totalities, but because atoms also act randomly (the atomic swerve or *climamen*), organized totalities always become disorganized. But as soon as randomness irrupts into a determined totality, the random element produces and is integrated within a new totality: "The Lucretian *clinamen*… is a point of entry for death, as loss of information, into a system, and to that extent an assault on memory…. At the same time, however, Lucretius insists that the

universe of atoms is a closed system. This means that the errors introduced by the *clinamen* must feed back into the development of the whole" (259). Paradoxically, a determined state can only continue because of the randomness that destroys that state. Likewise, destructive randomness can only interrupt a given state if the random element is immediately integrated into the determined system. "The atomic generalization of death [that] is also the erasure of the boundary of death" gives life to the system (234). The system cannot die, for its death is the source of its life. In fact, the second part of Roberts' three-part book is devoted to explaining why fears of an absolute end do not make sense from a Lucretian or Shelleyan perspective: the play between organization and disorganization, death and life, he argues, is an eternal one.

From many different theoretical perspectives, Shelley scholarship has explored and re-explored the process in which the life of poetry is predicated upon surviving its death in a fragmented form.[lxxxvi] In what follows, I will tease out Shelley's various arguments in *A Defence of Poetry* for the eternity of poetry and the unpredictable futurity it opens. And yet even in this work which is probably his most famous and succinct statement concerning futurity, Shelley undermines his own argument for the endlessness of poetry and the concomitant openness of futurity. In addition to the Shelley of eternal transference there is another—unread—Shelley: the Shelley obsessed with the end of the seemingly unending and unendable cycle of poetry. *A Defence of Poetry*'s insight, which even its most radical readers have overlooked, is that the indestructible nature of poetry can in fact be destroyed. In other words, while poetry should be indestructible since its destruction gives it life, it is nonetheless, Shelley's essay implies, subject to an absolute

death without remainder or survival. Moreover, it is poetry's very commitment to futurity that paradoxically can end up shutting that future down.

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II. Eternal Poetry

In *A Defence*, Shelley tends to assume that poetry is the expression of something else. But he is altogether inconsistent as to *what* this "something else" is that poetry expresses. Sometimes poetry seems to be the expression of an original homogeneity underlying all differences: "it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things," presumably in order to return to a foundational unity (533). At other times poetry is "the most perfect expression of the faculty itself"—namely, "'the expression of the Imagination'" (514, 511). Does it express an original state of oneness, or is it the expression of the imagination? Ultimately, the answer will be neither, since, unsurprisingly, each time Shelley proposes a definition of poetry, his text immediately calls that definition into question. By taking each of these definitions in turn I will show that Shelley ends up defining poetry as that which repetitively destroys its own definition or identity, but also as that which repetitively survives these destruction. It will thereby become evident why the scholarly tradition reads Shelley's notion of poetry as a notion of poetry's immortality (if immortally never itself).

When Shelley defines poetry as the expression of an original homogeneity or unity, he also figures the original state of language as perfectly reflecting the impressions that caused them. The unity between impressions and expressions, Shelley implies, is then forgotten when society emerges and expressions become themselves impressions

demanding to be expressed. Using the child as a figure for the original users of language, Shelley writes: a "child at play by itself will express its delight by its voice and motions; and every inflexion of tone and every gesture will bear exact relation to a corresponding antitype" (511). But according to his own narrative, the child's perfect expression of an impression is not perfect at all: "the child seeks, by prolonging in its voice and motions the duration of the effect, to prolong also a consciousness of the cause" (ibid.). By prolonging the expression in a manner *not* corresponding to its antitype, the child's expression rips itself from its corresponding impression. What should be an original homogeneity between language and non-language is already divided at the origin. And since the child's language is poetry *par excellence*, poetry rends rather than mends the supposed unity between language and non-language. Moreover, the incompatibility between the child's expression and received impression opens the possibility, for Shelley, of futurity. The future is already contained within the past; the social (and all its corruption) is already present in the origin: "The social sympathies, or those laws from which as from its elements society results, begin to develope themselves from the moment that two human beings coexist; the future is contained within the present…" (511). The future of corruption or the corruption of the future is located squarely in the origin.

Indeed, in the very first sentence of his essay, Shelley highlights poetry's role in destroying the similitude seemingly underlying things. The synthetic imagination, he writes, "compos[es] from [thoughts] as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity" (510). Like a chemical synthesis, the imagination takes the thoughts it inherits, recombines and synthesizes them, and then

creates something new, something, as he will later say, *unapprehended*. Poetry is τὸ ποεῖν: creation. But why, if poetry creates something new from the elements it inherits, does Shelley say that imagination respects "the similitudes of things" (ibid.)? If I understand him correctly, the idea is that poetry takes elements that should be incomparable and combines them. It imposes a similitude upon its material so as to produce something other or alien. Poetry does not return to the origin, but creates the dissimilar from the similar. As we will soon see in more detail, it is reason that respects, sanctions, and perpetuates the order of things in their similarities, differences, and relations. Reason fixes relations; imagination interrupts them.

Just as poetry's supposed discover of the origin ends up as poetry's invention of the alien, Shelley's assertion that "Poetry… may be defined to be 'the expression of the Imagination'" turns out to undo itself (511). At the end of the essay's first paragraph, he writes that "Reason is to Imagination as the instrument is to the agent," but just two sentences later he says that man and hence the imagination is "an *instrument* over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven" (511, my italics). The comparison of the Aeolian lyre is an entirely expected image, but it is peculiar that directly after opposing the imagination to an instrument, Shelley quite explicitly figures it as one. We are thus given a hint, already in the first lines of the essay, that the hierarchy of an imagination expressed by poetry will soon crumble. What is supposed to be original, the core of the self, ends up as an instrument, a supplementary tool.[lxxxvii]

In expressing the imagination, poetry is to return us to or project a pure form of ourselves: "The tragedies of the Athenian poets are as mirrors in which the spectator beholds himself, under a thin disguise of circumstance, stript of all but that ideal

perfection and energy which every one feels to be the internal type of all that he loves, admires, and would become…. [Drama] teaches self-knowledge and self-respect" (520).[lxxxviii] Whether as a goal or an origin, imagining an ideal self, for Shelley, encourages us to resist our interpellation by historical and social structures. As such, referring the language of poetry to a purified and pre-linguistic imagination hidden away at the core of the self offers a politics of resistance. However, projecting an idealized self by bracketing the corruptions of society and history turns out to be as devastatingly risky as it is promising. It is all too easy for the self to enslave itself to the self it has projected. Earl Wasserman famously interprets tyrannical Jupiter as Prometheus's own making, as the latter's self-projection of his own self. Prometheus thereby invents the very slavery from which he has to unbind himself.[lxxxix] He posits an I that becomes an other who is greater than himself and to whom he freely submits: the free assent and legislation of one's own law becomes not an Enlightenment promise but a romantic fear. Perhaps the most condensed statement of the enslaving power of self-knowledge and self-positing comes from *The Revolt of Islam*:

> "What is that Power? Some moon-struck sophist stood
> Watching the shade from his own soul upthrown
> Fill Heaven and darken Earth, and stood in such mood
> The Form he saw and worshipped was his own,
> His likeness in the world's vast mirror shown…" (VIII.3244-8)

Self-knowledge and the projection of the self in an idealized form are at once the source of liberation and the source of further self-enslavement.[xc] In *A Defence*, Shelley underscores the dangers of returning to or projecting a foundational self with the utmost

emphasis: "Poetry, and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world" (531). If poetry projects the purified imagination of the self, it simultaneously is meant to lift us out of "the dull vapors of the little world of self" (525).[xci]

In the course of *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley moves increasingly away from an interest in the origin of poetry to an interest in the future of poetry. The self should not return to its original self in an act of *anamnesis*, but should attempt to leave itself by sympathizing with the other: "The great secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exits in thought, action, or person, not our own" (517). But the identification with this "thought, action, or person, not our own" can never occur. As readers of *Alastor* or *The Revolt of Islam* or *Epipsychidion* know well, identification with the other turns it into the same. In order to liberate itself from itself, the self has to identify itself with an other, but if such an identification succeeds in Shelley, then it amounts to a subordination, a self-enslavement. The idea becomes less to return to the original and purified self, and more to project an ideal and fictional self that can only arrive beyond the future—an "ideal," as he says in "On Love," that is "the *invisible* and *unattainable* point to which Love tends" (504, my italics). The imagination, as the pure seat of poetry and the self, is deferred to a future that can never arrive, for if it were present now or in the future, then it would no longer be an ideal but a determinate other to whom we could only enslave ourselves.

A Defence makes its dwindling interest in the origin of poetry most explicit in its discussion of composition:

> Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results: but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet. (531)

The "original conception of the poet," though, is barely the poet's conception at all: it is an *inspiration* that comes from elsewhere and, moreover, is "on the decline" as soon as it emerges. The moments of inspiration, or "evanescent visitations," happen in a flash (532). And that flash is "always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden" (ibid.). In fact, the moment of pure conception does not even belong to the poet: "neither poets themselves nor their auditors are fully aware of the excellency of poetry: for it acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness. It is reserved for future generations" (516). The poet does not even experience the moment of conception, since it is unconsciouss and unapprehended. The moment of inspiration is too quick, too present or divine, to be a moment: it can only be registered as a moment of composition in the future, after the fact. The original conception of a poem is erased before it happens, but that erasure passes its trace on to "future generations." By the end of *A Defence of Poetry*, poetry has little to do with its composition or with the expression of the imagination. As the essay progresses, we move from a rhetoric of return to a language of futurity, in which poetry does not refer back but ahead.

Whether in terms of an original homogeneity or the imperial faculty, *A Defence of Poetry* finds itself figuring, disfiguring, and then refiguring poetry. Unable to settle on a single figuration, each figuration implodes upon itself and leads to another one. If

something like a definition of poetry emerges in Shelley's essay, it can only be found in Shelley's inability to settle on a definition. The being of poetry constantly reemerges *as something else*, be it, in the context of *A Defence*, "Love" or "the light of life" or "Imagination" or "Power" (517, 522, 511, 535). Constantly failing to be what it is, poetry 'is' the repetitive displacement or erasure of its own self, its own being, its own proper definition.[xcii] Shelley's images of poetry abound with figures of erasure, to the point where poetry itself becomes its own erasure: "It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over a sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only as on the wrinkled sand which paves it" (532). Poetry is neither the sea nor the wind, but the traces of the wind on the surface of the sea. Already, poetry is imagined as the trace of something that it is not. The trace of the wind, though, is not stably inscribed but is constantly erased: the trace is at most the play of ever-moving, never self-same, ambiguously delimited and differential depressions constituting the surface of water. Shelley's figure for poetry does not stop there, but redoubles in its complexity. The self-erasing trace is in turn erased by the "coming calm." And this second-order erasure leaves traces that "remain only as on the wrinkled sand which paves it." Questions abound: Is the sand another metaphor for the sea or does the calmed sea leave traces upon the shore, as the tide moves out? What is the "it" that is paved and how does sand do the paving? Figures, traditionally used for the purpose of illustration or clarification, typically, in Shelley's poetry and prose, lead only to more figures, each more mysterious than the last.

The meaning of poetry can never arrive: "All high poetry is infinite…. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the innermost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed"

(528). There is no kernel or infinitude below the veils. In fact, poetry is not the *nothing* underneath the veil, but that which "spreads its own figured curtain or withdraws life's dark veil"—which is to say that poetry is the very movement of the veil (533). And insofar as poetry is (its own) veiling, it is also that which continues to create the illusion of itself, of an itself that would be behind the curtain.[xciii] It is not just that the being of poetry is too bright to shine forth; rather, poetry constantly *creates* its being that it knows, by virtue of being *poetry*, to be fictional or literary. The failure to be what it is amounts to its own creation and recreation of itself. Poetry is "the inventive and creative faculty" that "creates for us a being within our being" (530, 533). Our being—and thus the being of poetry since "poetry is connate with the origin of man" (511)—is *created* by poetry. Poems—be they cities, customs, moments, or literal poems—are shadows of a blank, vapors from an abyss, footsteps of a ghost. But the blank or abyss or ghost of poetry survives, for it is always again created anew. In this sense, poetry is the endless survival of its own death, the trace of its own erasure.

III. Eternal History

Not only does Shelley figure poetry as the history of its erasure and survival; he also figures history as the repetitive erasure and survival of poetry. Shelley brings history and poetry to bear on each other (almost to the point of identity) in one of the most discussed passages of *A Defence*:

> Those in whom [the poetic faculty] exists in excess are poets, in the most universal sense of the word; and the pleasure resulting from the manner in

> which they express the influence of society or nature upon their minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community. Their language is vitally metaphorical, that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things, and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them, become through time signs for portions or classes of thoughts instead of pictures of integral thoughts; and then if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse. (512)

Poetry "communicat[es]" the "*unapprehended* relations of things" by "perpetuat[ing] their *apprehension.*" In apprehending the unapprehended, poetry makes the unapprehended exactly what it should not be: it makes the unfamiliar familiar. Poetry ought to make "us inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos"; it ought to destroy the "familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being" (533). But by communicating the new, the unfamiliar, and the unapprehended, it reproduces and thus destroys the very thing it produces. It freezes, repeats, and disseminates what should be a vanishing flash of lightning. Thus, while poetry "creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration," it is also does the very opposite: it reiterates the unapprehended as the apprehended and thereby blunts our mind (533). Shelley continues: "Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them or in language or in form sends them forth among mankind" (532). As the term *arrests* emphasizes, poetry

freezes and confines what is in essence *vanishing*, what is its essence precisely because it vanishes. Poetry tries to respect, preserve, and maintain the vanishing *as* vanishing, but as soon as it sees the vanishing, it thereby constitutes the vanishing as something that does not vanish but becomes visible. It creates the fleeting as "immortal." While poetry's job is to "awaken[] and enlarge[] the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought" and to "create forms of opinion and action never before conceived," the creation of the new creates the new as the same (517, 523).

However, while poetry destroys itself in and through doing what it does, its self-destructive act is also a self-creative act. Only by killing itself does it have the chance to come to life again. Poetry always arises to "create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized"—in other words, it always arises to disorganize what has become overly organized, which Shelley calls "disorganized" (512). The poet relies upon the familiar ("the influence of society or nature upon their minds") in order to *refract* it as the unfamiliar (ibid.). Shelley consistently understands this seemingly passive reception and redoubling of the familiar world that the poet receives as the creation of an unfamiliar one. Poetry "beholds intensely the present as it is… but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time" (513). The most profound penetration into and reduplication of the present amounts to the advent of the future, for the apprehension of present historical circumstances changes those circumstances. The (ana)logic seems to run as follows: just as the grasp of present circumstances exceeds and so changes those circumstances, so the most faithful grasp of reality changes it most radically. Submitting oneself to the familiar is the precondition for creating the unfamiliar: poets are "less their spirit than the spirit of the age. Poets are the

hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present" (535). I take these famously impenetrable lines as saying that when poetry reflects the present, the present is *altered*, and the possibilities of futurity are thereby read. Precisely by being the most saturated by the spirit of the age, poets are the most able to challenge historical saturation.

Shelley highlights the futural activity of profoundly keen receptivity most succinctly in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*:

> Every man's mind is in this respect modified by all the objects of nature and art, by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form. Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are in one sense the creators and in another the creations of their age. (208)

History does not simply determine poetry, for poetry reflects back and refracts the totality that saturates it. Or, to use a perhaps better metaphor, poetry is a precipitate of a vast solution of historical impressions. There is nothing *in* poetry that transcends the historical. Any yet, the precipitate transcends history without transcending it, differs from it while being it. Precisely because it is maximally determined by its familiar context, poetry singularly reflects that history and thereby exceeds and changes it, producing the new, the future. But, again, the poet constitutively fails at beholding the future, for as soon as it is beheld, it becomes incorporated into the static tyranny of familiarity, which tries to discount the possibility of future change. In short, when poetry apprehends the familiar, it defamiliarizes it and creates the unknown; but the creation of the unknown

immediately arrests it and thereby recreates it as familiar, in which case poetry has to again defamiliarize its own familiarization. At the moment it comes to life, it begins dying, and vice versa.[xciv]

This process whereby poetry both instantiates the new and destroys it amounts, in *A Defence*, to the movement of history. The force of any historical moment *conserves*: it creates a stasis that legitimates itself according to the past that has been rather than the future that is unknown. It makes what has been seem like what will be. History, though, is not simply conservative. Rereading, preserving, and fixing what has been cannot but recreate it: "a word, a trait in the representation of a scene or a passion, will touch the enchanted chord, and reanimate, in those who have ever experienced these emotions, the sleeping, the cold, the buried image of the past" (532). Working against itself, the conservative and legitimating rereading of the past cannot but reread it anew. In other words, the processes that seek to repress or destroy poetic creation fail to completely eradicate poetry because they themselves partake of the poetic. And since poetry is its own destruction, it would seem that any destruction of poetry cannot but be poetic.

Much of the second half of *A Defence* critiques knowledge—both "moral, political and historical knowledge" and "scientific and oeconomical knowledge"—for "conceal[ing poetry] by the accumulation of facts and the calculating processes" (530). Rather than poetically imagining future possibilities, these knowledges sanction and perpetuate the status quo in its tyrannical denial of futurity. But as we have seen, poetry cannot be rigorously distinguished from the forces that seek to destroy it: while poetry interrupts the status quo, its interruptive inventions become familiarized and form that very status quo. Although Shelley begins his essay by separating poetry from reason, he

ends up subsuming the back and forth between poetry and reason, interruption and integration, under one term—namely, poetry: "The functions of the poetical faculty are two-fold; by one it creates new materials of knowledge, and power and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them" (531). He elaborates that poetry "is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought" (531). The knowledges that seek to destroy the possibility of the creation of a different future not only have poetry as their root; they also find themselves poetically reinventing the tradition they hope to conserve.[xcv]

As its own destruction of itself, poetry cannot be destroyed, and its erasure will always be, as Paul de Man would have it, a half erasure.[xcvi] There cannot be a force external to poetry capable of destroying it, since any threat to poetry is itself poetic and therefore maintains what it seeks to destroy. It is for this reason that Shelley describes history as a "cyclic poem" (523). And this history of poetry or poetic history cannot end: it is "forever," "eternal," "ever-living," "everlasting" (528, 513, 523, 524).

III. Extinct Poetry: Hope

Once the boundary between beginnings and ends, life and death, and destruction and creation is called into question, the absolute end becomes as much of an impossibility as the absolute beginning of revolution. And yet, *A Defence of Poetry* is dotted with an anxiety that is patently at odds with poetry's indestructibility—namely, the anxiety of

absolute extinction. It is understandable that scholars have entirely overlooked this crucial theme in *A Defence*, since, according to the essay's logic, destructions cannot but leave behind remainders, whether remainders of what was destroyed or the remainder of the act of destruction itself.

When Shelley writes of "the extinction of the poetic principle" or the "extinction of the energies which sustain the soul of social life," he is explicitly raising the possibility of the very thing that should be absolutely impossible: the end of the poetry, the end of the cycle of life and death (524, 521). Similarly, he entertains the possibility that "Poetry can… cease" if "corruption… utterly destroy[s] the fabric of human society" (522). While the "sacred links of that chain have never been entirely disjoined," he does not discount the possibility that they could be, that that which "connects, animates and sustains the life of all" could be entirely and absolutely dissolved (ibid.). Such a disjoining would amount to the accomplishment of evil: "Had that corruption availed so as to extinguish in [poets] the sensibility to pleasure, passion and natural scenery, which is imputed to them as an imperfection, the last triumph of evil would have been atchieved" (ibid.). The "last triumph of evil" would emphatically not be just another assault on poetry that furthers its life; rather, it would be the achievement of the final annihilation of history, of the play between creation and destruction.[xcvii] Too often, though, Shelley scholarship proceeds as if Shelley never had these worries and had never written these words concerning, precisely, "extinction."

As I see it, the unread mystery of *A Defence of Poetry* is that it opens the possibility of complete annihilation with the one hand and shuts it down with the other, that it asserts both the immortality of the poetic principle and the possible end of this

principle. The question is: can this mystery teach us anything? Is it an oversight of Shelley's, or is he trying to think something that we have not been able to read? What would it mean for that which cannot be destroyed because it lives off destruction nonetheless to be *completely* annihilated? And what would be the stakes of thinking such an absolute annihilation? How to think eternal transference (which allows for the movement of history) on the one hand and its historical finitude on the other?

In "On Life," Shelley writes that man "disclaim[s] alliance with transience and decay, incapable of imagining to himself annihilation, existing but in the future and the past, being, not what he is, but what he has been, and shall be. Whatever may be his true and final destination, there is a spirit within him at enmity with change and extinction [nothingness and dissolution]" (506). This is a remarkable passage. Man is not himself, but 'is' his past that no longer is and his future that does not yet exist. Man is the presence of his own absence; the 'synthesis' of his non-existent past and future; the trace of his nothingness. But, over and above this nothingness, there is yet another nothingness: an annihilation that man is "incapable of imagining to himself." This unimaginable annihilation would be the destruction of that which is already only the survival of its own destruction. Unsurprisingly, this absolute destruction cannot quite be thought. But of course, in order to say that he is incapable of imagining it, Shelley must have some sense that there is something that he cannot imagine. The impossible end of poetry emerges in *A Defence* as the unapprehended unthought that Shelley urges his future readers to think, even if he cannot.

It is tempting to say that the end of the unendable is at or beyond the limit of Shelley's—and our own—thought. Yet, it would not be correct to say as much, since

Shelleyan poetry compels us to doubt the logic of the border or limit. To search for that which is 'beyond' indestructible poetry would be to regress to the topology that poetry calls into question. The absolute erasure of poetry squarely cannot be thought within the logic of poetry, but the logic of poetry is the only logic we have. In other words, when we try to think absolute erasure of poetry, we end up either incorporating it into the logic of poetry as half erasure or relying upon the outmoded concepts of *border* or *limit* or *beyond*. The task of thinking the absolute erasure of poetry, then, is (today at least) an impossible one: to think that which 'exceeds' or is 'other than' the very logic of excess and alterity.

According to Shelley, though, only if we can think the unthought can we continue to think at all. Once the play between apprehension and the unapprehended becomes itself familiar, thought has to think 'beyond' that play. In other words, once the play between the apprehended and the unapprehended becomes itself apprehended (even if what is thereby apprehended flies in the face of tradition notions of apprehension), an unapprehended that cannot be reduced to that play is necessary for the future of thought. The absolute erasure without remainder of poetry would be the name for that future. The possibility of absolute erasure is a double-edged gift. On the one hand, it is the only hope for thinking the unapprehendable (once the logic of the unapprehended becomes apprehehended) and thereby keeping the future of thought open and unknown. But on the other, it is a tease, since absolute erasure is absolutely unthinkable.

In his critique of Hogle, Hugh Roberts makes a point similar to mine, even if he overlooks its implications. Roberts argues that Hogle's *Shelley's Process* "ends up making [every Shelley text] sound completely interchangeable and ultimately—and most

damagingly—boring" (136). According to Roberts' account of Hogle, every text predictably deconstructs itself, and there is no way out of this "boring" predictability without being (rightly) accused of stabilizing the tyranny of meaning (136). If, according to Hogle, any future meaning will *a priori* be transferred to another meaning, then the future is indeed predictable: both the attempt to mean and the failure to mean will continue eternally. Every meaning will always have had been lost or transferred before it arrives, and every disfiguration of meaning will always have had entailed another meaning. In figuring transference as an *eternal* process, the future is shut down at the very moment Hogle wants to keep it open.

Roberts' Lucretian Shelley, though, falls prey to his own criticism: the randomness heterogeneous to a total system will always destroy that system; the random events that exceed and change a totality will always in turn be integrated into a newly formed totality; and the reinscription of the excess into a totality will itself be marked by its own excess and singularity. Futurity here, if not in its content at least in its form, is quite confidently known in advance. Hogle's and Roberts' astute and powerful readings find themselves suppressing one of the most compelling aspects of Shelley's corpus—namely, his enthusiasm for thinking the unknown, for thinking that which lies 'beyond' the 'boundaries' of thought. Shelley's obsession with absolute extinction a in *A Defence of Poetry* is the realization that poetry, which opens futurity, paradoxically forecloses any futurity worthy of the name, since the logic of the unapprehended will be known in advance. Thus, Shelley gives the possibility of poetry's complete extinction to his reader for thinking the last thing that remains unapprehended. Only if the permanently

interrupted process of poetry can somehow end is an unthought future possible in any meaningful sense.

IV. Extinct Poetry: No Hope

Absolute erasure is a double-edged gift: it offers thought a future while guaranteeing that thought cannot think it. But it is double-edge in an even stronger sense. On the one hand, the annihilation of poetry keeps open the possibility of thinking the absolutely unapprehendable once the play of the unapprehended becomes familiar. But on the other, the absolute annihilation of poetry would, of course, absolutely destroy poetry, which opens futurity in the first place. In order to keep futurity alive, we have to destroy poetry, the precondition of futurity. It is no surprise, then, that Shelley calls this destruction "the last triumph of evil" (522). The "extinction of the poetic principle" is an *evil*—or hopelessness—in addition to a *hope* (524). Shelley provides his reader with a dismal picture of the end or near-end of poetry with his prescient account of the dialectic of Enlightenment:

> We have more moral, political and historical wisdom, than we know how to reduce into practise; we have more scientific and oeconomical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. The poetry in these systems of thought, is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes…. We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life:

> our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave. To what but a cultivation of the mechanical arts in a degree disproportioned to the presence of the creative faculty, which is the basis of all knowledge, is to be attributed the abuse of all invention for abridging and combining labour, to the exasperation of the inequality of mankind? From what other cause has it arisen that the discoveries which should have lightened, have added a weight to the curse imposed on Adam? (530-1)

Something rather surprising happens in this passage. Up until this point in *A Defence*, poetry is threatened when its integrative/conservative side obtains the upper hand over its interruptive/inventive side. But in this passage, the threat to poetry—calculative reasoning—does not threaten to integrate poetic disruption and thereby create a stasis. Rather, just the opposite happens: the calculating powers themselves become *creative*. The issue is not the suppression or integration of invention, but the "*abuse* of all invention." The calculating aspect of poetry creates and creates and creates; and instead of digesting, it keeps creating.

The figure of eating is crucial here. Previously in *A Defence*, "the inventive and creative faculty" creates something new, digests it, and then has to create more food for itself: poetry "form[s] new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food" (530, 517). Previously, that is, when poetry enlarges its circumference, reason

immediately digests what it has created, and then poetry has to create more food. But now, "we have eaten more than we can digest." And it is reason instead of poetry that keeps discovering more food. Calculative reasoning usurps the role of poetry; instead of digesting, it *creates*. Poetry is not concealed by facts, but by "the *accumulation* of facts and calculating processes." Reason's accumulation here is not an ordering of facts that already existed, but the production of more and more facts, processes, and markets. Reason is not digesting, familiarizing, and arranging what has been created, but abusing invention in its excessive accumulation. It becomes inventive and combinatory or synthetic. Poetic creation is far from concealed. It has outrun itself. The problem is not that facts have piled a heap on top of creativity, but that there is too much creativity.[xcviii]

Poetry therefore is called upon to *assimilate* excess, to integrate, stabilize, and quantify the new, to take over the role of reason: "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life." When calculative reason becomes poetic, poetry has to give form to ("imagine that which we know"), act upon ("act that which we imagine"), and "digest" that which has been created. Poetry is no longer to push the bounds of the status quo, but to absorb what is invented. Reason becomes creative, and poetry becomes integrative. The reversal of poetry and reason, though, is asymmetrical, since when reason becomes creative, poetry fails to take over reason's role of ordering what has been created. Were poetry to succeed at integrating, imagining, digesting, or acting upon that which has been created, then poetry would become nothing but the handmaiden of calculative reason, nothing but an aesthetic ideology.[xcix] As such, poetry's power of interruption becomes impotent. When the status quo becomes its own interruption, it

cannot be meaningfully interrupted. Once calculative reasoning harnesses poetic invention, poetry can only invent for or as the tyranny of calculative reason. In its voracious invention, calculative reason discovers its blind spots and invents the unknown in order that its calculations become increasingly successful. By progressively imagining the unknown rather than conservatively consolidating the past, calculative reason paradoxically makes the unknown and hence the futurity opened by poetry increasingly impossible.

Shelley's insight that calculative reason is poetic is incredible when we remember that he was writing at the beginning of industrial capitalism, for this insight is generally understood as one that only emerges as a critique of late capitalism. Indeed, the degree to which he anticipates what Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition*, calls the postmodern is uncanny. For Lyotard, knowledges in the techno-scientific world no longer seek to justify or legitimate themselves; they simply *perform* (which we might call, following Shelley, το ποιειν) in order to increase their spatiotemporal reach, efficiency, and power. The techno-scientific hegemony abandons the search for an ultimate *telos* that would produce liberty or truth or emancipation, and it no longer attempts to fix the identities of self or nation, but relies upon fluid and decentered networks of exchange, translation, and differentiation. In *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley no longer, as he did earlier in his career, understands power as legitimating and consolidating itself under the image of king, priest, or nation with which the people can identify. Instead, the conjunction of capital and science calls into question the old foundationalist or theologico-political paradigm and replaces it with sheer performance, with constantly inventing and creating the new, the other.

For both Shelley and Lyotard, capitalism constantly seeks out the new and unknown in order to open new markets and circumscribe the random within predictability. Lyotard argues that capitalist programs even search out and question the determinate but unknown rules constitutive of them. Invoking Shelley's account of reason's usurpation of poetic invention, Lyotard writes of techno-science that,

> the best performance cannot consist in obtaining additional information…. It comes rather from arranging data in a new way, which is what constitutes a 'move' properly speaking. This new arrangement is usually achieved by connecting together series of data that were previously held to be independent. This capacity to articulate what used to be separate can be called imagination…. …what extra performativity depends on in the final analysis is "imagination," which allows one either to make a new move or change the rules of the game. (*The Postmodern Condition* 51-2)

By challenging their own assumptions and preconditions, programs invent new rules and new conceptual or material spaces upon which those new rules can operate. In this way, the process of reducing alterity to homogenized, translatable, and quantifiable bits incorporates into itself its own disruptions and blind spots. And the more this process thinks its constitutive blind spots, the more data and therefore precision it gains for its calculations. No doubt, Shelley does not highlight the extent to which calculative reason questions its own rules to the degree that Lyotard does; but because calculative reason attempts to know precisely the unknown, *A Defence* suggests that calculation questions its own unknowns as well. And by unearthing its blind spots, calculative reason constantly undermines itself for the sake of its own precision and efficiency; it constantly

interrupts or reinvents itself for the sake of precluding the possibility of interrupting it. Again, postmodern knowledge paradoxically attempts to predict, control, and foreclose the radical unknowability of the future precisely by seeking out the unknown, by being attentive to alterity.[c]

For Lyotard, the words "inhuman" and "postmodern" have two heterogeneous meanings inscribed in them. "Postmodern" names the most radical act of resistance possible: the act of presenting the unpresentable; or, more radically still, it names an act or presentation that does not try to present the unpresentable but presents unpresentability in and as the presentation.[ci] But "postmodern" also names the performative techno-science discussed above. Lyotard points out that these two heterogeneous meanings cannot be rigorously differentiated, even if it is absolutely necessary to do so. He goes to pains to assert that the former sense of "postmodern" is constitutive history and that the latter sense is an historical assault on that originary historicity. He makes the same case with the term "inhumanity," which means both contemporary dehumanization as well as the inhumanity always already inscribed in the heart of the human.[cii]

Similarly, for Shelley το ποιειν means *both* poetic creation that combats the status quo *and* poetic creation that finally is the status quo. But if the word is double as in Lyotard, then a difference between poetry and calculative reason remains, implying that poetry survives, even if it is contaminated by the poetic reason it combats. Poetry, though, has always already been contaminated by what it combats, has always already been predicated upon the destruction of its predication. As such, Shelley's figuration of performative techno-science is squarely *not* the figuration of what survives after the absolute erasure of poetry. While the Shelleyan-Lyotardian account of reason's

usurpation of poetry is a dismal picture, it is a moment *within* the poetic play between creation and destruction. It may describe our accelerating and asymptotic ascent towards the "last triumph of evil," but it neither describes that total annihilation nor what remains after it. So long as we can tell the difference—however uncertain or unstable—between poetry and reason or between the two senses of 'postmodern', the last triumph of evil is held at bay.

For "the last triumph of evil" to 'arrive' the deconstructed difference between the two types of poetry would have to be absolutely annihilated. The impossible would have to happen: not the *capitalization of loss* (which is what capital always capitalizes on, whether for short term or long term gain), but the *capitalization of the absolute excesses of capitalization*. Capital would have to gain from *absolute expenditure* and the *absolutely random*. The destruction of randomness would indeed, for Shelley, be the annihilation of poetry, since if *A Defence* settles on one thing, it is that poetry is random. While Shelley fluctuates on his conception of composition, he emphatically figures it as a *random act*:

> A man cannot say "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it: for the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: …and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. (531)

As I have quoted above, he continues that poetry is "always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden" (532). "[T]he original *conception* of the poet" is not something that the poet conceptualizes, but something the poet gave birth to in a random, singular, and

absolute moment that emanates from nowhere to nowhere. It has no clear or determinate origin and has no clear or determinate end, as the most frequent refrain of *A Defence* is that meaning is infinitely deferred. In the words of Paul de Man's "Shelley Disfigured," poetry is "a positional act, which relates to nothing that comes before or after" (117).[ciii] With calculative reason's absorption and annihilation of randomness—of composition and therefore poetry—the difference between the two meanings of "postmodern" or "inhuman" or "το ποιειν" would disappear *absolutely*. They would not reappear in their disappearance and would not leave behind the difference as an illusion. Shelley's anxiety about the absolute extinction of poetry and the random thereby challenges one of Lyotard's few *a prioris*—namely, that no matter how uncertain the difference between postmodern thought and the postmodern erasure of thought becomes, that difference will remain.

V. Remaining Images

The absolute disappearance of the difference between poetry and reason is unthinkable so long as we continue to inherit that dichotomy. Such a disappearance *appears* as only if it is not yet a possibility: were it to happen, we could not know. *A Defence of Poetry* asserts the possibility of the absolute disappearance of the difference between reason and poetry, but it gives no form, content, or figure to that disappearance. The disappearance disappears from the text. In this way, Shelley refuses to think of this extinction as Lucretius and Roberts do—namely, as the annihilation of the universe itself, either as the absolute dispersion of atoms into a chaos (if destructive randomness were to

get the upper hand) or as the coalescence of atoms into a condensed ball without void or dynamism (if reintegration were to get the upper hand). In these cases, the end of poetry would amount to the end of the universe. Rather than a horrific thought, this is arguably a comforting *image*, for not only are we afforded the opportunity to imagine it, but we can rest assured that poetry will last as long as the world does, that it is coextensive with the world—after which, its survival is a moot point.

For Shelley, evil is paradoxically whatever *remains* after "the extinction of the poetic principle." The final words of "On Love" stress that Shelley's interest resides in what remains *after* the logic of remainders: "So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was.—" (504). The end of poetry or love or transference is emphatically *not* the end of the universe, *not* the Final Annihilation of Being. Something yet survives, if only a "living sepulchre." If man already lives as a ghost—"existing but in the future and the past, being, not what he is, but what he has been, and shall be"—then what is this even more ghastly "living sepulchre"? Shelley gives us a clue:

> Had that corruption availed so as to extinguish in [poets] the sensibility to pleasure, passion and natural scenery, which is imputed to them as an imperfection, the last triumph of evil would have been atchieved. For the end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure; and therefore it is corruption. It begins at the imagination and the intellect as at the core, and distributes itself thence as a paralyzing venom, through the affections into the very appetites, until all becomes a torpid mass in which sense hardly survives. (522)

Social corruption infects the self, starting with its mental functions and working its way to the body and the appetites. Usually, in *A Defence*, the more the poet beholds or is determined by the static and familiar status quo, the more the poet is able to change it. But in this passage, the poet is determined absolutely and loses the ability to refract determination as invention. The venom of the abuse of invention "begins at the imagination and the intellect as at the core." And the "faculties… last to be destroyed" are the "appetites" and the "torpid mass." Without imagination and the intellect (the first to go), the sense that survives in the torpid or insensate mass can only be immediate perception: a seeing eye without a mind.[civ] Or, the sense that survives is the sense of a machine—a machine that can mechanically process data, but cannot reflect upon its own processing. The image of what survives after the extinction of poetry is a quite mundane one from today's perspective: the utter determination of an entirely mechanical world, a world of cognition without thought and perception without reflection, a world in which it is difficult to imagine even animal life surviving. But this figure of the posthuman machine-world is precisely a figure: we can only wax poetic about what remains after poetry, and it is no accident that when we do so we stumble upon such a traditional and unpoetical image. Since what remains is unimaginable, we grasp onto an image that is as commonplace as it is strictly unimaginable: on the one hand, the machine-world has occupied our imagination since as long as we can remember, but on the other, we cannot even imagine it if we realize it is the image of a world without images.

VI. Shelleyan Imperatives Today

The absolute annihilation of the poetry cannot be thought (or can only be thought mundanely as a traditional figure of chaos), and so Shelley instead figures what remains after such an annihilation. But the 'figuration' of what remains is just as mundane (or profound) as the 'figuration' of annihilation itself. Both of these 'figures', I have argued, constitute the central mystery of *A Defence* even if neither of them appears in its pages proper. It is no surprise that Shelley's reader is quickly drawn away from the challenge of extinction to the brilliant analysis of performative techno-science. One might ask: what, in the end, is the insight of Shelley's fictional account of a history after the extinction of poetry?

A Defence of Poetry offers us two contradictory imperatives. On the one hand, in order to resist reason's abuse of invention, we must integrate, digest, and act upon what we already know. Whether or not we *know* that the unthought will always already have had been thought, we have barely begun to *imagine* the consequences of this knowledge. It may be boring because we already know it, but that does not mean that we should not slow down and imagine the epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and politics of it. The haste with which we invent new discourses compels us to overlook the keenest insights poetry offers us and to feeds right into the capitalization of invention. Poetry—which I will now call deconstruction—should continue to do what it has always done best: illustrate why inventions that seem to introduce radically new markets in fact usually follow the ancient logic of poetry.

On the other hand, *A Defence of Poetry* warns us that deconstruction forecloses the very futurity it opens: the play between the unapprehended and apprehended—between the singular and the repetitive, the event and its integration—that allows for

futurity in the first place constitutes that futurity as *predictable*. To refuse this foreclosure of the new, we must attempt to think that which come after poetry—that is, we must always try to think the unapprehended of thought. We have to admit that so long as the unthought is *a priori* known to exceed or destroy the horizon of knowledge while always and forever being a repetition of it, poetry does not welcome the future it thinks it does. We must, that is, be open to the absolute erasure of poetry, whether this is a welcomed mutation of the logic of mutability or the monster of calculation that may or may not have already arrived. We must today try to think that which is rigorously impossible (the death of deconstruction qua operation, event, process, reading, perception) without forgetting, ignoring, or bypassing the force of the (il)logic of deconstruction.

Shelley makes a meta-deconstructive imperative: we need integrate what seems to be deconstruction's excess into it and, simultaneously, we need to try to think the impossible thought of deconstruction's excess.

Chapter Four

Annihilating Allusions in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"

I. Introduction

The impossibility of a final end is one of the most consistent and salient themes in Shelley's corpus. "Mutability" concludes: "Nought may endure but Mutability" (l. 16). While everything else changes, decays, and dies, mutability is eternal, possessing an indefatigable endurance. Perhaps an even more famous statement of mutability's eternity comes at the end of "The Cloud":

> I change, but I cannot die—
> For after the rain, when with never a stain
> The pavilion of Heaven is bare,
> And the winds and sunbeams, with the convex gleams,
> Build up the blue dome of Air—
> I silently laugh, at my own cenotaph,
> And out of the caverns of rain,
> Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
> I arise, and unbuild it again.— (ll. 76-84)

Of all the British romantics, Shelley is perhaps the most self-undermining and self-doubting. It would thus be peculiar if, among all the concepts he submits to questioning, only the eternity of mutability were to survive unscathed. One might thereby expect that

if Shelley is so concerned with the eternity of decay, then he might be equally concerned with the decay of eternity. After all, the final words of *Hellas* read: "The world is weary of the past,/ O might it die or rest at last!" (ll. 1100-1101). In this chapter, I will first recount the stakes of asserting a mutability without origins or ends and then will proceed to outline Shelley's acknowledgement of the limitation of such stakes. My primary thesis is that scholars' understandable reluctance to think the end of Shelleyan eternity ironically overlooks Shelley's most radical insights into futurity. Said more positively, we can only understand Shelleyan futurity if we confront his insistence on the possibility of a final end of eternal mutability, no matter how nuanced and qualified that mutability is. Such a confrontation will not only rethink what we mean by futurity but also what we mean when we speak of 'remainders', 'irreducibility', and 'survival'—especially the survival of the figures that seem to irreducibly remain in our lexicon.

II. The Eternally Fragmented Ecosphere

In order to address the possibility of final end of mutability, we would do well to confront a poem that seems to assert the *impossibility* of such an end. We could not find a better test case than "Ode to the West Wind" insofar as it offers one of the best examples of the eternal play between death and life in Shelley's corpus. Towards the end of the poem, Shelley commands the west wind:

> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken new a new birth!
> And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth,

Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

Be through my lips to unawakened Earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! (ll. 63-69)

Shelley divorces his words from 'living thought' and inscribes them on dead leaves, but the scattering of the leaves allows his words to be reread and kept alive. The wind that threatens to put out the "unextinguished hearth" is the very force that spreads the dead remainder of his thought throughout the "unawakened Earth" so that it came come to life once again. The living meaning of his poems might be destroyed, but this very destruction is precisely what allows the poems to have a future. Only if they cannot be read exhaustively now, can they be read in the future; and only because they cannot be exhaustively read in the future, can they have a future beyond any foreseeable future. The death of poetry's full meaning offers it an afterlife.

Life and death are radically heterogeneous, and yet, they are too intertwined to be differentiated: life, in "Ode to the West Wind," is the very process of dying, and vice versa. Stuart Curran writes that, "what destroys and what preserves are equivalent, inseparable…. The forces of life and death, the elemental duality of human existence, are never simply contrasted, but are insistently conflated through the poem" (*Annus Mirabilis* 155, 157). Before figuring the play of death and life in terms of textuality in the last two sonnets of the poem, Shelley figures their play in the natural ecosphere described in the first three:[cv]

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes… (ll.1-5)

While these lines seem to describe living leaves falling off the trees and slowly decaying, they also describe the exact opposite: each figuration of the leaves shows them slowly becoming more and more alive. First, they are "leaves dead"; then slightly less dead "ghosts"; and finally no longer dead at all but "[p]estilence-stricken multitudes." From one figuration to the next, the leaves become increasingly alive, and the final figuration of them is one of dying, suggesting that once they become alive again they immediately start dying. The cycle of the leaves seems to be a slow and organic one without interruption. And yet, Shelley's figures should make us pause. The material and dead leaves leads to a simile: "like ghosts." The embodied dead are suddenly figured as disembodied ghosts. The trope does not stop there: the disembodied ghosts are suddenly figured as "[y]ellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,/ Pestilence-stricken multitudes." This line begins by describing the color of leaves in autumn in a literal mode, but it suddenly ends up describing the color of the face that results from consumptive fevers.[cvi] The material leaves that became immaterial ghosts now become dying people. With sudden refigurations rather than slow transformations, we travel from what has lost life, to what lives on after life, to life in the process of dying; from material nature, to immaterial spirit, to dying human multitudes. The figuration of the slow and continuous

transformation of leaves from death to birth is simultaneously the figuration of radical leaps between heterogeneous types of being and figures.

On the one hand, the poem presents an ecological system in which all elements sympathize with one another and slowly transform into one another. Temporally, life leads to death, and death leads to birth. Spring leads to autumn, and autumn eventually leads to spring. Spatially, the land, sky, and sea of the first three sonnets can be read as depicting an interrelated totality. Moreover, space and time themselves are integrated into one and the same process: transformations happen diachronically via the cycle of life and synchronically between the land and sky and sea. Just as life slowly becomes death, space slowly becomes time. On the other hand, the poem repetitively inserts gaps within the system. Temporally, the slow transformations are in fact *sudden* like the rapid refigurations of the "leaves dead" from one ontological domain to another. While the first sonnet seems to impose an intimate connection between the scattering of dead leaves in autumn and the sprouting of seeds in spring, the two processes remain strikingly independent and isolated from one another. The reader imagines that the dead leaves become nourishment for the scattered seeds, but the poem refuses to make this link.[cvii] Leaves scatter; seeds sprout… but the semicolon contains no relation. Sequence, cause and effect, and organic transformation all face a schism at the very moment when one expects the overcoming of such a schism. The poem seems to (and in fact does) destabilize death and life by making each traversed by the other, but it also absolutely differentiates them such that one process is completely independent of another.

Spatially, the land, sky, and sea seem to be united in global ecological exchange, but are instead only linked paratactically. We expect the floating leaves and the "winged

seeds" of the first sonnet about land to lead into the second sonnet about the sky, but the second sonnet does not begin from where the first left off. Rather, it changes registers (from leaves and seeds to rain) without suggesting any sort of continuity between the two sonnets: surprisingly, the rain in the sky is not associated with nutrients for the seeds, nor does the movement of the poem pan from the floating leaves to the clouds above them.[cviii] Similarly, we expect the second sonnet about the clouds and rain in the sky to lead into the third sonnet about the sea, but, again, the third sonnet does not begin from where the second left off. Rather, the poem offers no connection between the rain and the sea. Despite appearances, the sea in the third sonnet is not woken by the storm in the second, but by the wind.[cix] At the same time as insinuating an intertwined, interconnected, and sympathetic ecosphere, the poem cuts off any relation between the land and sky and sea.[cx]

Shelley highlights the fractures in temporal continuity and spatial totality at the same time that his poem produces the appearance of an organic whole.[cxi] The poem, then, underscores the reader's spurious but inexorable production of a whole in that Shelley creates such a seductive illusion of totality while simultaneously insisting upon its opposite. In "Lyric Ritalin: Time and History in 'Ode to the West Wind'" in his recent *Romantic Sobriety: Sensation, Revolution, Commodification*, Orrin Wang most elegantly takes the interruption within space and time even further, suggesting that space and time themselves are, in the poem, heterogeneous and yet so intertwined as to be indistinguishable. Reading the "Ode" as a meta-commentary on the high Romantic lyric, Wang focuses on the problematic status of lyric as at once a sequential narrative read across time *as well as* an apostrophe contained in a single moment of address.

Allegorizing the conflict of its own genre rather than trying to dissolve that conflict, the poem establishes how sequential narrative and the instantaneous apprehension of space rely upon and undo each other:

> Time might be calculated by an approaching storm, except that that calculation relies on a movement through space. Space might be differentiated by the different weather of various locales, except that such climate change might be happening temporally, as a series of events. At another level, the poem's sequential narrativization of all these shifts exposes rather than simply masters the volatile nature of their heteronomy. (171)

For Wang, this disjointedness is a consequence of the wind, which "makes not only space but also time throughout the first three stanzas" (170). The west wind propels the leaves through their life cycle and propels the "leaves dead" into pages of writing, which is to say that the west wind 'is' metaphoricity or transference, as Jerrold Hogle would have it.[cxii] Moreover, it not only allows for the transfers from one material state to another, from matter to phenomena, and from dead writing to living meaning; it also guarantees that these transformations will always be paratactic linkages rather than smooth continuities, disconnected spaces and interrupted sequences rather than totalized wholes and series of cause and effect. The wind is a natural immateriality: not particles of air, but the power that moves those particles. It is *power*. But it is also *nothing*. The wind is the gap or difference that allows for but disrupts relations, interrelations, and transformations. We might say that the wind names the 'nothingness' of difference *as well as* the inevitable leap across this difference.[cxiii]

As the power of transformation, it would seem that the wind itself cannot be transformed, and so cannot be included in any of the poem's ontological categories: neither dead material nor immaterial like the meaning of Shelley's leaves. Nor is it a dead thing that contains life, whether as a seed or a ghost. Nor is it the combination of the material and immaterial, as the embodied consciousness of humanity is. And yet, the wind is included within the system of which it is, as its condition of possibility, outside. In the very first stanza of the poem, Shelley's reduplicating trope pulls the exorbitant wind into its orbit:

> O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
> Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
> Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing…. (ll. 1-3)

The "leaves dead" are driven "like ghosts" from an "unseen presence." "[G]hosts," though, are themselves a kind of "unseen presence," which is to say that the ghosts or leaves are also like the wind. By allowing a slippage between the "unseen presence" of the wind and the leaves that are "ghosts," the lines incorporate the wind into the chain of figures that it makes possible. Rhetorically, the wind is incorporated into the very system from which it should remain separate as a source. To add to the complexity, the west wind becomes not only a ghost, but also the enchanter from whom the ghosts are fleeing.[cxiv] The figuration of the wind as an enchanter also creates an appositional relationship between the poet (who, in the lyric, is the enchanter of the wind) and the wind. It is not entirely surprising that the source of the system becomes incorporated within it, that the transcendental becomes entangled with the empirical: the poem, after all, is about a quite mundane and worldly phenomenon, namely, wind.

Just as the wind is not a transcendental source[cxv] because it is too within system, it is also *too* outside of the system, *too* absolute. Curiously, the wind does very little. It aids the dissemination of seeds, but, contrary to what a cursory reading of "Ode to the West Wind" would give us to think, the wind is *not* necessary for their transformation from "corpse[s] within a grave" to "living hues and odours" (ll. 8 and 12). The seeds would sprout regardless of the wind's force. There are other means of dissemination and movement: animals relocate and carry seeds across the earth, chemicals attract and repel one another, gravity pulls elements downwards, and the sun dissolves elements upwards. According to the poem's own figurations, the wind is necessary for neither the leaves' decomposition nor for the seeds' sprouting. Like the gaps that the wind inserts into transformations and totalities, the wind itself is a gap, nowhere and unnecessary. And yet, it is difficult to imagine transformations in an ecosphere without wind. At the very least, life and the world as we know it would be unimaginably different. Not only within and without, the wind verges on the absolutely superfluous and the absolutely necessary.

The play between continuity and disjunction is spelled out in the rest of the poem through the relationship between the poet's I and nature. Insofar as the poet wants to be an object—the west wind's "lyre, even as the forest is"—he is divided between his self and (his own) nature (l. 57). In a characteristically romantic fashion, the I wants to return to nature, to become a natural object at one with itself. But it knows this to be an impossibility. This impossibility, moreover, is the source of hope insofar as the inability to bridge the divide between nature and humanity keeps the poet grasping towards the future: if "I were as in my boyhood, and could be/ The comrade of thy wanderings…/ …I would ne'er have striven" (ll. 48-51). Only because the poet cannot be the wind, can he

continue to go on living and striving. The poem thereby establishes an incommensurability between the poet and the natural object he wishes to be.

However, like all the incommensurabilities in the poem, the poet and the wind nevertheless pass into one another, as the implied simile between the voice of the poet and the breath of the wind suggests. The exchangeability of the poet and the wind is figured most powerfully in the fourth sonnet. Shelley demands that the natural wind "hear," simultaneously giving nature agency and destroying nature qua nature by anthropomorphizing it as something that can listen (ll. 14, 28, 43). And Shelley asks nature to kill him, either by making him a lyre or by making his thoughts mere inscriptions on a page, simultaneously destroying his living thoughts by making them "dead thoughts" and giving them life by "[d]riv[ing]" them "[l]ike withered leaves to… a new birth" (l. 63-4).[cxvi] On the one hand, the poet and nature are absolutely heterogeneous, as the desperate and vain pleas to "hear" underscore; on the other, life and death, poet and nature, and material objects and immaterial meaning ceaselessly pass into one another. While these passages constantly become unhinged, the gaps and heterogeneities that destroy them allow the transformations to live on. "Ode to the West Wind," it would seem, is a poem about how death, no matter how extreme and irreversible, gives life. The dissolution of elements in the ecosphere, the gaps or interruptions of the ecosphere itself, the displacement of the transcendental source, and the undoing of the poem's own figuration are all food for the future.

With Shelley's destabilization of the binary of death and life, death loses some of its radicality since absolute death becomes an impossibility. But futurity is thereby guaranteed. Wasserman writes: "In this eternal cycle of nature that denies any point of

annihilation, and in the conviction that but one Power moves both mind and the universe, Shelley found grounds for the optimistic faith in a moral cycle in which a period of moral decay is actually transitional to a moral revival and even generative of it" (243). Counterrevolution, conservatism, utilitarianism, and historical stasis can never squelch the possibility of revolution once and for all since they contain the seeds for the future of political and moral change.[cxvii] For Orrin Wang, the revolutionary potential of rebirth by dissemination is a less than celebratory one:

> A revolution might be occurring in the "Ode," but it might be more akin to Raymond Williams's "long revolution" of literacy, reading publics, and media systems than to the apparently abrupt vision of Jacobin social transformation that Badiou sings in his own account. The significance of the leaves might be not so much their revolutionary transfiguration as their necessary existence as commodities…. [They] might be the revolution(s) of a yet-to-be nineteenth century, or the already inexorable encroachment of global commodification that leads to the "long twentieth century" of capitalism outlined by Giovannia Arrighi. (188)

Whether the gaps and deaths in the "Ode" lead to a sudden revolutionary spring or to the slow encroachment of capitalism, they nevertheless lead to future life: "In its rendering of its own particular *Neuzeit*, the 'Ode' insists on inhabiting a space always on the verge, always within the indecision, of the historical moment, precisely because in the 'Ode,' unlike in 'To Autumn,' *history never stops*" (ibid., my italics).

Shelley's stakes for thinking of history without final ends are high. The refusal to think the end is the refusal to think that absolute breaks or renewals are possible. Shelley

knew well that the break from tradition can only arise from reading that tradition, which is to say keeping that tradition alive, no matter how violent it might be.[cxviii] It is no accident, as scholars have long noted, that even in the paradisiacal universe in the last two acts of *Prometheus Unbound*, humanity is still defined in relation to the tradition that has been negated: "man remains,/ Spectreless, free, uncircumscribed—but man:/ Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless" (III.iv.193-5).[cxix] And it is no accident that at the precise moment when there should no longer be kings, man remains "the King/ Over himself," with *king* ominously capitalized (III.iv.196-7). Later, man "Compel[s] the elements…/ …even with a tyrant's gaze" (IV.395-6). The refusal to figure paradise as a complete escape or as a utopia amounts to a refusal of the logic of purified beginnings. Shelley realizes that if we desire utopia, then we simultaneously desire a world without messiness, contamination, impurity, and futurity.[cxx] Just as Shelley is suspicious of utopia, he is also suspicious of any sort of final violence. To preoccupy ourselves with violent catastrophes is to miss that violence is most powerful when it does not show itself; it is to miss that violence gains its hold imperceptibly in and through our language, as *Prometheus Unbound* and *A Defence of Poetry* insist. As Curran puts it: "Shelley has located the source of power of ideologies and the problem of dispelling them: words" ("Shelley and the End(s) of Ideology" 603). Moreover, the thought of an event that could bring a violent or revelatory end to the eternal cycle of mutability relies upon the tropology of before and after and of origin and fall and return. Throughout Shelley's career, he undoes this tropology and its assumption that there can be clean breaks and rigorous differences between now and then: the past saturates the present, the present contains the future, and possibility lurks in what was, what is, and what will be.

III. Absent Allusions of Annihilation

"Ode to the West Wind" seems to be about the impossibility of final ends. And yet, the poem's final question—"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"—leaves the reader free to respond: yes, spring might be far behind; in fact, spring might never arise again. Readers of the poem, though, have by and large not accepted this answer as a viable one.[cxxi] Indeed, recent critics of the poem have not even addressed the poem's final question at all. Only Paul Fry's 1980 reading in his *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode* has seriously considered the possibility of a winter without spring.[cxxii] In his account, winter becomes more impassable than the most treacherous regions on top Mont Blanc, or, more aptly perhaps, more impassable than the never-reached peak of the north pole in *Frankenstein*, which is figured as a sort of shape all light or all white. Fry insinuates that a revolutionary spring can only be a utopian phantasm and thus responds to Shelley's question with a resounding: yes, spring can be far behind; in fact, it probably will never arrive (216). But he can only answer it this way insofar as he assumes that spring is a revolution rather than, say, Wang's slow and ugly process of commodification. After all, Fry reads this impassable winter as the white gap in between the black markings of ink inscribed on a page, but these gaps are, as we all know, more than passable. We might pass over these gaps by simply ignoring them or failing to take them seriously, but we nonetheless pass them, even if it is only as passing them by. Following Fry's logic, the question remains a rhetorical one, for while winter is the 'inscription' of meaninglessness

that precludes any final spring, this very meaninglessness allows for the spacing or differences between words, which is to say that it allows for the spring of meaning.

In the rest of this essay I will show that the poem demands that its final question be read in a thoroughly literal register—a register that will allow us to grasp the insights of Shelleyan futurity that have been neglected by the scholarly tradition and that resituates how we think of Shelley's corpus vis-à-vis problems of annihilation and erasure. At the end of the second sonnet, Shelley consolidates the slow changes that separate summer and autumn into a single night:

> …Thou Dirge
>
> Of the dying year, to which this closing night
> Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
> Vaulted with all thy congregated might
>
> Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
> Black rain and fire and hail will burst: O hear! (ll. 23-8)

What should be a slow process of transformation is instead a definite and sudden break, marked with the deictic in "*this* closing night." In between summer and autumn is the break of a single night, itself figured as a gap or absence: "a vast sepulchre" for "the dying year," an empty grave vaulted by clouds or vapors. The vault of vapors above the empty sepulcher in the sudden gap between seasons then suddenly consolidates into a "solid atmosphere." And from this solid atmosphere a sudden "burst" issues forth "[b]lack rain and fire and hail."

The storm is not simply a storm but "[b]lack rain and fire and hail." The color contrasts—black and red and white—and the incompatibility of the three elements should make us pause. While the reader might read fire as a trope for lightning in the imagined image, the substitution is not necessarily warranted. We can understand fire literally, in which case the image that emerges is a paradoxical one, with fire and rain simultaneously bursting forth without canceling each other out, without fire dissolving rain or rain putting out the fire. The figure of the storm divides or doubles. On the one hand, the storm is perfectly natural, with the fire a metonymy for lightning and the black rain a metaphor for rain surrounded by dark clouds. On the other, read more literally, the storm is not a natural scene at all but a paradoxical bursting of fire and rain and hail. The figural reading produces a natural (or literal) image, but the literal one produces an unimaginable paradox wherein fire, black rain, and hail simultaneously erupt from the sky. The literal reading barely produces an image at all. Just as the vapors suddenly become solid, the figure suddenly becomes literal (and, we will soon see, utterly unimaginable).

Fire and hail, of course, have apocalyptic connotations—the final bowl of the seven angels in Revelations pours a plague of hail, alluded to in the poem by the "Angels of rain and lightning" (l. 18).[cxxiii] "Black rain" is a more peculiar and less identifiable image, aside from its not irrelevant nuclear connotations. The only use of the phrase that the OED gives prior to Shelley is from 1772 and reads "The vapours, fogs, and rains with which the atmosphere of London is loaded, drag with them in their fall the heaviest particles of the smoke: this forms black rains." Black rain is suggestive of smog and soot and smoke, of industrial pollution-colored rain. It is tempting to read hints of manmade ecological catastrophe into the black rain, as if human civilization is destroying cyclical

nature. But the destructive black rain and fire and hail do not, in these lines, threaten to destroy anything at all. Shelley assigns no bottom to the "vast sepulchre." And yet, the bottomless void of the grave is itself under attack by conflagration, flood, and freezing. The grave itself is not being threatened, but the hollow inside the grave. In "the dome of a vast sepulchre" that this night is, whatever was at the bottom is gone, rotted and dispersed, leaving nothing in its place. Neither the grave nor the remains within it are being destroyed; rather, the fire is burning, the hail is freezing, and the black rain is smothering only a nothingness or a gap. The void that is "this closing night" between one season and another is itself facing death—a death without rebirth.

The storm in question seems to destroy a gap that is not reconstituted as a continuity. But how can a void be destroyed without being filled? Only by, in a characteristically Shelleyan fashion, losing all shape and contour. Once the solid vapors burst forth in a sudden flood and conflagration, the bottomless void of a grave will also lack a ceiling. The void is at risk of infinite expansion, the infinite expansion of a chaos of black rain and fire and hail falling from nowhere to nowhere. Once the shaped void becomes a shapeless chaos, temporality simply falls out of the picture: there is neither change nor transformation nor rebirth. Again, the image is unimaginable: there is a flood, but nothing to flood; a holocaust, but nothing to burn; an ecological catastrophe, but nothing to become black with soot; a Lucretian chaos, but no clinamen; a Maenad's tearing and eating of the raw landscape which has been guilty of no sacrificial negligence. Instead of offering us a dark and deathly storm that destroys the gap between two seasons and thereby forms a continuity between them, Shelley offers us a storm that destroys nothing—or, rather, *nothingness* is destroyed. The storm destroys what is

already figured as a gap or death or absence, an instant between seasons or an empty grave. The death constitutive of life is 'itself' annihilated.

Following the peculiar future tenses of the sonnet, one might even say here that the ability to remain will itself be destroyed. In the poem's present of "*this* closing night" Shelley calls out, "Thou Dirge/ Of the dying year," presumably naming the clouds spreading over the sky and forming the vault. On *this* night, when the storm is still "approaching," the "dome of a vast sepulchre" signifies a remnant or ruin of the dying year. The storm is at once the grave and the dirge for the dying year. Oddly, though, this empty grave, which memorializes the past for the future, is itself squarely located in the future: "Thou Dirge/ Of the dying year, to which this closing night/ *Will* be the dome of a vast sepulchre." *This* closing night divides or doubles: it is the now of the poem, but it is also deferred to the future, when the year will be done with and the storm will be the year's empty grave or vast sepulchre. Once the year ends, the dome will be its sepulchre or remainder. The spatial emptiness inside the sepulchre corresponds to the temporal nothingness that the future 'is'. And it is precisely the nothingness of this future—a future that should contain the dying year's remnant that will remain—that will be destroyed when "[b]lack rain and fire and hail *will* burst." In the future beyond the future (the storm beyond the future that "this closing night" is), the unimaginable storm will destroy futurity's constitutive absence. To make a storm, which is transient by nature, be a memorial, which should be quasi-permanent by nature, is telling enough.

My reading requires that the annihilations in the second sonnet are absolved from the dialectic between creation and destruction. But the third sonnet seems to announce a rebirth:

Thou who didst awaken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coiled of his chrystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's Bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! … (ll. 29-36)

On the level of the imagery alone, the sonnet moves from the beginning of autumn (the waking of the Mediterranean from its summer dreams), to a scene of summer (the summer dream), and then again to the destructive force of autumn in the last stanzas ("The sea-blooms and the oozy woods… despoil themselves" (ll. 39-42)). This regenerative temporality only emerges according to what Russian formalists call the *syuzhet*, the narrative reorganization of described events.[cxxiv] But in terms of the *fabula* or the actual order of the described events, the Mediterranean is dreaming during (and of) the summer; the autumn wind wakens it from these dreams; and then the plants at the bottom of the sea "grow grey with fear,/ And tremble and despoil themselves" (ll. 41-2). The sonnet leads from the traumatic awakening to even more destruction. And, what is more, the summer from which the Mediterranean awakens is only a dream, which suggests that there was no peaceful state in the first place. The violence of waking the Mediterranean destroys what was already nothing but a fragmented, illusory, half-life.

The sonnet continues:

> …Thou
>
> From whose path the Atlantic's level powers
>
> Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
> The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
> The sapless foliage of the ocean, know
>
> Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,
> And tremble and despoil themselves: O hear! (ll. 36-42)

Allusions to the origin abound here. Already, we have seen the Mediterranean, "[b]eside a pumice isle," dreaming of "old palaces and towers… overgrown with azure moss and flowers." This suggests not only the ruin of civilization, but also its origin, where human civilization is not yet differentiated from the natural world, but is entangled with "azure moss and flowers."[cxxv] The allusion is also to the original "ooz[e]" of life. The image of life originally forming in the oozy textures of the sea would have been most familiar to Shelley through Erasmus Darwin, whose work Shelley read and knew well.[cxxvi] He was particularly fond of Darwin not only for his materialist account of progress, but also for his claim that the possibilities of the future are unbound insofar as the earth is relatively new.[cxxvii] Darwin places the origins of life at "sea" in "primeval caves," "on the mud" or "the watery mass," and by "lava-isles" where the "first [underwater] volcanoes blaz'd," corresponding to Shelley's "oozy woods" "[b]eside a pumice isle in Baiae's Bay" (*Temple of Nature* I.231, 233, 298, 324, 326).[cxxviii]

While Shelley's poem is not obviously evolutionary in the sense of the elder Darwin, its account of death as the condition and agent of birth is certainly a Darwinian idea. Both thinkers were writing in the context of an explosion of interest in the origins of life and evolution—a context in which the image of life originally emerging in the ooze of the sea was common in both geological and biological sciences. To give but two additional examples: Lamarck: "In the waters of the ancient world, and at the present time, very small masses of mucilaginous matter were collected. Under the influences of light, certain elements, caloric and electric, entered these little bodies. These corpuscles became capable of taking in and exhaling gases; vital movements began, and thus an elemental plant or animal sprang into existence" (178, quoted in *From the Greeks to Darwin: An Outline of the Development of the Evolution Idea*). Similarly, Lorenz Oken, one of the most important early figures of *Naturphilosophie*, wrote in his *Grundriss der Naturphilosophie*: "*The primary mucus, out of which every thing organic has been created, is the sea-mucus*," and "All life is from the sea, none from the continent" (185, 186, italics in the original).[cxxix] The image of life arising in a primordial soup is far older than the evolutionary discourses of the early nineteenth century: Homer,[cxxx] Thales,[cxxxi] Anaximander,[cxxxii] Xenophanes,[cxxxiii] Anaxagoras,[cxxxiv] and Aristotle[cxxxv] all appealed, to greater and lesser extents, to a notion of sea, wetness, slime, or ooze at the origin of plant and animal life. Of the references to the relationship between water and the origin of life, the most important of course comes from the beginning of Genesis: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (1.2).[cxxxvi] Then: "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters and let it divide the waters from the waters" (1.6). The image of the spirit or wind, which Shelley would have etymologically associated,

moving over the waters and cleaving them finds an exact parallel in the poem: "Thou/ For whose path the Atlantic's level powers/ Cleave themselves into chasms."[cxxxvii] If Shelley's combination of volcanic activity and the ocean floor speaks to Darwin only indirectly through cultural motifs, the Biblical allusion is most certainly a direct one.

Shelley provides his reader with a note here: "The phenomenon alluded to at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathizes with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it" (300). An ecological system is proffered in which all parts, no matter how distant, sympathize with one another in a totality. And yet, precisely when he says that there is only relative action and no autonomous action, we are presented with the only moment in poem of reflexive action, which suggests a self-generated or absolute act that remains autonomous rather than part of an ecological system. The "Atlantic's level powers" are not cleaved by the wind but "[c]leave themselves," and the despoiling of the "sea-blooms and the oozy woods" is not caused by the environment, but they "despoil themselves." The plants might hear the wind and tremble at its power, but the wind neither despoils them nor does it cleave the waters "into chasms." Instead, at this one moment in a poem saturated with non-reflexive transitivity, things act by themselves, on themselves, and to themselves, absolved from their interrelations and the transformations that should control them.

The salient position of this reflexivity brings to mind another type of origin—namely, the foundational act of self-positing in Fichtean transcendental idealism. A studious reader of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Shelley would have been well acquainted with the idea "that the act of self-consciousness is for us the source and

principle of all our possible knowledge" (284). For Coleridge, the I AM grounding the relationship between a subject and an object is ultimately rooted in "the primary ACT of self-duplication" (281). Moreover, both in Coleridge's take on *frühromantisch* idealism and in the romantic idiom more generally, the original creative act at the root of all being and knowing is a *theft* or *despoiling*. The constitutive act of self-reflection not only creates the self, but also forever steals its foundation from itself, for thereafter it can only think of itself as a me rather than an I, as an object about which it thinks rather than that which thinks. In Shelley's poem, the theft associated with the reflexive act of the "sea-blooms and oozy woods" is likewise a theft of the self by the self: the oozy life literally at the foundation of the earth despoils itself.

Yet, in stark contrast to the romantic narratives of an original act of reflexivity, Shelley's self-despoiling plants do not create in and through the process of destruction. His poem figures *only* the self-annihilating origin, *not* any creation that might follow from the destruction. The origin, the source of life, is annihilated—not by anything outside of itself that would remain after the annihilation, but by itself.[cxxxviii] More radically still, what is destroyed is the originary destruction at the 'origin' of life. In other words, since the theft or despoiling or destruction at the origin of life does not create but redoubles upon itself, the very difference and destruction at the origin destroys itself. What is destroyed—most improbably—is the not the origin but the difference before the origin. The despoiling constitutive of life is itself despoiled. And, again, this *remainderless* and absolute self-annihilation of the originary difference at the heart of life comes precisely in a poem that seems to suggest that every annihilation leaves a remainder. The destruction of the death or difference at the source of life is further

evinced by the mythological allusions: as the leaves of the Cumean Sibyl are destroyed, so is her home in Baiae Bay, which is the site that articulates the difference between Hell and Earth.

The source of life that destroys itself is hidden in the allusions; and the allusions—the historical sources for the figure of the source—are themselves hidden, uncertain. The hidden source is like the wind, nowhere to be seen; the destruction of that source even less so. When discussing the beginnings of biology and the concept of life in *The Order of Things*, Foucault argues that life is figured precisely as *hidden*. Focusing on Cuvier, he traces how the natural sciences began asking about what lied underneath the visible, isolatable, and comparable surface of organisms. Instead of comparing organs in different species, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientists asked about the invisible functions of those organs and the processes, such as circulation and respiration, behind them. Species that appeared different were determined to be related because they shared the same type of process structuring them. And uniting divergent species was life, which was even more mysterious than the functions. It is that "mysterious, invisible focal unity, from which the multiple seems to derive, as though by ceaseless dispersion. Life is no longer that which can be distinguished in a more or less certain fashion from the mechanical: it is that in which all possible distinctions between living beings have their basis" (293). In the poem, the allusion to life is hidden just as life is hidden.[cxxxix] But for Shelley, the source—invisible but constituting everything else—is more than mysterious and invisible: it is annihilated. Absolute destruction, which cannot be figured without leaving the figure as a remainder, permeates the poem but remains peculiarly outside it, more secret than a secret.

One might think that a rebirth occurs by the end of the next sonnet with the salvational figures of Jesus and Prometheus, both of whom, throughout Shelley's corpus, revitalize a dead history. We could, then, read the allusion to god's spirit moving across the water not only as an allusion to Genesis but also as an allusion to Book VII of *Paradise Lost*:

> …but on the wat'ry calm
> His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread,
> And vital virtue infused, and vital warmth
> Throughout the fluid mass, but downward purged
> The black tartareous cold infernal dregs
> Adverse to life… (234-39)

In "Ode to the West Wind," god's wind across the sea does not build a firmament or vast dome as it does in Genesis, for this dome has already been eradicated in the second sonnet. Rather, as in *Paradise Lost*, the wind's sweep across the water moves us downward, where we find a romantic Satan or Prometheus or Jesus, cast to hell or bound up or crucified: "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!/ A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed/ One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud" (ll. 54-6). In the poem, though, Jesus and Prometheus are not necessarily the revisionary portraits of them that we find elsewhere in Shelley.[cxl] The sonnet ends not with the rebirth of Jesus' words after their institutionalized form has destroyed their revitalizing power, nor with a Prometheus rewritten as steadfast after Aeschylus had taken away his resolve. Rather, we see Jesus and Prometheus only at the moment of submission: bondage and fall.

The second, third, and fourth sonnets all end with annihilation. Instead of following the model of the first sonnet in which the spring follows autumn, the middle three sonnets see only destruction without creation. The destruction terminating each of these sonnets looks forward to the next sonnet to transfer what has been lost into a gain, but only more destruction lies ahead. Everything comes down to the fifth and final sonnet. Will even the dead and disseminated words of Jesus, Prometheus, or Shelley undergo a meta-death, or will the words inscribed on leaves bring about a new spring? Will "fading coal[s]" be reawakened by "an inconstant wind" (*A Defence of Poetry* 531)? The fifth stanza, as James Chandler has most recently and compellingly argued in *England in 1819*, concerns *fire*.[cxli] After three sonnets on earth, sky, and water, the reader expects the trio to be completed as a quartet. And indeed, the final stanza is about fire: "Ashes and sparks" from "an unextinguished hearth" (ll. 67, 66). For Chandler, fire is at once one of the elements determined by the wind and the one element that, as a Promethean figure for intelligence and technology, can control the others. It both determines history and is determined by the ecosphere. In Chandler's terminology, fire is both a cause and a case of history: it allows us to control the elements but it is also controlled by their interrelational system.[cxlii] Chandler continues by suggesting that the leaves, which reappear in the final sonnet as Shelley's pages, provide fuel for future fire. Futurity and historical change require, then, that fire be "preserved only at the expense of destroying something else" (553). Shelley actively gives up control of his thought by scattering it through flammable pages. The burning that ensues constitutes what is a case of history as a cause; the sacrificial destruction of the pages (and of the once living

thought now inscribed on them) creates those pages as sparks, as determining rather than determined by history.

For Chandler, Shelley's final sonnet hopes that by relinquishing control of his thoughts and scattering them through dead letters and pages, he will provide fuel for future sparks of history. Shelley abandons his youthful hope of calculating change or producing it by reason in virtue of a poetic refusal to *know* his poetry's efficacy. Working with and against the spirit of the age, he thereby hopes to change the utilitarian hegemony of efficacy and calculation. Chandler's reading is also in line with *A Defence of Poetry*, where Shelley argues that interruptive and revitalizing language becomes dead when it is disseminated and integrated into fixed systems of thought. But this static language inexorably contains electricity, for while the dissemination of language makes it static and familiar, it also allows for the familiarized language to be reread and defamiliarized. Tradition cannot completely eradicate the sparks that disrupt static language since the sparks form its basis and since tradition can only perpetuate itself by rereading and thus interrupting itself. Disseminative scattering can be progressive or conservative, but, it seems, it cannot end.

Shelley writes:

> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
> And, by the incantation of this verse,
>
> Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
> Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind! (ll. 63-7)

Neither Chandler nor any other critic I am aware of fully takes into account an image furtively submerged in these lines like an ember under a pile of leaves. With the references to forests and leaves and sparks the image is one of conflagration—a conflagration, moreover, that the wind will only increase. Ashes, sparks, leaves, and wind can be read metaphorically as the glimmers of futurity, but they can also be read literally. The fire burns more and more and, at some point, only ash is left… ash and wind, creating a deserted sandstorm of remains. Shelley's poem suggests it will restore hope with an image of a forest, sparks, and fire, but it thereby combines combustibles and ignition and wind. It is surprising that so few readers view the materials in Shelley's trope of futurity as the ingredients of conflagration without end. Nor does anyone read the ignited pages as disseminated mail bombs, like Ted Kaczynski's *Industrial Society and Its Future* tucked away in a stalk of fennel. The glaring and literal meaning (perhaps a little too bright or inflammable) seems to have been smothered out. This is not, though, a fault of the critics: the extinction of futurity is at once a salient motif in the poem and, like the aftermath of total extinction, an absent or unwitnessable one.

After reading these submerged or absent allusions to absolute annihilation in the final four sonnets of the poem, we can turn again to the "Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,/ Pestilence-stricken multitudes" of the first sonnet. The Norton editors cite G. M. Matthews here, who "notes that the four colors are not only actually found in dead leaves, but represent the traditional four races of humans—Mongoloid, Negroid, Caucasian, and American Indian" (298). The image is of humanity as a whole diseased and dying. Whatever spring the first sonnet imagines following upon autumn would be a spring without humanity, a spring after the death of the human species. In the context of

the profoundly popular notions of Catastrophism, Diluvialism, and other geological theories of the history of the earth of which Shelley was well aware, humanity's permanence had become an issue.[cxliii] All of a sudden, the life of a species and, by extension, life in general were seen as fleeting. After the debates between Cuvier, Lamarck, Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, Davy, Hutton, and Greenough and the Geological Society of London, it became possible to view life on earth as subject to repeated extinctions, to absolute deaths that were not survived by the extinct species in question but that required new life to emerge.[cxliv] It is probably no accident that the geological revolution occurred side by side with millennialisms of all sorts,[cxlv] the increasingly biopolitical figuration of multiplicities of peoples as a 'natural' species and a population,[cxlvi] and war on a worldwide scale.[cxlvii] Humanity became one fragile species among others, one moment in time in a newly conceived geological or deep time span.[cxlviii] "Ode to the West Wind" has to be situated at this moment in the early nineteenth century that witnessed a profound interest in the end of humanity and the end of history. The plot of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, after all, hinges on Victor Frankenstein's fear that the monster "might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror," and he subsequently figures himself as having sacrificed his "own peace" for "the existence of the whole human race" (138). And her *The Last Man*, written after Percy's death, revolves around a plague that envelops the entire globe and kills all but a select few.

In fact, "Ode to the West Wind" can also be read as a 'last man' story. As Wang comments: "the pressing question is whether to read the first three stanzas as being narrated by the poet of stanza 4, or, in some fundamental way, *not being narrated by*

anyone at all" (176, Wang's emphasis). He further argues that the first three sonnets stage "how much sequentiality wants to establish simultaneity" (169). The first three sonnets attempt to stage a "vertiginously *simultaneous apprehension*," all the while knowing that this staging is impossible insofar as the apprehension of an instantaneous event cannot but be distended into a narrative (172, Wang's emphasis). In Wang's reading, Shelley's attempt to figure "an (in-)comprehensible simultaneity" is an attempt to think "the historical itself" (ibid). In other words, Shelley is attempting to think the alterity, materiality, and singularity of a historical event—an alterity that is neither immediate nor mediated by human cognition, narrative, or phenomenal perception.[cxlix] More simply, Shelley is attempting to figure a scene without the human who figures it. "Ode to the West Wind" figures an ecosphere that, in Wang's words, is "emphatically *global* in nature" and that is deprived of humanity, save the four races that are all dying from pestilence (ibid.). The scene is of the last survivor of the pestilence that is destroying all the races of the world. And, as in *The Last Man*, this lone survivor is nonetheless sending forth his writing for posterity: he is writing, as I will develop in the next section of this paper, for what remains after the end.

IV. Wintery Future

Far from a self-sustaining ecological totality wherein any death and destruction are constitutive of life thanks to the disseminating force of wind, "Ode to the West Wind" insinuates the possibility of a death that exceeds the system and threatens its entire existence. While the poem is about organic, textual, and revolutionary rebirths following

death, each sonnet contains an extinguished allusion to the end of that system, to an end that cannot be figured. It only remains for us to address the poem's final question, which asks precisely about the possibility of death without rebirth, annihilation without remainder: "O Wind,/ If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" (ll. 69-70). The question at first seems to be rhetorical, assuming "no, it cannot be far behind" as an answer. But as a rhetorical question, it falls entirely flat and disintegrates into superfluous, dead letters at the end of an otherwise exceptional poem. And as I have argued, the poem in fact encourages us to answer, "yes, it can be far behind." The words of the question, then, need to be awakened from their rhetorical reading; we need "to quicken to a new birth" the "withered leaves" (l. 64). Once the rhetorical question is rekindled as a literal one, it suggests the possibility that that which was dead cannot be reborn, cannot be awakened, cannot be rekindled. Therefore, if we liven the question that has been scattered throughout history and the world on the dead leaves of books and that rhetorical reading has deadened, then we reawaken the very question that suggests that reawakening might not occur. Thus, the very ability to rekindle the question implies that the end of rekindling has not come to pass and perhaps cannot come to pass. We cannot read the question as a literal one without betraying the impossibility of doing so: as a question that suggests the possibility of a death without remainder, without the ability of to be re-awoken, the question remains totally and inaccessibly dead. No reading can reawaken it without foreclosing the possibility of what has been re-awoken, namely, the end of re-awakening.

The inability to rekindle the question amounts to the impossibility of witnessing the poem's figuration of absolute annihilation. If one were to witness or even imagine it,

then one would have survived or placed oneself in the position of imagining the end of the imagination. But question challenges us in an even more basic manner. The careful reader is taken aback by the sudden intrusion of winter in the poem, for winter simply has no place in the poem. Stuart Curran writes:

> The conclusion of *Ode to the West Wind*—"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"—is perhaps Shelley's most famous utterance, but in context it operates as an abrupt intrusion, shifting the seasonal locus of the poem. Shelley invokes winter here only by a logical leap, duplicating the implication of the poem's beginning, where the seed of spring were said to be laid within "their dark wintry bed" (6). However the frame of the last line determines a reader's response, winter is not the subject of the poem. (*Annus Mirabilis*156)

In the context of the poem, the scattering of the autumnal west wind just is the dissemination of spring. One either becomes the other or always already is the other. Winter has no place here. (At most, it is one of those sudden gaps that prevents the ecosphere from being a sympathetic totality but allows it thereby to be an ecosphere.) As a season, winter should not touch down on the shores of Baiae Bay. Within the poem's logic, the only way to understand winter is as an icy stasis freezing the dynamism of Shelley's ecosphere. As a season rather than the white gap between words, winter has to be thought of not as deathly dissemination (which is the domain of autumn), but as the pausing or freezing of that dissemination. The unfigurable end or freezing of mutability—of the play between the sudden and impassable leaps and the inexorability of crossing them—would not be the spring that fails to follow the winter, but the winter

itself. The literal meaning of the question thus becomes: if mutability ends—if the winter arrives—then what remains? What remains after mutability if mutability is precisely the logic of the remainder?

As discussed in the previous chapter, Shelley constantly gives himself the task of imagining the unimaginable. Futurity, according to Shelley, is effectively shut down if we cannot think the unfamiliar after what used to be unfamiliar has become familiar:

> [The poet's] language is vitally metaphorical, that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things, and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them, become through time signs for portions or classes of thoughts instead of pictures of integral thoughts; and then if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse. (512)

Once the unapprehended becomes apprehended and fixed as a familiar sign, the unapprehended needs to be discovered or invented anew. Mutability here names the process *both* whereby thought apprehends the unfamiliar and thereby makes it familiar *and* whereby this destruction or familiarization of the unfamiliar serves as the conditions under which it is alone possible to think the unfamiliar anew. "Ode to the West Wind," though, elusively points us to something 'beyond' or still unapprehended by the play between familiarization and defamiliarization, the apprehended and the unapprehended, death and life. Which is to say that mutability—the play between familiarization and defamiliarization—has itself become familiar. And thought, for Shelley, is only thought if it can chase after what still remains unapprehended, unthought, and unfamiliar. This is

the crisis of the poem. While futurity relies upon a thinking that exceeds a familiarized mutability, mutability or the play between familiarity and its interruption is precisely what opens the future of thought, politics, and culture in the first place. The final question is neither rhetorical nor literal, but an imperative to *think* the *unthinkable* end of mutability without thereby figuring this end as the literal the end of the world and without the slight of hand by which we treat mutability as one process among others.

As in *A Defence of Poetry*, mutability is double-edged: it imprisons futurity in a familiar and formally predictable structure but it simultaneously allows the new and the unthinkable in the first place. To return to *Hellas*, with which I began, Shelley stages this dilemma through Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, who is cursed with eternally wandering the earth. But that which curses him provides a certain Platonic hope: "look on that which cannot change—the One,/ The unborn and undying" (*Hellas* ll. 768-9). His wanderings and the truth he sees cannot change, and yet the One remains unborn, its undying futurity lying ahead. Likewise, the unthinkable annihilation of mutability is double-edged. Were mutability, which allows for futurity, to end, an unimaginable and absolute extinction would be guaranteed. But if it could not end and lead to a different conception of history and what makes history possible, then thought would be at its stagnated limit.

I mean here to differentiate Shelley's unapprehendable remains of mutability from the Derridean "to come." The Derridean "to come" 'is' another formulation of the *aporia* between two heterogeneous but indistinquishable claims or affirmations—namely, the *new, other,* or *singular* and the *repetition* or *inheritance* (and arguably, the "to come" is structurally inscribed within the deconstructive idiom, even if that idiom disavows the immanence of the "to come" to any idiom whatsoever). While the singularity of the

idiom of the "to come" cannot quite be reduced to so many other Derridean idioms, it retains a predictable relation to them. And predictability is at issue. For arguably, while the "to come" calls prediction and predictability into questions, it nevertheless imposes a predictability upon any imaginable or possible future. What comes will have been absolutely heterogeneous to the tradition (which includes, in a certain way, 'deconstruction' itself), but it nonetheless will have been a repetition of that tradition. In this sense, the "to come" invades each and every here and now, and yet for this reason it can never in fact arrive 'as such'. This is another way of saying that the 'word' and 'concept' "to come" names the impossibility of any future present. Whatever arrives in the future will follow the (il)logic of iteration (which is to say that no future 'as such' will ever arrive). Derrida thereby extends the logic of deconstruction into the 'future' and institutes a predictability not regarding what can or will arrive, but regarding how what arrives arrives.

The Shelleyan annihilation of mutability, though, would be precisely that which cannot be foreseen by or assimilated to deconstruction, to neither deconstructive originarity nor the deconstructive to come. Unlike the "to come," it cannot, in that Blanchodian way, be known in advance without being known in advance. Shelleyan annihilation names not a future present that can arise, but a mode of thought that cannot be assimilated in any way whatsoever to the deconstructive 'structures of' thought. This is why the annihilation of mutability leaves a remainder: what remains after deconstructive thought that will in some way have to break with the discourse on the instability between breaks and inheritance. As such, when today we try to think it, we can only fail, we can at best assimilate it to the "to come" just within the limits of our

thought. Shelley's "Spring" is squarely and resolutely unthinkable. But while the Shelleyan remainder of absolute annihilation does not offer anything of its own per se, it prophesies a future mode of thinking that perhaps will no longer be able to be called 'deconstruction' and that will necessarily no longer be able to be understood according to the name 'deconstruction'.[cl]

The challenge "Ode to the West Wind" proffers, though, is not only the grandiose gesture of 'imagining' a thought that exceeds deconstruction (the improbability of a thinking that exceeds the thinking of excess or the excess of thinking). He also forces us to imagine, *from within a deconstructive register*, the possibility of destruction*s without remainders*. He forces us to imagine disappearances that do not amount to the appearance of the disappearance. He forces us to imagine events that do not even have the possibility of a future, that cannot even be misread, misremembered, or mal-archived. He forces us to imagine events that preclude even the possibility of leaving a trace, but the possibility of leaving a trace is precisely the possibility of an event's appearance in the first place, even if that which leaves a trace is originarily only a trace.

Unimaginable 'images' of remainderless annihilation permeate the poem, and yet they are not in the poem. The 'images' in the poem are 'images' of precisely what cannot be imaged or imagined, since they are 'images' of destructions that *even and especially* destroy their ability to be recorded, witnessed, read, or thought in the future. They are 'images' of destructions that destroy the destructions' futurity. Destructions that destroy ahead instead of behind, forward instead of backwards. It is no surprise, then, that they do not quite appear in the poem. If they do appear in the poem, they do so only in the future of its own internal figurations—and the future precisely *is not*, does not exist. Or they

appear in the poem's past, in its allusions that are uncertain, uncorroborated. Of course, since we can in some sense read these 'images' that cannot be read, Shelley's poem does indeed present them in a peculiar way. But it presents not the images absolute destructions, but only their possibility. The implication of destructions that do not simply render their future readings misreadings but that preclude the possibility of reading *tout court* remains open. I do not know the relevance of the fact or possibility that some destructions are absolutely unwitnessable. That question remains for the future.

Chapter Five

Keats's Material Psyche and the End of Love

I. Introduction

Keats's "Ode to Psyche" ostensibly internalizes the external goddess Psyche as the poet's psyche. He thereby announces a secular religion of the mind, uniting a paganism purged of its superstitions with the enlightenment self purged of both its egotism and its futile attempt to reject all superstition. However, almost all the scholarship from the past thirty years has noticed that the poem stages the failure of what seems to be its own goal—namely, the reconciliation of religion and reason, the embodied self and the conscious one. Some scholars have shown how the reconciliation of Psyche and psyche cannot sustain itself and ultimately fails.[cli] Others have shown how the poem also moves outward towards a textual history that undermines the poem's movement inwards.[clii]

In the first section of this chapter I will build from this criticism and recount the "Ode to Psyche"'s reconstruction of the textual history of Psyche/psyche. This allegory of history initially seems to be an allegory of futurity as well, an address to the other or unknown of the future (*allos agoreuein*). In the poem's last lines Fancy "breed[s] flowers, [but] will never breed the same" and a "casement [remains] ope at night/ To let the warm Love in" (ll. 63, 65-7). Keats emphasizes here that while breeding will continue, it will always breed something anew and that Love's arrival lies ahead in a

future presumably more promising than the past. As I will discuss, the most sophisticated readers of the poem show that the future it depicts is one that will only succeed in breeding more illusions, liars, or lyres. Yet all readers agree that the allegory of history points towards or becomes an allegory of futurity and survival.

In the second section of this chapter, though, I argue that "Ode to Psyche" in fact allegorizes the annihilation of any conceivable future history rather than the openness of history's future. "Ode to Psyche" does *not* insist upon the remainders that history's destructions leave behind, but upon an absolute destruction that has remained unreadable even to those readings most attuned to unreadability. While many scholars have noticed the ways in which Keats alludes to and rewrites Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, they have not, I argue, carried the implication of his allusion and rewriting through to its conclusions. Rather than looking towards the final union of Love and Psyche (or body and mind, *eros* and *psuche*), Keats radically excludes Love from the mental landscape of the fourth stanza. It is this exclusion that my reading explores. As Alan Richardson has most thoroughly shown, the fourth stanza depicts the material and dissectible brain. But it also depicts a mythical image that is a pure mental fantasy. The fourth stanza simultaneously portrays the purely imagistic and the material brain; or, it portrays neither the interiority of the mind nor the exteriority of matter, but undecidably fluctuates between both. Love is cast out of this *mental landscape*. And Love, in the poem's figurations and intertext, names precisely the medium that separates and unites the brain and the mind. "Ode to Psyche," then, ultimately asks about the exclusion of the difference between the brain and the mind, the exclusion of the very difference that allows the finite brain to produce the infinitude of thought and mortal Psyche to become

immortal psyche. What it means philosophically, scientifically, and historically for such a difference to be erased is the question that the poem forces upon us.

II. History Without Ends

"Ode to Psyche"'s opening lines are among the most complex of the entire poem:

> O GODDESS! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung
>
> By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,
>
> And pardon that thy secrets should be sung
>
> Even into thine own soft-conched ear (ll. 1-4)

We are not told *from where* Keats wrings these tunes out, only *how* they are wrung out: "by sweet enforcement and remembrance dear." We can guess, though, that he wrings them out from the Platonic depths of his memory, deep within his psyche. But as the poem makes clear, he does not have a psyche at this point; he gains a psyche only after internalizing and installing the goddess Psyche inside his mind at the end of the poem. Apuleius's Cupid-Psyche myth in the *Golden Ass* invents a mortal psyche (named Psyche) as the goddess Psyche, and Keats reverses and rewrites this myth in order to invent Psyche as psyche. Even with these opening lines, though, the task is shown to be an impossible and paradoxical one. When Keats apostrophizes psyche with the help of his *anamnesis* or "remembrance dear," he does yet have a psyche capable of apostrophizing. The ability to reinvent Psyche as psyche is dependent upon remembering a preexisting psyche that is nowhere to be found. The poet can only wring out his tunes for Psyche from *nowhere*.[cliii]

Just as peculiarly, the "tuneless numbers" Keats sings into Psyche's ear are themselves Psyche's secrets. What Psyche holds secret—what Keats should not or cannot know—he sings to her. As Keats tells something he is unable to tell, Psyche's "soft-conched ear" hears something she cannot hear: her secrets are "tuneless" or written instead of sung through breath or *psuche*. And even if the tunes were sung, one might argue that they could not pass through her ear into her mind or psyche, since a conch is closed at the end. Psyche needs someone else to tell her own private secrets to her in order for her to be apostrophized into existence, but since her own secrets are not hers and she cannot hear what she is told, she disappears at the moment she is invoked. Psyche lacks her own psyche. In the exchange between Keats and Psyche, both depend on the other for a psyche, but neither has one to give.

It is difficult to know whether the poem erects Psyche or evacuates any sense of psyche at all. In fact, the identity of each of the poem's three characters—Keats, Psyche, and Cupid—circulates to the point of total confusion. In the first stanza, Keats describes himself much as Apuleius describes Psyche as she wanders through the forest before becoming a goddess: "wander[ing] in a forest thoughtlessly" alone (l. 7). Without thoughts or worries, he then, "on the sudden, faint[s] with surprise" as he stumbles upon Cupid and Psyche in a sexual embrace (l. 8). As Keats goes from wandering about without an object of thought (and without, perhaps, a psyche) to fainting and losing his sense of self to discovering a sexual scene and stopping to watch, he doubles or divides. Through fainting and entering a dream-like state, he paradoxically gains a sense of self in that he acquires an object of thought and vision; but he also loses that self in that he becomes a voyeur overcome by the object of the gaze (rather than dominating or

overcoming through the gaze). And finding himself alone with himself he doubles again as the scene becomes masturbatory or autoerotic: seeing but unseen, he is also affecting himself and being affected by himself. The scene of watching unseen even extends itself to the scene of writing: once we begin imagining the 'fictional' Keats watching Cupid and Psyche, we cannot but imagine the 'real' Keats, alone with his pen, getting off while writing about his 'fictional' self watching.

The voyeuristic and masturbatory scene quickly turns into an orgiastic triangulation between Keats, Cupid, and Psyche. The stanza ends: "But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?/ His Psyche true!" (ll. 22-3). With the expression "His Psyche," we read Psyche not only as the goddess with whom Cupid is copulating, but also as Cupid's psyche. Cupid then divides as Keats did, and Cupid takes the place of Keats as the one alone with himself: Cupid and his psyche autoerotically lying in the grass. When Cupid takes the place of Psyche, Keats takes the place of Cupid, coupling and copulating with Psyche, which again will become Keats coupling or copulating with himself, with his own psyche. Every substitution entails another. In an undecidably masturbatory or orgiastic triangulation, each character coupled with another ends up coupling with himself or herself, and coupling with one's self becomes the coupling with another.[cliv] By the fourth and final stanza, Keats and Psyche are alone, and we have completely forgotten about Cupid. But with the final line of the poem, Cupid becomes the voyeur, and the "casement ope at night,/ To let warm Love in!" is also a peephole. And yet, if Keats and Psyche are alone together in Keats's mind in the final stanza, we assume that love or Love or Eros is already there in between them, making their relationship possible.

The poem is thus an erotic testament to the loss of identity or psyche that comes with "*Negative Capability*" or with being a "camelion Poet" who "has no Identity" but takes on the identity of everything around it or with "a complete disinterestedness of Mind" that is concerned only with sympathizing with others rather than having any purposes of its own (Scott, 60, 195 270).[clv] But while the poem challenges the stability and value of psyche at every turn, it is nonetheless an ode to Psyche. In the portion of the packet of letters to George and Georgiana from the twenty-first of April—just before the portion from the thirtieth that includes "Ode to Psyche"—Keats presents his famous account of "The vale of Soul-making" (Scott 290). In a rather mysterious manner, he here explains how, through the medium of "*World*" or "circumstances," the heart and mind act on each other so as to form "Soul" or "Identity" (291-2). There "are not Souls till they acquire identities" (290). And each individual's soul or identity is different, depending on the specificity of circumstances that act upon the mind: "As various as the Lives of Men are, so various become their souls" (291). By explaining how the heart and mind combine to form a soul through the material and arbitrary circumstances of the world—through "a World of Pains and troubles" such as Psyche has to endure in Apuleius's myth—Keats tries to offer an account of the soul that does not refuse its historicity.

Just as the prose celebrates *and* undermines psyche by presenting it as formed historically through the specific contingencies of experience, so too does the poem. As Stuart Sperry suggests, the poem, in a rather complex gesture, pesents P/psyche's historical transformation from an ahistorical mode to a historical one:

> Fundamentally the change [narrated in the poem] is from a mythopoeic conception of experience, that most genial to art, to an historical one….

> From the timeless domain of the first stanza, the realm of 'Flora, and old Pan' with its rapt discoveries and wide-eyed contemplations, we are transported to a world where mythology has been swallowed up by history. (252-3)

Insofar as the psyche is traditionally understood as the ahistorical and spontaneous selfsameness of each individual's consciousness, Keats's invention of his psyche by way of the history of P/psyche from mythic to modern times simultaneously displaces the psyche while celebrating it anew. Keats begins this history where one would expect: with the primeval world of ancient Greece, where the psyche was not yet burdened by the modern doubling of self-consciousness. But as Homer Brown notes in "Creations and Destroyings: Keats's Protestant Hymn, the 'Ode to Psyche'," the supposedly pure Greek origins in the second stanza are riddled with Christian imagery, suggesting that the innocent past was already contaminated—or, in the words of the poem, "haunted"—by its future (53, l. 39). The origin prior to self-duplication is a fiction of the "fond believing lyre (l. 37)—"fond" signifying "caring, devoted but also foolish" in the words of the Norton editors, and lyre punning on liar (*lie* already inscribed in be*lie*ving) (464). The world that neglected Psyche—but to which she should have belonged—was a myth, invented at the same time that it is archived by Homer's and Hesiod's lyre and then later by nineteenth-century mythographers (ll. 29-35).

Psyche was not neglected by or "too late…/ Too, too late" for the "old religion" because the psyche was unproblematic, unproblematized, and undivided (making its deification unnecessary), but because the "old religion"—understood as the religion where self and other were united—never existed (ll. 36-7, Scott 294). Rather than

figuring the original psyche as perfect but lost to the past, Keats figures the psyche as the goddess Psyche—as, that is, a literary invention. He tells George and Georgiana that she "was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apuleius the Platonist who lived after the Augustan age, and consequently the Goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervor, and perhaps never thought of in the old religion" (Scott 294). Apuleius invents Psyche as a goddess at the very moment when people stop believing in the pagan gods and when Christianity converts Psyche into the immortal soul.[clvi] As a goddess, Psyche only and ever existed as a fiction in literary history and was at no point perceived of as having a corresponding referent.

Keats goes on to imply that not only was Psyche a fiction, but so is the modern, internalized psyche. At the fictional origin, Psyche had neither a temple

> Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moan
>
> Upon the midnight hours;
>
> No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet
>
> From chain-swung censer teeming;
>
> No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
>
> Of pale mouth'd prophet dreaming. (ll. 29-35)

He repeats these lines with a simple substitution, highlighting the ease or dis-ease with which fictional language converts the fictional Psyche into a 'real' psyche:

> So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
>
> Upon midnight hours;
>
> Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
>
> From swinged censer teeming;

Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat

Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming. (ll. 44-49)

Keats makes Psyche his own psyche neither through the arduous Wordsworthian insistence upon both thoughtlessness and meditation nor through the philosophical labor of a Descartes. Rather, he makes Psyche his own psyche through the most rhetorical and mechanical substitution possible, repeating a stanza with a slight difference: *thy* for *no*. While Keats is confronting with utmost seriousness the challenge of a being a modern poet in good faith, there is more than a little humor in converting the private psychological world into an external allegorical goddess, or vice versa. The second stanza, with its self-consciously literary imaginings of a primeval past, exposes that past for what it is: a fiction. And the third stanza, as a repetition and substitution of the second, exposes the modern cult of self-consciousness for what it is: a fiction, premised upon the tricks of rhetoric. The modern attempt to locate a psyche freed from superstition, for Keats, comes with a superstition of its own, which he names the "wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" (Scott 194).[clvii] For the attempt to ground the self upon itself relies upon the mythology that history and fiction and rhetoric can be put aside. Enter Keats, who shows that the modern psyche cannot avoid the fate of the fictional Psyche, from whom it gets its name. With the humor of an oxymoronic modern goddess, "Ode to Psyche" does not so much establish a synthesis between the ancient and modern (or between Psyche and psyche, mythology and reason, body and mind) as it tells the story of the transition from one inadequate historical moment to another inadequate historical moment. Both Psyche and psyche only make sense in and as the history of a fiction.

Homer Brown's essay is again helpful here, since it argues that the poem *both* "aspires toward the autonomy and the invention of something that cannot be named… a cogito of pure consciousness untouched by external experience" *and* calls attention to the textual history that allows for and destroys the illusion of an autonomous psyche (55). Brown tracks "Ode to Psyche"'s allusions to the substitutions and translations of P/psyche throughout literary history, from Greek mythology, to Apuleius, to the Christian conversion of psyche into the immortal soul, to the re-allegorization of Psyche in Spenser and Milton, to the institutionalization of mythology in the eighteenth century, to the Enlightenment's secularization of the soul as the empirical experience of consciousness. "Ode to Psyche" positions the psyche as an illusion predicated upon the textual history of displacements, supplements, and repetitions. Each recovery of neglected P/psyche in this textual history tries to substitute itself for what it sees as a prior misreading or misappropriation of Psyche; but each recovery and demystification, the poem shows, will be supplemented and supplanted in turn. Accordingly, the fiction of psyche will irreducibly survive because every demystification entails its very own re-mystification. Keats, Brown argues, resolutely refuses to position himself at end of this history.

Almost a year to the day before writing "Ode to Psyche," Keats wrote his famous "Mansion of Many Apartments" letter to Reynolds. The soul progresses beyond "the infant or thoughtless chamber" to "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought," where it becomes "intoxicated with the light" (Scott 124). Correspondingly, the poet "wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly" and then progresses to the point where he announces, "I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired" (ll. 7, 43). But the chamber of maiden thought "becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open, but all

leading to dark passages…. We are in a mist. *We* are now in that state. We feel the 'burden of the Mystery'" (Scott 124). The implication is that when we advance down those dark passages, we will see the chamber of maiden thought as a youthful 'stage'—a moment in the mystified past. The upshot is that any stage of demythologizing, in the future, will have its own mythology of which it will remain unaware.[clviii] The dark hallways beyond maiden thought promise a future, but a future that will always also have been deluded.

With a highly historically aware consciousness, the poem asserts that any stage of knowledge—including its own—will change, die, disappear. Brown writes: Keats's "concern is to explore the *mortality* of *all* the gods, including art, including the Psyche of this Ode, the mortality of all cultures" (54). But in addition, "the Keatsian text equally insists on what remains in that mortality" (ibid.). Brown then cites a passage from *The Fall of Hyperion*: "'*It works a constant change, which happy death/ Can put no end to: deathwards progressing/ To no death(.)*'" (ibid., Brown's italics). All things die, but all things leave a remainder; history unendingly repeats itself, but with a difference each time. Keats's allegory of history thus insists on the future, on the survival and continuation of history, no matter how textual or deluded it may be. That history might not be a happy one; it might be progressing deathwards. But that deathwards 'progress' progresses precisely to *no death*. Fancy, Keats writes in the final stanza of "Ode to Psyche," will always be "breeding flowers," but she "will never breed the same" (l. 63). It would seem, then, that in the end, the psyche will survive, albeit as a ruin always undergoing but surviving fresh destructions.

III. Psyche without Love

At the end of the poem, Cupid is still outside the "casement ope," and Psyche is still awaiting him (l. 67). The future remains literally "ope" or open at the end of the ode. The final words—"To let the warm Love in"—points to a future event that has not yet occurred. It does not point to a *telos*, but refers to an undetermined future, which is a reference to nothing, to that which does not yet exist (l. 67). The blank on the white page following the poem and the poem's submission of itself to future readings testify to the historical openness with which the poem ends. And yet, I will now argue that what seems to be an irreducible openness towards the future at the end of the poem is in fact a figuration of the absolute end of history. Rather than a figure for the forever delayed future, the final stanza may well figure a future without futurity.

My argument relies upon the fourth stanza's reduplication of the imagery in the first, which Helen Vendler has pointed out in detail:

> Yet his new, allegorical, later paradise [of the fourth stanza] reduplicates the earlier, mythological one [of the first stanza]. There are, in the interior world, sleeping Dryads lain on moss, just as the sleeping Cupid and Psyche had been couched in grass; there are dark-clustered trees where there had been a forest; there is a murmur of pines where there had been a whispering roof of leaves, streams where there had been a brooklet, stars to replace Phoebe's sapphire-regioned star, mental flowers where there had been mythological ones, soft delight where there had been calm breathing, a bright torch to substitute for aurorean light, and a "warm

> Love" in place of the winged boy. In all these ways, the internalized closing scene of the poem is a copy, in its imagery, of the opening forest scene, just as the second of the two central Miltonic stanzas of the ode is a copy, in its catalogue of reparation, of the first, with its catalogue of loss. (60-1)

But there is another crucial similarity between the two stanzas that has gone unnoticed by previous scholarship. The first stanza in which dream and waking sight easily coexist in that otherworldly world of myth presents a *still picture*:

> They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;
>
> Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
>
> Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,
>
> As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber,
>
> And ready still past kisses to outnumber
>
> At tender eye-dawn of aurorean love… (ll. 15-20)

Psyche and Cupid are paused in the moment just prior to "kisses… outnumber[ed]" and just after "past kisses."[clix] The picture is an instantaneous snapshot, and yet, it paradoxically contains within itself its own past and future, invoking its own temporalization. And just as the scene transitively freezes the pair of lovers, so it itself is intransitively frozen. On the one hand, Keats presents the play between the instantaneous picture and the temporality traversing it. But on the other, this very play is itself frozen in and as its dynamic stillness.[clx] Keats's image is an image *of* the play between an image or instant and duration or motion or history. In other words, it is not simply an image that contains its own temporality, but is the portrayal *of* the play between space and time.[clxi]

Containing both motion and stasis, it transfixes the reader. And amounting to a microcosm of the problem of the ode—the play between the moment of address and the distension of narrative—it threatens to stop the poem in its tracks or complete it before it gets started. In fact, the tableau vivant arguably depicts the end result of Apuleius's Cupid-Psyche, when the two lovers finally unite.

In order to explore what this implies for Keats's poem, it may be helpful to recall more closely Apuleius's account of the myth in the 1566 Adlington version known to Keats. Psyche is so beautiful that men's worship of her begins to replace their rites to Venus. Consequently, Venus sends her impetuous son Cupid to earth in order to make Psyche fall in love "with the most miserablest creature living, the most poore, the most crooked, and the most vile" (Apuleius 100). Meanwhile, Psyche, "alone, lament[ing] her solitary life," "hated shee in her selfe her own beauty" because, while "[e]very one marvelled at her divine beauty, as it were some Image well painted," no mortals would approach her since she was taken to be or to be too like a goddess (ibid.). When Psyche's parents anxiously inquire about the fate of their youngest daughter, the oracle of Apollo tells them to leave her on a mountaintop where she will come "to her finall end and burial" and marry the "Serpent dire… appointed to destroy all the world" (101-2). After her parents abandon her on the mountaintop, Zephyrus saves her and brings her to a divine palace.

In the palace she is treated to all delicacies and riches and attended by divine, bodiless voices, and after she goes to bed, "[t]hen came her unknowne husband and lay with her: and after that hee had made a perfect consummation of the marriage" (104). She thus spends her time alone save the disembodied voices and the new husband whose

identity and appearance are unknown to her. Eventually, her sisters convince her to light an oil lamp once her husband is asleep and to kill him should he be the serpent that Apollo predicted. When she discover he is Cupid, she becomes overwhelmed and "recreated in her [own] mind," at which point she uncontrollably kisses him "a thousand times" (113). While kissing him, a drop of oil from the lamp falls on and burns Cupid; "O rash and bold lampe, the vile ministery of love, how darest thou bee so bold as to burne the god of all fire?" (ibid.). Betrayed, Cupid flees his love in anger. Meanwhile Venus learns what has happened, detains Cupid while he recovers from his wound, and, like a Fury, searches for Psyche, who finally surrenders herself to Venus's wrath (121). Venus then tears off Psyche's clothes and beats her before giving her a number of impossible tasks to perform. After Psyche completes her tasks with the help of divine creatures, Cupid, now recovered, persuades Jupiter to make Psyche immortal and to permit the lovers' marriage, which he does because he sees it as a means to finally "bridle and restraine" Cupid's "adulterous living" (128).

Again, the opening picture of Cupid and Psyche coiled together in a divine bower arguably portrays them after their travails and reunion, after Psyche has gone through the requisite experience of gaining knowledge (discovering Cupid's identity) and then suffering for this knowledge (Venus's punishment of her). In the "vale of Soul-making" letter, Keats describes modern soul-making similarly when he asks George and Georgiana: "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?" (Scott 291). Not only does the tableau vivant formally threaten to contain and thus halt the rest of the ode. It also refers to the end of the myth and even to the result of modern soul-making. The opening scene, at the end of the myth,

threatens to be the end of the poem. But rather peculiarly, this scene of freezing, which should stop the poem in its tracks, *repeats* at the end (or just beyond the end) of the fourth stanza, to which I will now devote my attention.

After building Psyche a temple in "some untrodden region of my mind," Keats gives her "A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,/ To let warm Love in!" (ll. 51, 66-7). As Geoffrey Hartman, Stuart Sperry, and Jeffrey Cox have all noticed, these final lines of the poem also allude to Apuleius's Cupid-Psyche myth—in particular, to the scene when Psyche, after having repetitively slept with her unknown husband, prepares a lamp in order to reveal his identity.[clxii] Alone in the dark of Keats's mind, Psyche only hears his disembodied thoughts just as she only heard disembodied voices in Cupid's palace. She lies, waiting "To let the warm Love in" with a "bright torch." Hartman provides a compelling reading of the allusion:

> Love is about to cross that threshold, yet there is no leap of the imagination ('Already with thee!'), no 'Let the warm Love in.' Only, 'To let the warm Love in.' Instead of an imperative we have an infinitive, a stationing moment…. In *To Psyche* we do not even reach the perilous event, which the received myth gives as Psyche's lust of the eyes, her use of that torch to discover the identity of her lover. A next, fatal step is omitted. (222)

He continues that "we remain suspended, we hang there, in that 'bright… night'" (ibid.), still waiting for the torch to spill its oil on Cupid.[clxiii] Because Hartman's essay is written with that characteristically understated and rather poetic nuance in which more is implied

than said, it would be unwise to assert that he does not go far enough in reading this allusion to the Cupid-Psyche myth.

However, Hartman overlooks one basic aspect of the allusion. Keats alters the myth by giving Psyche the " bright torch" *before* Cupid has entered the room rather than after he has fallen asleep. And since, in the mythological frame evoked by the poem, Cupid can only enter in the dark, unseen and unknown, he precisely will not and cannot enter. Contrary to Hartman's reading, then, the "fatal step" is not omitted or delayed and it is not suspended (so long as this suspension holds open the possibility of its future occurrence). Rather, the fatal moment itself suffers a kind of fatality and will never arrive. The possibility that the fatal moment could arrive in the future—that Cupid will wake up in the light, leave Psyche, and so on—is foreclosed by Keats's transformation of the myth. At the end of the poem, Psyche is indeed infinitivally suspended, waiting "To let the warm Love in," but because the lit torch is also infinitivally suspended, the suspension can never end. In rewriting the myth by giving Psyche the torch *before* Cupid enters, Keats pauses the scene eternally. We know exactly how it will continue: the suspended scene will remain forever *still* or *frozen*, with Psyche and Cupid separated.[clxiv] Just as Cupid and Psyche were paused in a moment of separation in the first stanza, so too are they at the end of the final stanza, only here they are separated without the hope of joining in the future, without the hope of the scene repeating in the future with a difference, as the first scene of freezing did. The end of the fourth stanza shuts down the world of Fancy, "[w]ho breeding flowers, will never breed the same." Keats's allusion to and rewriting of Apuleius's version of the scene precludes the openness or unknown that should necessarily remain after its final line. Rather than (or in addition to) an allegory of

history that knows its own historicity, the poem allegorizes the foreclosure of futurity and thus of the *end* of history.[clxv]

No doubt, one could very well argue that Keats's whole point is to rewrite the myth such that it does not end with immortality as in Apuleius but with the dismal, modern self that cannot simultaneously be both itself and join with another, that cannot both be a pure psyche and possess embodied *eros*. In this reading, love and the psyche remain apart at the end of the poem insofar as the modern self will remain divided between body and mind, but that division does not necessarily imply that they remain *absolutely* separated. Love and Psyche might be separated, but Love is already inside, contaminating the purity of the psyche. Indeed, the poem's last word, "in," is already inscribed in the rhyme scheme of the fourth stanza: "win"/"in" and then further as the "i" of this rhyme scheme finds itself written into Psyche's "soft del*i*ght" at "n*i*ght."[clxvi] Thus, one could argue that the poem by no means shuts down futurity since the discord but contamination between Love and Psyche remains alive and well. This reading is by no means implausible. Indeed, it is quite correct: even if the poem points to a certain end of futurity, the very futurity of its reading betrays that end. And yet, it seems to me that the combination of the fourth stanza's repetition of the frozen image of the first and the rewriting of the central event of the Cupid-Psyche myth compels us to pursue a different and darker alternative. That is, it seems to me that the infinitival "To let the warm Love in" *both* suspends while hoping for the entrance of Love *and* suggests that Love is eternally precluded from entering. This second possibility has not been considered in the scholarly tradition, but the poems's carefully crafted parallel structure and allusion to its intertext insists upon it.

In fact, Keats's reiteration and rewriting of Apuleius remains, in a rather surprising sense, profoundly indebted and faithful to Apuleius. Before being left on a cliff at the behest of the oracle of Apollo and before being transported to Cupid's palace, Psyche asks: "why should I refuse him that is appointed to destroy all the world?" (Apuleius 101). The serpent that Apollo says all the gods fear and that Psyche must marry in and as her own death is understood as fated to destroy all the world. What is striking, though, is that Apollo's oracle is never revealed to have a kernel of truth in it. By all mythological standards, the deep truth of his words, having been misinterpreted, should come to light. But Apollo's words remain completely unexplained at the end of Apuleius's tale. The myth ends with Jupiter's scheme to contain and domesticate Cupid (who is figured as the principle of licentiousness, illegality, and evil) by sanctioning his marriage to Psyche. One wonders, then, whether the domestication of evil might amount to nothing other than the "destr[uction] of all the world." In other words, if one takes the oracle of Apollo seriously, then Apuleius's version of the myth, like Keats's, also depicts the end of all futurity while refusing to depict it. For were all evil, all contamination, all transgression to be destroyed, the world would probably end.[clxvii]

Just as Apuleius paradoxically interpolates the end of futurity in his myth without actually writing it into his myth, so Keats portrays the end of futurity without actually figuring it in his myth, since the closing scene that destroys the seemingly irreducible openness of futurity is not quite locatable *within* the poem. The submerged image of Psyche and Keats eternally separated 'emerges' only *after* the final words of the poem, *after* we learn that there is a "A bright torch…/ To let the warm Love in!" (ll. 66-7). The image never arises as an image at all, for if it did, then it would not be an image of the

end of futurity, which precisely cannot be imaged (since any image of it would be a remainder beyond the end). The image is not *there*.[clxviii]

Keats's allusion to the torch scene transforms the myth in yet another way. In Apuleius's version, Cupid is also exiled: after finding out about Cupid and Psyche's affair, Venus locks up Cupid in his room for his licentious behavior. He is exiled by being brought within, detained and contained. Psyche, of course, is also exiled, but she is thrown out into the treachery and danger of the outside world. In Keats's version, the opposite happens: Psyche is detained within the mind, and Cupid is cast out of it. But while the inside/outside dichotomy is symmetrical in Apuleius's version, it is not in Keats's. For as I will elaborate further below, the extended metaphor of the fourth stanza depicts *both* the external world with its "wild-ridged mountains" and "zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees" *and* the interiority of the poet's psyche (ll. 55-6). As such, the outside into which Cupid is cast is absolutely outside or other, excluded from both the outside world *and* the inside world, from both language and words and thought *and* things and matter and reality. He is *absolutely nowhere.* Moreover, Keats's brain in the fourth stanza not only includes both the inside and outside world; it also contains the confusion of these worlds. When reading the *mental landscape* of the final stanza, one cannot be sure whether the external world is a metaphorical vehicle for a radically idealist and interior one, or whether the mental world is a vehicle for the entire world. Cupid, then, is 'outside' the very confusion between inside and the outside. And we cannot even *think* what it would mean to be *excluded from the very play between the inside and outside*, since this play is a condition of possibility of meaning, thinking, and being.

IV. Without Love

Before confronting what the absolute exclusion of Love implies, we have to understand what exactly 'Cupid' signifies in the poem and the myth. Or rather, we need to ponder the connotations of *Love*, since the name 'Cupid' never appears in the poem. Considering that, with the exception of Phoebe, Latinate names dominate Keats's retelling of the Latin myth, the word "Love" (the English translation of the Greek *Eros*) comes as a surprise. In Apuleius's account, Cupid is defined as follows: "Cupid, rash enough and hardy, who by his evil manners contemning all publique justice and law, armed with fire and arrows, running up and downe in the nights from house to house, and corrupting the lawfull marriages of every person, doth nothing but that which is evill" (99-100). Jupiter later says to him: "thou haste not given due reverence and honour unto me as thou oughtest to doe, but haste rather spoiled and wounded this my brest (whereby the laws and order of the Elements and Planets be disposed) with continuall assaults, of Terren luxury and against all laws, and the discipline of Julia, and the utility of the publike weale, in transforming my divine beauty into serpents, fire, savage beasts, birds, and into Bulles" (128).

Cupid is figured here as the most earthly or Terren of the gods, always flagrantly disregarding the laws both of Heaven and Earth. He is love, but he is evil. He is a sort of *in between* figure, imposing himself between couples and shuttling between one marriage and the next. Cupid both makes and destroys human relationships; he brings together humans at one moment and rips them apart at another, relating people to one another and then inserting irreconcilable differences between them. Moreover, in shuttling between

Heaven and Earth, he is both heavenly and all too human, or he is not enough of either, but between the two, even more so than Hermes or Mercury. He is an uncontainable and poisonous contagion as well as the principle of life and reproduction.[clxix] He is the earthly god or *daimon* who mediates between (or differentiates and unites) the mortal and the immortal and makes the mortal Psyche/psyche immortal.[clxx] His particular error lies in "*transforming*," in making one thing something else.

In the "vale of Soul-making" letter, Keats's emphasis is precisely on the *medium* through which one acquires a soul. His discussion is underdeveloped, but the argument seems to run as follows: we have innate and material intelligence ("Intelligences are atoms of perception"), but we do not yet have identity or even, perhaps, consciousness (Scott 290). The material world and its circumstances act on the heart, and the heart in turn allows the world to act on the intelligence. The argument, though, is inconsistent. At first, *the world is the medium* and allows intelligence and heart to interact with one another, thereby forming a soul: "the *World* or *Elemental space* [is] suited for the proper action of *Mind and Heart* on each other for the purpose of forming the *Soul* or *Intelligence destined to possess the sense of Identity*" (italics in the original, 291). But in his second go, Keats asserts that *the heart is the medium* that allows world and intelligence to interact with one another, thereby forming the soul:

> I began by seeing how man was formed by circumstances, and what are circumstances but touchstones of his heart? And what are the touchstones but proovings of his heart? And what are proovings of his heart but fortifiers or alterers of his nature? And what is his altered nature but his soul? And what was his soul before it came into the world and had These

> proovings and alterations and perfectionings? An intelligence—without Identity—and how is this Identity to be made? Through the medium of the Heart. And how is the heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances? (292)

Heart here has something to do with receptiveness or sensation (as opposed to intelligence, which has to do with perception and cognition), but it also has to do, of course, with love—or, more abstractly, with relation and difference, with the medium that allows for things to come together and come apart. Heart, like or as love, allows the mind and the world to unite and create identity or soul. It is that which *alters*, which makes something *different.*

The association of Love with heart and fire (besides having a torch, Cupid is "the god of all fire" in Apuleius's account (113)) resonates with romantic biological and medical discourses, which Keats knew well. In *Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, Alan Richardson points out that Keats calls Eros the "God of warm pulses" in *Endymion* (128). According to Richardson, this phrase, in the context of romantic medical science, alludes to the fiery redness of blood, which emanates from the heart and forms the medium through which mind and body interact (ibid.). The "God of warm pulses" also suggests the electrical nature of the nerves, which allows for communication within the brain and between the brain and the rest of the body.[clxxi] Whether it suggests blood or the electricity in nerves, "the warm Love" at the end of "Ode to Psyche" constitutes the differences and relations necessary for communication between the mind and the body, and ultimately relating the two. And the ode, after all, is about such a linkage, about the relationship between embodied sexual dimensions and psychic or mental ones, which

Keats's medical training taught him to view as inextricably bound, as Richardson compellingly lays out. We should also note that it is not just Love or Cupid that is to be let in at the end of the poem; it is "*the* warm Love," suggesting not only the god but also a substance or force or medium. In Apuleius's characterization, in Keats's prose, and in the allusions to medical science, Cupid or Love or Heart is the principle of mediation, of difference and relation. And specifically, it names the difference between the external world of matter and the interior world of phenomenality.

The question that now confronts us is how to read Love in the final stanza if he is exiled even from the very confusion of the outside and the inside—body and mind, world and psyche—'in' Keats's brain. Love, after all, names the very confusion from which it is exiled. In the extended metaphor of the fourth stanza, the tenor seems to be, on the most thematic level at least, Keats's act of placing Psyche at the seat of his thought:

> Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
>
> In some untrodden region of my mind,
>
> ……
>
> And in the midst of this wide quietness
>
> A rosy sanctuary I will dress
>
> With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
>
> With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
>
> With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign… (ll. 50-62)

Unsurprisingly, though, the metaphor's tenor quickly falls out of the picture, as the privatization of the deity is figured as a mere delusion: the *fane* will be dressed with everything that *Fancy* could *feign*.[clxxii] The I's paradoxical positing and building of its

own psyche is figured as a *fantasy* rather than a Fichtean auto-self-constitution that Keats would have read about in *Biographia Literaria*. We have to understand the first line of this stanza—"Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane"—as ironic: the metaphor for interiority is an external temple borrowed from the impersonality of ancient Greece, suggesting we can only ground our psyche in *fiction* and its textual history. When the tenor is revealed to be a fiction, the poem leads the reader away from the seemingly non-fictional tenor of the vehicle to self-consciously fictional vehicle of the tenor.

As I have already mentioned, it should come as no surprise that in this poem of doubling there are not one but two competing vehicles. One of these vehicles, we will see, is the phenomenal imagery of the conscious mind, and the other is the non-conscious materiality of the physical brain: on the one hand, the vehicle is the imagery of a temple and trees and mountains and stream, but on the other, the vehicle is the material brain with the psyche as a physical spot within it rather than as a consciousness (that could, for example, perceive the brain as an image). For grappling with the vehicle of the brain, Alan Richardson's reading is again indispensable:

> Many of the images that fill out the mental landscape of the "Ode to Psyche" have been traced to specific features of the new brain anatomy as Keats understood it. The "wild-ridged mountains" suggest the convolutions of the cerebral cortex, which had appeared more like intestines to earlier anatomists but had been given new visual definition (as well as unprecedented functional significance) by Gall and Spurzheim. The "dark-cluster'd trees" with their "branched thoughts" evoke the tree-like appearance of some brain structures as revealed by the new dissection

> techniques (most notably the cerebellum with its "arbor vitae") and echo Keats's note on the nerves arising by "numerous branches from the Substance of ye Brain" (*JKNB* 54). The "streams" and "rosy" sanctuary correspond to the network of blood vessels nourishing the brain and connecting it with the circulatory system…. Most strikingly, the "wreath'd trellis of a working brain" evokes the fibrous texture of the brain's "medullary" or white matter as described by Gall and Spurzheim. (124)

Whether or not the correspondences that Richardson posits line up exactly is not of issue. Of interest is that in the image of the brain, the psyche is nowhere to be found—at best materially localized in some untrodden region of Keats's brain like Descartes' pineal gland.[clxxiii] Instead of being the vehicle for Keats's psyche, the figure of the brain becomes literal; or rather, it becomes an 'image' of the brain itself prior to or abstracted from consciousness, an 'image' of the dissected non-conscious and non-thinking brain. It is thus an image of that which cannot be imaged, since as soon as materiality is perceived, it is precisely an image instead of sheer materiality unmediated by human consciousness. Indeed, it is even wrong to say that Keats presents the brain as a vehicle of the metaphor; rather, he injects into the stanza elusive allusions to the material brain that never converge to form an image or figure. In other words, he does not even figure the material brain, for its figuration would efface its materiality. One might say that the 'figure' of the unfigurable brain is materially inscribed in the lines.

The second vehicle that Keats uses in the extended metaphor of the fourth stanza is the fantastic and phenomenal world of the temple and zephyrs and Dryads. This vehicle is an image of a mythical ancient past that never occurred. Instead of sheer

materiality that cannot be perceived or imagined without being erased, the fantasy is a sheer image that has no referent and that does not even point towards a material world. Keats's stanza is absolutely riven: utter materiality on the one hand, and utter phenomenality on the other. And yet, as absolutely heterogeneous as the two 'vehicles' are, they cannot be separated: Keats speaks of "branched thoughts…/ Instead of pines," but the *branching* of the thoughts already suggests trees, mixing the two vehicles that should be absolutely distinct. The "wild-ridged mountains" are *both* the cerebral cortex *and* the fantastic landscape of mythology. The two 'vehicles' are heterogeneous and yet inseparable.

One might expect a conclusion at this point along the following lines: Keats evokes the heterogeneity between materiality and phenomenality while simultaneously illustrating that materiality can only ever be phenomenalized (or perceived by consciousness) and that phenomenality is always already displaced by materiality. One might expect, that is, the conclusion that the difference between the brain and the mind is both irreducible and yet unstable. This conclusion, though, would overlook the absolute exclusion of Love from the scene: without the difference or power of mediation that love 'is', materiality cannot be effaced by figuration, and phenomenality cannot be displaced by materiality. But love—which is the principle of difference, confusion, relation, and contamination that links the mortal world to the immortal one or the finitude of brain to the infinitude of the psyche—*is* absolutely excluded. The poem shows that what is missing is the principle of relation, difference, or mediation that would enable one to move between the two registers. The material brain and the brain's thoughts, language, and perception remain entirely heterogeneous, without the possibility of matter passing

into consciousness and without the possibility of consciousness figuring, erasing, and being displaced by matter. This figure—which cannot be said to be a figure (I am unsure what to call it)—of the absolute erasure of difference and relation is the poem's most radical insight.[clxxiv]

Of course, though, as I have already underscored, the poem suggests that there still is a difference and a relation. In the context of Apuleius's figuration of Love as the god of fire, the torch that keeps Love out of Keats's brain is Love's torch or fire, a supplement or remnant of Love that survives within it. Also, Keats "dress[es]" the recalcitrant materiality of the brain with a "wreath'd trellis of a working brain" and with "all [that] the gardener Fancy e'er could feign." The rhetorical effect of *dressing* the material brain with the "trellis of a working brain" and with everything that "Fancy e'er could feign" is to *convert* the brain into a conscious mind that *includes* (rather than being merely dressed with) the *work* of *fancy*. The supplement of dress—in this case, the ornament of thinking, working, fantasizing, and feigning—supplants or at least becomes entangled with the inanimate materiality of the brain. Indeed, Fancy is interpolated as a *deus ex machina* in order to supply the missing link between materiality and phenomenality once Love is exiled. And further, so long as conscious people can still read the material ink on the page, Keats's 'figuration' of an absolute erasure of the difference between materiality and phenomenality fails since, in being read, it reproduces the difference it would erase.

Keats manages to make up for Love's disappearance by means of a rhetorical slippage, but the poem highlights just how tenuous a fix this is. While Love survives in "Ode to Psyche," the poem alludes to the possibility of the most improbable historical

event: the *absolute annihilation* of Love, since Psyche's torch will forever exclude Love from the inside, the outside, and the confusion between them. We certainly cannot imagine this seemingly impossible possibility, but it is clear that without Love, the materiality of the world cannot magically produce thought and consciousness. Without Love, oppositions cannot mingle, commingle (the Greek verb for mingling— μείγνυμι — is also the word for sex), synthesize, or contaminate each other. Without Love, Psyche and psyche, external and internal, immortal and mortal, infinitude and finitude, reality and fantasy, materiality and consciousness would all remain eternally frozen in an image without movement or futurity. Without Love, there is no difference.

Richardson notes that, "once sensation, thought, and volition were located in the brain, it became natural to view the mind and body as aspects of an integrated system rather than as distinct, much less dichotomous, entities" (130). But Keats's appreciation of the medical and scientific insight of the era elaborated by Richardson leads to the questioning of this appreciation: he learns not how interconnected are the mind and body, immortality and mortality, and materiality and phenomenality; rather, he learns how tenuous their connection is. Keats, then, dwells on the unresolved question still puzzling cognitive and neuroscientists today: how can the material brain produce non-material consciousness. And, further, he entertains the possibility that this production cannot be taken for granted: again, he can only account for it through the *deus ex machina* of Fancy.

V. After Love

The threat of the absolute disappearance of Love is a threat (or perhaps a hope) that contemporary criticism confronts today: a "working brain" that is not conscious and does not have a psyche, or, alternatively, conscious thought that does not have a body. This threat is the threat of the historical destruction of what should be, by all good reasoning, a precondition for history as we know it—namely, the constitutive play between the brain's materiality and the mind's consciousness. How could history continue—and would it still be what we call 'history'—if such a disappearance were possible? History, in its most general and minimal sense, is written *by* psyches that are also material and is written *about* psyches' transformation of materiality and materiality's transformation of the psyche.

By asking such questions, Keats's poem does not necessarily conclude with a paranoid fear of a dystopian future in which humanity is replaced by robots. But "Ode to Psyche" does ask how, considering that consciousness has always already been more artificial or robotic or external or historical than it would like to think, such an artificial or robotic future could arise. How, in other words, can we talk about the medical and technological transformations that could eradicate the psyche without—like so many dystopian (or utopian) pronouncements of the end of humanity—erroneously smuggling in the assumption that the psyche has not always already been artificial, robotic and, as it were, ended or inhuman? How can the end of psyche's history be thought without presupposing a stable psyche in the first place?

Scholars of Romanticism—whether from a historical or deconstructive tradition—often assume that while subjectivity and selfhood are historically constructed, mutable, and specific, there nevertheless seems to be a certain notion of the self, or individuation

at least, that survives throughout history and is necessary for history to emerge in the first place. While the manners, types, functions, tropes, and logics of individuation change according to time and space, it seems to be generally agreed by scholars from myriad backgrounds and disciplinary commitments that history cannot proceed or occur without some sort of individuation and illusion of a psyche. And yet, at that very moment in history when so much attention and anxiety is given to the role of selfhood (whether in its historicity, its instability, or its ground), Keats considers the possibility not of a psyche that is always historically specific, but of a psyche that might not even exist in a historically singular and fractured form. In other words, at the moment in history when thinkers arguably begin to affirm actively that the self is *both* transhistorical *and* always historically specific and constructed, Keats suggests that this already unstable notion of the psyche is itself facing the possibility of an even more devastating ruin. "Ode to Psyche" considers a psyche *after*, as it were, the historicity of psyche; in the plainest of terms, he considers the possibility of artificial intelligence, and he does so *without* presuming that intelligence has not always already been artificial, external, historical.

In introducing a thinking machine that has no illusion whatsoever of a psyche that phenomenalizes materiality, Keats also puts pressure on the deconstructive—in particular, the Demanian—refrain that while the difference between materiality and phenomenality is predicated upon its instability, it will nonetheless irreducibly and necessarily survive. De Man insists again and again that no manner how many times oppositions—especially between articulation and disarticulation, performative event and tropology, materiality and aesthetic ideology—may be deconstructed, they will necessarily insist themselves and the deconstructor will necessarily fall into the traps of

tropology, phenomenalization, and aesthetic ideology. And the early Derrida's refrain is that no matter how much we might outline the contours of the closure of metaphysics and point to a writing or exteriority that 'precedes' it, we cannot escape metaphysics (since the attempt to escape absolutely and purify ourselves of metaphysics is the metaphysical move *par excellence*) but can only strategically displace it. De Man and Derrida here seem to be on entirely solid ground: how could there be, for example, a writer of history that does not necessarily convert material events that exceed meaning into meaning? Keats, though, intervenes and suggests that the very oppositions that seem to be constitutive of history can in fact face historical erasure absolutely. A thinking machine that writes history can in fact be immune from the tropes and narratives that any history relies upon. Such machines, from my understanding of new media and AI theory, do not yet quite exist, but their possibility cannot be ruled out, and their mere possibility is enough to put considerable pressure on the deconstructive notions of remainder, relapse, repetition, and inheritance. In the face of the most cherished and rigorous academic truism, Keats insists that difference—which is nothing but the survival of its own disappearance—can disappear *absolutely*.

Keats was able, no doubt, to write "Ode to Psyche" because of his historical moment—that insanely brief, intense moment called Romanticism. I would contend that, on the one hand, it is imperative to ask about the history *of* the insight, to understand the insight's historical conditions, whether they be romantic brain science, Hellenism, the drive to unite or differentiate *eros* (body and sexuality) and *psyche* (mind and consciousness), or the anonymity of the public sphere that could think without having a body per se.[clxxv] What does it suggest that—before artificial intelligence and before

today's situation in which futural fictions become historical realities before we have even digested the fictions—Keats was able to ask about thought without a material substrate or a thinking materiality without consciousness? Assuming that my reading is not only the privilege of my postmodern position, what does it suggest that Romanticism—arguably at the beginning of what we call 'modernity'—is thinking the ends of modernity in ways which postmodernity is just beginning to confront under the peril of an uncontrollable technological hegemony (if not determinism)?

On the other hand, it is imperative for us to engage Keats's insight *about* history. The burden of *our* mystery is to follow Keats and think how or whether history could manage to destroy the very Love that seems to be the condition of possibility of history. Alongside contemporary theory on new media, I would contend that, fiction or not, we have to consider how the possibility of material thought affects our notion of history, remainders, and difference. If the psyche—in all its instability—cannot be taken for granted as a precondition of historicity, then how will history have to reformulate itself? Will material thinkers without consciousnesses be able to write history, and how will we write about or even recognize such beings into our history? This is simply to repeat what one of the primary questions of the "digital humanities" should be.

Notes

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[i] From "Dark Star," by Robert Hunter (and Garcia, Lesh, Kreutzmann, Hart, McKernan, Wier), *Box of Rain* 54.

[ii] No emphasis other than Wordsworth's is required for this phrase: the "language really used by men" (597), "the very language of men" (600), "the language of men" (600), "the language really spoken by men" (602), "real language of nature" (605), "the real language of men" (608), "the real language of men" (612).

[iii] For the best formulation of this structure, see Geoffrey Bennington, especially chapters "R. I. P." in *Interrupting Derrida*; "The End is Here" in *Other Analyses: Reading Philosophy*; as well as the essays published in *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida*.

[iv] See the second chapter of Sara Guyer's *Romanticism After Auschwitz*.

[v] For an argument that any and all language is apocalyptic, see Derrida's "On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy."

[vi] Take for instance Lord Byron's short poem "Darkness," which tells of "a dream, which was not all a dream" in which the "bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars/ Did wander darkling in the eternal space,/ Rayless, and pathless…" (ll. 1-4). "Darkness" tells of the remaining humans who eventually die out until the "world was void,/ The populous and the powerful—was a lump,/ Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless—/ A lump of death—a chaos of hard clay" (ll. 69-72). But even in this poem of a universe devoid of light, motion, and life, something yet survives: "Darkness had no need/ Of aid from them—She was the universe" (ll. 81-2). Even in this poem that tries to think the final end of the universe, a remnant still survives as the anthropomorphized and feminized universe, as if the final absence becomes the gaping void of the womb awaiting a new God's insemination of light and form. Ending with a new beginning, "Darkness," in a subtle and sexist manner, proves itself apocalyptic.

[vii] For more on Godwin and immortality, population, and death, see Maureen N. McLane's *Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species*, especially Chapter Five.

[viii] On this permanence of the principle of population, see also pages 24-5 and page 60.

[ix] In Chapter XV of *An Essay* Malthus attacks the possibility of even imagining a better world:

> It has been frequently observed that though we cannot hope to reach perfection in any thing, yet that it must always be advantageous to us to place before our eyes the most perfect models. This observation has a plausible appearance but is far from being generally true. I even doubt its truth in one of the most obvious exemplifications that would occur…. A highly intellectual being, exempt from the infirm calls of hunger or sleep, is undoubtedly a much more perfect existence than man; but were man to attempt to copy such a model, he would not only fail in making any advances towards it, but by unwisely straining to imitate what was inimitable, he would probably destroy the little intellect which he was endeavouring to improve

> The form and structure of society which Mr Godwin describes is as essentially distinct from any forms of society which have hitherto prevailed in the world as a being that can live without food or sleep is from a man. By improving society in its present form, we are making no more advances towards such a state of things as he pictures than we should make approaches towards a line, with regard to which we were walking parallel. The question, therefore, is whether, by looking to such a form of society as our polar star, we are likely to advance or retard the improvement of the human species? My Godwin appears to me to have decided this question against himself in his essay on avarice and profusion in the Enquirer. (115-6)

[x] For a reading of the allusions to Revelations in this passage, see Tim Fulford's "Millenarianism and the Study of Romanticism" and Gary Harrison's "Ecological Apocalypse: Privation, Alterity, and Catastrophe in the Work of Arthur Young and Thomas Robert Malthus," both in *Romanticism and Millenarianism*.

[xi] See David Collings' "The Discipline of Death: Knowledge and Power in *An Essay on the Principle of Population*" for more on Malthus and biopolitics.

[xii] For a more detailed discussion of how romantic geology and biology pertains to the thought of total death, see my Chapter Three.

[xiii] For a discussion on romantic Hellenism, see Timothy Webb's "Romantic Hellenism" in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*. See also Webb's *English Romantic Hellenism: 1700-1824*.

[xiv] For the most emphatic argument that the Napoleonic Wars were in fact the first *total war* in the modern sense, see David A. Bell's *The First Total War*. See also Mary A. Favret's *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime*.

[xv] For more on the periodical and public opinion, see Andrew Franta's *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public* and John Klancher's *The Making of English Reading Audiences: 1790-1832*.

[xvi] See Lieselotte Sauer's "Romantic Automata" in *European Romanticism: Literary Cross-Currents, Modes, and Models*.

[xvii] "Men, like poets, rush 'into the middest,' *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of the span they need fictive concords with origins and ends" (7).

[xviii] See Timothy Morton, "Romantic Disaster Ecology: Shelley, Blake, Wordsworth."

[xix] See Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally* 26.

[xx] Herein lies the one of the most profound links between Romanticism and both psychoanalysis and deconstruction (especially in regard to Derrida's notions of trace, remainder, *survivance*, *revenant*, hauntology, etc.). I refer to Sara Guyer once again: "But with each act of speaking, identity (death) is at once posited and evaded—posited as what one already will have survived, what is perpetually past… and ever still to come. If Heidegger, Derrida, Lévinas, Blanchot, and de Man have made these logics—as well as their rhetorical and ethical implications—familiar to us, so much so that one could say that that [sic] the entirety of what we call deconstruction (spanning, for example, from Emmanuel Lévinas to Judith Butler) can be understood as generating a rhetoric of survival, my point here will be that within romanticism this rhetoric already is under way.

Or, to put it another way, one that will resonate with claims about romanticism's uncontainment, familiar to readers of Carol Jacobs, Cynthia Chase, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: deconstruction is, in fact, romantic" (14).

[xxi] Caruth uses this phrase in "After the End: Psychoanalysis in the Ashes of History," the fifth chapter of her forthcoming *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Johns Hopkins). She also has used the phrase in various graduate seminars I have taken with her at Emory University. The term is used by Derrida (see, for instance "Ousia and Gramme" in *Margins*, 66), but he does not use it, to my knowledge, in the sense that Caruth has introduced. I am profoundly indebted to her for the term and concept of "absolute erasure," which I found and continue to find absurd. Her patience with my persistent incredulity is itself more than I could ask for.

[xxii] The exact phrase he uses is "half erased" (118).

[xxiii] Indeed, my articulation of the difference between the irreducibility of survival and the end of that irreducibility might very well turn out to be a dubious difference, since the end of the logic of survival might already be a profound possibility at the origin of that logic. In *Sovereignties in Question* Derrida writes: "Ash, we were saying, annihilates or threatens to annihilate even the *possibility* of bearing witness to annihilation" (69). Claims similar to this can be found scattered across many works from the late 1980s, in *Cinders*, in "There is No *One* Narcissism" and "Passages—from Traumatism to Promise" both printed in *Points…*, and in *Archive Fever*. A certain interest emerges in his writing around the *remainderless*. And yet, every time Derrida puts forth the thought of a destruction that destroys even the possibility of its repetition and return, he simultaneously incorporates this thought into the structure of *survivance*, of the irreducible and necessary survival—or possible survival—of what has been annihilated, incinerated, reduced to ash. To put it schematically: on the one hand, Derrida seems, in a cryptic fashion, obsessed with the idea of the absolute and remainderless destruction of what that was never there in the first place; on the other hand, as soon as this emerges in his text, it comes with a "but" or an "on the other hand"—on the other hand, the annihilation of what was never there in the first place leaves a trace that will in turn not be there but that might arrive from the future, when and where and if it is read again. Derrida's texts from the late 1980s onward offer a difference between trace and ash—the remainder of what is *not* and the annihilation of the possibility of that remainder—but dispense with the difference almost as soon as it is made and suggest that ash cannot be distinguished from trace. I cannot, in this note, do more than mark this furtively introducted difference. My task in this dissertation is not to establish anything like an opposition or dichotomy between erasure and absolute erasure, but to note a difference—a difference, moreover, that might minutely displace what Derrida means by remainder or trace or survival. For more on survival or survivance, see *Living On: Border Lines*, *Specters of Marx*, and *Learning to Live Finally*.

[xxiv] The phrase 'exceeds the thought of survival' is a difficult one. For according to the understanding of survival as I have elaborated it here, both thinking as such and the signified thought of the logic of survival simply are excessive, leading beyond themselves and surviving as other than themselves. And yet—if I may be permitted a rather ugly sentence—the excess that I mean to name with my phrase is an excess that is precisely in excess of the thought of excess. The romantics try to think a concept that

cannot be understood according to the logic of survival. And considering that the concept of the concept cannot be understood without the logic of survival (since concepts survive in and as their own erasure), the romantics try to think something enigmatic, unthinkable, unconceptualizable, but perhaps also, I will argue, crucial for our "sense of history," to borrow Alan Liu's phrasing.

[xxv] Liu makes this point with an explicitness not to be found in McGann or Levinson: "strong denials of history are also the deepest realizations of history" (32).

[xxvi] It could be argued that McGann's reflection on Romanticism is in fact a repetition of Wordsworth's reflection on himself. While McGann's explicit claim is that formalist scholars of the 1960s and 70s failed to gain a critical distance from their object of study and so repeat its ideology, McGann also explicitly acknowledges that his own argument is a repetition or survival of the romantic one: "In the Romantic Period, however, the ground of universals of a Natural Law philosophy had been undermined, largely through the development of historical studies and the emergence of a modern historical sense. No longer did human nature seem always and everywhere the same, and the celebrated 'epistemological crisis' was the chief register or this new ideological fact" (67). In other words, romantic ideology self-reflexively registers its own ideological response to a newly discovered and unsettling historicism. As such, McGann's text finds itself conceding that it cannot gain the critical distance it demands. Against its own explicit claims, *The Romantic Ideology* admits that the ideological problematic of Romanticism continues to be the ideological problematic of today: we survive bearing the romantic insight—namely, that we know we are ideological but cannot thereby escape ideology or totally recognize our material embeddedness. No matter what critical distance we presume, we draw on "the critical power which past works of poetry exercise on present acts of reading" and we draw on "the critical resources of Romantic poetry in particular" (14). Romanticism survives until today, and we survive as romantics, as subjects fractured by a knowledge that we cannot make good on.

[xxvii] Liu is here reiterating Marjorie Levinson's claim in *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* that history is "'the nothing that is'. Levinson writes: "deconstructive materialism" "represent[s] the literary work as that which speaks of one thing because it cannot articulate another—presenting formally a sort of allegory by absence, where the signified is indicated by an identifiably absent signifier" (10, 9). History (the signified) undoes the text's sense of its self-contained presence by inscribing a determinate absence (the text's "absent signifier") "at the heart of manifest discourse" (11). The upshot of her argument is not only that history creates fault lines at the core of the romantics' attempt to live in the self-presence of interiority; it is also that the very thing Levinson wants to bring to light—namely, erased history—is itself an absent presence, surviving only as that which has disappeared with time. Whatever the critic "reconstruct[s]" is an "alterity," which is to say that the critic's reconstructed history will at best be a textual trace of what is now unreadable and unreconstructable (ibid.).

[xxviii] To give a sense of just how varied and complex the scholarship on "romantic historicism" is, I will quote a long passage from Chandler: "To consult the critical literature on the history of historicism in post-Enlightenment Europe is to confront an oddly sorted range of opinion. The oddity is that, while commentators are quite unanimous in the judgment that European intellectual culture underwent radical

historiographical transformations between, say, 1770 and 1830, they are quite divided about what that transformation actually amounts to: there is more agreement, for example, about the claim that the concept of contemporaneity undergoes major changes in this period than there is about what it means to make such a claim. No doubt, from commentators as diverse as Friedrich Meinecke, R. G. Collingwood, Georg Lukács, Hannah Arendt, Louis Althusser, Reinhart Koselleck, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, J. G. A. Pocock, Hans Blumenberg, Tzvetan Todorov, and Benedict Anderson, one could hardly expect full unanimity. Yet each locates a fundamental change in the recognition and representation of historical time *in* a time that is either called 'Romantic' or dated to a period (roughly 1770-1830) that we otherwise associate with the advent of Romanticism in its early (i.e., British) phase)" (101).

[xxix] Even Foucault seems to take the position that the historically singular irruption of the modern *episteme* generalizes itself throughout history. While the concept of the *episteme*—a presupposed blind spot of knowledge and experience that cannot be grounded insofar as it is grounding—is specifically a modern concept, Foucault understands any given historical or temporal period as constitutively relying upon its epistemic arrangement. As such, by understanding temporality from the perspective of modern temporality, Foucault does not only hermeneutically place himself in the logic of his *episteme*; he also implies that history itself can only ever have happened or be happening because it necessarily presupposes a central ground that remains ungrounded. That is, if Foucault seeks to historicize knowledge, then he can only do so if he simultaneously understands the *logic* of the *episteme* as 'prior' to any particular *episteme* and 'prior' to the *concept* of an *episteme*. The 'ahistorical' opening of the possibility of temporality as such and the historical specificity of modernity merge and differentiate themselves here. The debate that emerges between those two groundbreaking 1966 texts—*The Order of Things* and Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"—can be understood as a debate as to whether the ahistorical (but, for Derrida, always historically specific) opening of time should be privileged or the historical specificity of our modern understanding of temporality should be. The paradox is that the thought of the opening of time destroys the possibility of historicizing it, and the thought of the modern specificity of the concept of the opening of time destroys the possibility of placing it 'prior' to its historical context.

[xxx] Jerome Christensen's *Romanticism at the End of History* deserves special attention. As a response to Francis Fukuyama's claim that history has ended or accomplished itself with neoliberal hegemony, Christensen reminds us that that claim itself has a history that extends at least back to Romanticism and that the claim fails to account for what "remains unmasterable by the ideological eye" (34). In Romanticism Christensen finds certain acts, sects, and signs that, in their irresponsibility or irrationality or uselessness, elude their context and fight against the present order of things, such that they cannot be recognized until after the fact, retrospectively or from their own 'future'. But both these unrecognizable acts and the historicization that seeks to domesticate them fail. The acts only gain their force when they are grasped in the future, but once they are grasped and conceptualized they lose the very unrecognizability that gave them their power. Inversely, the historicization that domesticates them necessarily partakes in the transgressive and anachronistic task of bringing to light the future-oriented acts that were

not recognizable at the time. Historicization and the resistance to it become most patently inextricable with the romantic use of "the uncanny repetition of stereotypes": the progressive hijacking of repetition is forced to appeal to the conservative force of stereotyping and the conservative containment of these repetitions can only spread them (26). History here proceeds in a ghostly fashion, with historicization and its excesses both contaminating the other, both destroying and surviving the other. More to the point, in describing—with the historical nuance that he employs—the unstable play of history specific to Romanticism, Christensen ends up articulating a generalized theory of history and politics.

[xxxi] For this sense of the term 'mood', see *Being and Time* 5A.

[xxxii] For de Man, though, this necessity only can make sense after the deconstruction of the dichotomy between chance and necessity. The play between positing and tropology "stands beyond the polarities of chance and determination" (116). And yet, the chance of this play remains in de Man's corpus a necessary one.

[xxxiii] I make a similar claim about necessity and chance in Derrida's early work in my "Erasing Differences Between Derrida and Agamben" (forthcoming, *Oxford Literary Review*).

[xxxiv] In his insistence upon both the *inevitable* "rift in the social" and *inevitable* attempt to bridge it, Forrest Pyle's *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* perhaps stresses the permanence of romantic survival more than any other work (8, "inevitable" is his word, which appears on page 8 and then throughout his introduction).

[xxxv] See Rodolphe Gasché's *The Tain of the Mirror* for one of the earlier uses of this term.

[xxxvi] In a more critical or skeptical register, we might say that he grants others a sense of self-importance and self-righteousness by giving them the chance to keep his bare existence alive.

[xxxvii] David Simpson makes the same point in his reading of the beggar in *Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern*, a reading to which I am much indebted (71).

[xxxviii] For the complex relations between capital and walking, see Celeste Langan's *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom*, especially Chapter Two.

[xxxix] According to Foucault's analysis in *Security, Territory, Population*, the general argument was as follows. If people continue to give to the poor and support them in one way or another, then the poor will continue to be a problem. The poor remain poor precisely because laws are unnaturally created that assist them, that allow them to survive in their poverty. The solution, then, is to let the poor be, to treat poverty as a natural phenomenon rather than as an aberrant deviation of the economic system that has to be fixed by it. Impoverished people who do not become self-regulating and independent members of society (or who do not die) will be treated as *natural* deviations that can be calculated and predicted by biopolitical techniques on the level of the population. See also David Collings' "The Discipline of Death: Knowledge and Power in *An Essay on the Principle of Population*" and David Simpson's *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination.*

[xl] The "Discharged Soldier" episode in Book Four of the 1805 *The Prelude* is taken from an earlier draft written in 1798, in the same months that Wordsworth composed "The Old Cumberland Beggar." For a discussion on the difference between the two versions, see

James H. Averill's *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering*, pp. 142-6, and C. F. Stone III's "Narrative Variation in Wordsworth's Versions of 'The Discharged Soldier'." For a study of the version from *The Prelude* that investigates the figuration of sympathy and community in light of eighteenth-century moral philosophy, see Nancy Yousef's "Wordsworth, Sentimentalism, and the Defiance of Sympathy," which is interested in what survives the failure of the episode: "'Solemn and sublime' the encounter might have been but for the discomfiting sense that to be drawn from solitude is not necessarily to enter into fellowship. And it is perhaps the vividness of this awkward disappointment that survives the encounter" (212).

[xli] The replacement, though, is not isomorphic: the figure now holding the village together is not the uncanny beggar whom everyone recognizes and who resides within the village, but rather the discharged soldier with no village to call home. One beggar lives *within* the village as its excess or outside, the other beggar roams *outside* the village but logically holds it together as the outside within. And with the disappearance of the one and the appearance of the other, the village undergoes a death that it survives.

[xlii] *The Excursion,* of course, was meant to restore the hope that had been lost.

[xliii] There is, however, one exception that I know of. Andrew Bennett begins Chapter Four of his *Romanticism and the Culture of Posterity* as follows: "Wordsworth's poetry presents us with one of the most disturbing paradoxes of survival and an engagement with its ultimate failure: the fantasy of survival is, finally, bound up with the possibility of non-survival" (95). I would argue, though, that he does not go nearly far enough with this thought.

[xliv] See "Past Recognition: Narrative Origins in Wordsworth and Freud."

[xlv] For the canonical essay on this passage, see M. H. Abrams's "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor." For a more recent discussion of the passage, see Klaus Peter Mortensen's *The Time of Unrememberable Being: Wordsworth and the Sublime 1787-1805.*

[xlvi] This passage is far from unique in *The Prelude*. Versions of it repeat again and again. In the first Book, Wordsworth writes:

> …if my mind
> Remembering the sweet promise of the past,
> Would gladly grapple with some noble theme,
> Vain is her wish; where'er she turns she finds
> Impediments from day to day renewed. (I.137-41)

If we read "the sweet promise of the past" as the promise of a remembered self-identity, then we can understand the failure or vanity of the wish as implying that the promise of has been and will remain a guise. Moreover, the perpetual disappointment of the wish is perpetually forgotten, for the disappointment "day to day renewed" implies not only that the disappointment is renewed daily, but also that the attempt to overcome this disappointment is renewed daily. And just as in the last passage we looked at, what is particularly striking about this passage—and many others like it—is not that it describes and enacts the temporal structure that we have been analyzing; rather, what is particularly striking is that the passage cannot be situated *within* a temporal context. The participle and the conditional grammar coupled with the "where'er" which reads almost like a "when'er" suggests that the described temporality 'happens' not *in* time, but 'before'

time. What the passage describes does not happen at a particular moment in *The Prelude*, but happens always already, describing not a moment in the biographical context of the poem but rather that which allows for the temporality of context in the first place.

[xlvii] In a more Heideggerian vein, it could further be argued that the forgetting of presence is tantamount to the irreducible fall into clock or measured time. See for example Herbert Lindenberger's *On Wordsworth's Prelude*, which, if not in so many words, understands clock time as a constitutive threat to the internal time of memory and expectation. This reading seems to me correct, with the caveat that 'internal time' appears after, as it were, clock time.

[xlviii] I use the word "point" deliberately so as to avoid both 'describe' and 'perform.' In one sense, *The Prelude* not only describes the opening of temporality, but it also performs it. For again and again we get that characteristically Wordsworthian announcement of the presence of the present and then, immediately following, the "If this/ Be but a vain belief…" of "Tintern Abbey" (ll. 50-1). Similarly, at the end of Book Four, Wordsworth writes:

> From Nature and her overflowing soul
> I had received so much that all my thoughts
> Were steeped in feeling. I was only then
> Contented when with bliss ineffable
> I felt the sentiment of Being spread
> O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
> O'er all, that, lost beyond the reach of thought
> And human knowledge, to the human eye
> Invisible, yet liveth in the heart…
> …for in all things
> I saw one life… (II.416-430)

But, predictably, Wordsworth immediately follows this passage with: "If this be error…" (II.435). However, while *The Prelude* seems both to describe and enact the structure of temporality, it does not thereby achieve a reconciliation by doing what it says. Or, at most it could be said that the poem both does and does not do what it says. I thank Deborah Elise White for pointing out to me the persistent pattern in which Wordsworth posits, backs off, posits, backs off again, and so on.

[xlix] I have been arguing that Wordsworth's struggle to figure the childhood self at one with itself ends up describing the deconstruction of temporality constitutive of subjectivity. This argument is indebted to Paul de Man's writings on Romanticism, which, for my purposes, are best exemplified in "Time and History in Wordsworth," one of his 1967 Gauss Seminars, where de Man asserts that "the key to an understanding of Wordsworth lies in the relationship between imagination and time, not in the relationship between imagination and nature" (92). In the version of "The Winander Boy" incorporated into *The Prelude*, Wordsworth substitutes a third person narrative for a first person one; he makes the tale not about himself but about the boy from Winander. And when Wordsworth figures the boy's unification of the imagination and nature, he ends up describing the boy's death, for that is all such a unification could be. De Man argues that, in the original poem still in the first person, Wordsworth's look back to childhood—to the non-self-conscious self-presence wherein nature and the imagination are reconciled—

is in fact a look forward towards his own death. Because it is impossible to figure one's own death without betraying the figuration, Wordsworth figures it as someone else's and as happening in the past rather than the future. By placing his own death in the past and in the third person, Wordsworth is able to reflect on that death, to reflect on his survival of that death. He succeeds not at figuring original experience, but at figuring his survival of the death that that experience woud be. In this way, de Man understands the imagination as the ability to speak from after the death of the self, the ability, in the future, to remain and reflect upon the fact that one's humanity has always already died, that one's true human life is forever no longer or not yet:

> This backward motion does not exist in nature but is the privilege of the faculty of mind that Wordsworth calls the imagination, asserting the possibility of reflection in the face of the most radical dissolution, personal or historical. The imagination engenders hope and future, not in the form of historical progress, nor in the form of an immortal life after death that would make human history unimportant, but as the persistent, future possibility of a retrospective reflection on its own decay. (88)

The imagination is unable to figure the death that it has survived (for that death is *not*) and thus can only figure its *survival*. And yet, while Wordsworth learns that the imagination will always fail to figure its origin or completion, he cannot but forget the limits of the imagination. Even after he learns that the imagination can only, at best, "reflect on its own decay," Wordsworth will nonetheless try (and fail) to figure what he learns is a radical absence. The combination of the inability to figure one's original self-identity and the irreducibility of continuing to presuppose it accounts for, according to de Man, the originary possibility of temporality.

[l] See "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy*.

[li] In Book Seven, Wordsworth quite explicitly says that the value of London lies in showing him, by contrast, to appreciate solitude. Solitude, of course, implies the train of thought that allows man to discover *a priori* the universal imagination in disregard to its historical embeddedness.

> If aught there were of real grandeur here
> 'Twas only then when gross realities,
> The incarnation of the Spirits that moved
> Amid the Poet's beauteous world, called forth,
> With that distinctness which a contrast gives
> Or opposition, made me recognize
> As by a glimpse, the things which I had shaped
> And yet not shaped, had seen, and scarcely seen,
> Had felt, and thought of in my solitude (VII.508-16).

[lii] In his *Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern* David Simpson makes a similar point in a more historical register. He suggests that the fully developed notion of a rural community only came about once this community was threatened. Throughout his "encounter poetry," Wordsworth thematizes that commodification and foreign wars constitutively infect the ideal community from the start. As such, as soon as the rural ideal emerges in Wordsworth, it emerges as already infected by the urban: "[b]eggar and narrator both are in this way eerie incarnations of *urbs in rure*" (76).

[liii] It might be added that Wordsworth is displaying a little self-blindness here, for it is not rarely that he "stoop[s] to transitory themes"—just the opposite.

[liv] For a summary of the scholarship that has read the dwarf man as a mere foil for the Winander Boy, see Adam Potkay's "'A Satire on Myself': Wordsworth and the Infant Prodigy." Potkay reads the dwarf man as a satirical figure of Wordsworth himself in his childhood. By writing his younger self as a satire, Wordsworth is able to mock as well as preserve that which he wants to efface. Potkay points out that Wordsworth tries to materially erase the dwarf man from the 1850 *Prelude* and suggests that such an erasure seeks to erase the constitutive division between Wordsworth's (less fortunate) past self and his (more fortunate) writing and editing one. As such, it could be argued that Wordsworth's attempt to erase the dwarf man from the 1850 version amounts to Wordsworth trying to become one with himself, to create a conformity between his past and present. See also William H. Galperin, "Authority and Deconstruction in Book V of *The Prelude*" and "The Mind in the 'Landscape of Technology': Resistances to Spectacle in Wordsworth's *Prelude*" in his *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism.* For a standard understanding of the dwarf man passage as a dialectic of Enlightenment of sorts, see Kenneth R. Johnston' "Wordsworth and *The Recluse*: The University of Imagination," in which he writes that "much of the book [Book V] is taken up with a surprisingly savage satire on the 'monster birth' that modern educational theories have produced" (67).

[lv] The comparison with Rousseau brings to mind the nascent anthropology of the eighteenth century that so concerned the Romantics. The connection between unity and anthropology should be brought to bear on the claims by Foucault, Koselleck, and others that around 1800 a specific mode of temporality was developing. For anthropological research not only revealed (the temporality of) other cultures, but also gave rise to the myth of the noble savage: with the difference between cultural temporalities comes the fantasy of a humanity without temporal difference. For illuminating discussions on anthropology and Wordsworth, see Alan Bewell's *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment*, Maureen McLane's *Romanticism and the Human Sciences*, and see Charles J. Rzepka's "Sacrificial Sites, Place-Keeping, and 'Pre-History' in Wordsworth's 'Michael'."

[lvi] Likewise, Wordsworth's ventures into historically contingent circumstances or places are always associated with a moral fall. Of his experience in Cambridge, Wordsworth writes: "now and then/ Forced labour, and, more frequently, forced hopes;/ And, worse than all, a treasonable growth/ Of indecisive judgements that impaired/ And shook the mind's simplicity" (III.212-6). London and the aftermath of the French Revolution are portrayed not only as deviating from nature, but as threatening the morality of England and France's populations. In London, "transported hence as in a dream/ [Wordsworth] found [him]self begirt with temporal shapes/ Of vice and folly thrust upon [his] view" (VIII.641-3). Not in control of his own self, he finds himself "transported" to a different time and place, the time and place where he can no longer differentiate between good and evil. He is removed from temporality but is "begirt with *temporal shapes*." That is, he is no longer a temporal being living always in a present that passes, but is begirt with temporal things, with transient, historical shapes that nonetheless seem to defy time in their persistence as spatialized shapes: he has left natural time for historical time, for the type of 'temporality' that is longer temporal but only has temporal *shapes*, the type of

temporality that seems to destroy the natural rhythm of daily life precisely by naturalizing the contingent. And with this he is "brought… to guilt and wretchedness" (VIII.657-8). But no matter how lost historically and morally, Wordsworth tears himself away as if he had not just lost precisely the ability to tear himself away. Once again he is able to "deem [him]self/ A moral agent." Moreover, to "judg[e] between good and evil" is not for the "mind's delight,/ But for her safety" (VIII.668-9). Deeming himself moral is not for his pleasure or even for his uprightness, but for his *survival*, "for [his mind's] *safety*." It is not that he has finally discovered for once and for all the true distinction between good and evil, but that the difference itself (no matter how much in error, no matter how obscure) has reemerged. Thus, that he can *deem* himself (rightly or wrongly) a moral agent is a matter of survival. To be a perfectly natural human who has fallen from perfection in *The Prelude* amounts to losing the rigorous distinction between good and evil. But the difference between good and evil, no matter how undone it becomes, should survive as a deconstructed difference. However, as Wordsworth's stint with history suggests, temporality-destroying history threatens to destroy *absolutely* the difference that should irreducibly survive as a deconstructed one.

[lvii] For an articulation of the being of nothingness (and so the impossibility of a pure nothingness), see Levinas's early *Existence and Existents*:

> Let us imagine all beings, things and persons, reverting to nothingness. One cannot put this return to nothingness outside of all events. But what of this nothingness itself? Something would happen, if only night and the silence of nothingness…. This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable "consummation" of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *there is*…. In the night, where we are riveted to it, we are not dealing with anything. But this nothing is not that of pure nothingness. There is no longer *this* or *that*; there is not "something." But this universal absence is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence. It is not the dialectical counterpart of absence, and we do not grasp it in a thought. It is immediately there. (51-2)

[lviii] Asserting that the *episteme* does not name the originary possibility of temporality but rather that by means of which we understanding the originary possibility raises a difficult question: if an epistemic blind spot is not the condition of possibility of temporality and historicity, then what is? If I understand Foucault correctly, the answer would be to refuse the question, to refuse the necessity of having such a transcendental ground, even if we cannot think without it. I suppose one could oppose Foucault and Derrida by arguing that the former maintains that we cannot think without transcendentality for historical reasons, whereas the latter holds that we cannot think without it for essential reasons. Such an argument is no doubt seductive but would require, on the one hand, a sustained investigation into the historicity of the "essential reasons" and, on the other hand, an analysis of the appeal to a vague notion of history as a last resort in Foucault.

[lix] There are, of course, exceptions to this critical agreement. See, for example, Ian Almond's short reading of Book Seven in "Wordsworthian Comparisons with Augustine's *Civitas Dei*." In their "The Experience of the City in British Romantic Poetry," Michael Gassenmeier and Hens Martin Gurr write that "Wordsworth offers a long sequence of largely positive and enthusiastic impressions of the city followed by the

final Bartholomew Fair scene which must be read not, as critics would have it […], as a summary but as a kind of counterpoint and renunciation of the preceding 650 verses of book 7" (310). While I find the readings of London as a positive experience to be unconvincing, the point is well taken that London is not simply bad. Rather, Wordsworth's attitude to it seems to be one of polarized ambivalence: a strong attraction to the attractiveness that he disdains. For more on this very ambivalence, see James A. Heffernan's "Wordsworth's London: The Imperial Monster," and David Francis Taylor's "Wordsworth at the Theater: Illegitimate Spectacle in Book 7 of *The Prelude*."

[lx] See Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Crary continues that in the early nineteenth century temporality ceased to be reduced to the metaphorics of the eye when the eye started to become the object rather than subject of knowledge. While the undoing of the camera obscura as the dominant paradigm opened up the relationship between the perceiver and perceived to a genuinely temporal dimension, Crary is quick to point out that the temporalization of the spatial model of the camera obscura was by no means liberatory. Rather, the studying, training, and disciplining of the eye allowed for new forms of power/knowledge with respect to vision.

[lxi] See also James A. W. Heffernan's "Wordsworth's London: The Imperial Monster," which suggests, if not in so many words, that Wordsworth is drawn to London as a point of contrast. As such, London serves as a foil or supplement that enables Wordsworth to have the illusion of a life outside the deathly city.

[lxii] In his "Metropolitan Wordsworth: Allegory as Affirmation and Critique in *The Prelude*," Stuart Allen makes a similar point with the help of Wordsworth's famous description of the storefronts as a "title-page,/ With letters huge inscribed from top to toe" (VII.176-7): "People and objects are difficult to tell apart, individual faces substitute with other faces and, in turn, become interchangeable with shop fronts. Wordsworth cannot even say whether the shop fronts themselves bear allegorical designs or are human." And in her *Reinventing Allegory*, Theresa M. Kelley writes: "In their verbal as well as visual registers, these lines let the distinction between animate human figures and inanimate ones cave in under closer scrutiny. Wordsworth's 'endless stream of men and moving images' is a case in point. Either they are pushed, or move of their own will, or—to split the difference—they are so cleverly mechanized that they seem to move on their own, like the ingenious automatons that were exhibited in London and on the Continent, beginning in the 1740s" (129).

[lxiii] For the canonical essay on this passage, see Mary Jacobus's "'Splitting the Race of Man in Twain': Prostitution, Personification, and *The Prelude*" in her *Romanticism, Writing, and Sexual Difference*.

[lxiv] In his *Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern*, David Simpson argues the opposite—namely, that while factory or alienated workers are explicitly absent, we can read the presence of that absence in the characters Wordsworth encounters. I do not disagree with this thesis, but instead of reading the inscription of that absence in Wordsworth's figures, I am concerned with reading the significance of the absence itself.

[lxv] Wordsworth does mention a "Jew" with a "basket at his waste" (V.231. 230) and the "slow-moving Turk,/ With freight of slippers piled beneath his arm" (V231-2). But besides these instances, the figures in London are producers or consumers of leisure.

[lxvi] For a very helpful guide to the debates concerning luxury and leisure in the eighteenth century, see Istvan Hont's "The early Enlightenment debate on commerce and luxury" in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought.*

[lxvii] For the dates of Wordsworth's visits to London, see Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*.

[lxviii] Explaining the type of reading that I will not perform here, the type of reading that tracks the erasure of the economic in Wordsworth, Marjorie Levinson writes: "Or, one might study Wordsworth's mythic resolution of logically insoluble problems (what E. P. Thompson has called 'search for a synthesis at a moment of arrested dialectic' and what we might conceive as an ideological compromise function), in terms of the textual procedures that transform lived contradiction into the appearance of aesthetic complexity" (4).

[lxix] For a brief account of commodities and exchange-value in Book Seven, see Benjamin P. Myers' "Wordsworth's Financial Sublime: Money and Meaning in Book VII of *The Prelude*." See also the second chapter of Celeste Langan's *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom*. David Simpson's *Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern* is a study on the figuration of commodification throughout Wordsworth's poetry. See also Gary Lee Harrison's *Wordsworth's Vagrant Muse: Poetry, Poverty, and Power*, especially the third and fifth chapters.

[lxx] Numerous critics have suggested that the blind man is dead. In her "Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream," Mary Jacobus writes of him: "No characters, no written paper, can inscribe being; and so the beggar is doomed to non-being. To death in fact…" (632). In her "History in the Background of Wordsworth's 'Blind Beggar'," Geraldine Friedman writes that the beggar "is nothing but a label, dead letters dressed up to look like a figure and 'propped' up as one more theatrical device in London" (141). "[T]he Beggar's label [is] his epitaph, the story of his life told on the occasion of his death" (144). In his "Wordsworth's Images of Language: Voice and Letter in *The Prelude*," J. Douglas Kneale writes: "The man appears divested of the indications of life: no motion has he now, no force; he neither speaks nor sees. He is his own living epitaph" (358). However, all of these scholars either assume that the beggar was once alive or assume that if he is dead, then it is as a sort of death-in-life. In contrast, I will argue that the beggar figures the possibility of absolute death, of the death even of (in)humanity.

[lxxi] The scholarship on the blind beggar is enormous as so much of Book Seven hangs upon his status. Indeed, critics can be understood as falling into two camps: those who read him as an offer of solace and those who read him as an interruption that calls for solace or demands to be covered over. In the former camp are: Neil Hertz's "The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime" in *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime*, John T. Ogden's "The Power of Distance in Wordsworth's *Prelude*," James A. Heffernan's "Wordsworth's London: The Imperial Monster," and Michael Gassenmeier's "Poetic Technique and Politics in Wordsworth's Rendering of His Urban Experience in Book VII of *The Prelude*." In the latter camp are: Geraldine Friedman's "History in the Background of Wordsworth's 'Blind Beggar," Lawrence Kramer's "Gender and Sexuality in *The Prelude*: The Question of Book Seven," Mary Jacobus's "Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream," J. Douglas Kneale's "Wordsworth's Images of Language: Voice and Letter in *The Prelude*,"

Michael Meyer's "Theatrical Spectacles and the Spectators' Positions in Wordsworth's London," William Chapman Sharpe's "The Other as Text: Wordsworth's Blind Beggar" in his *Unreal Cities: Urban Figuration in Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Whitman, Eliot, and Williams*, and William H. Galperin's "The Mind in the 'Land of Technology': Resistane to Spectacle in Wordsworth's *Prelude*" in his *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism*. For all the disagreements between these two groups (and within each group), critics unanimously agree that the passage amounts to survival. If London disfigures the narrative of *The Prelude*, then the blind beggar allows the poem to survive that disarticulation. And if the beggar himself disfigures the narrative of *The Prelude*, then the poem manages to survive that disfiguration, whether this survival occurs as the blind beggar's survival, as the survival of Wordsworth after his encounter with him, or as the survival of that which the beggar disarticulates. Both Kneale and Kramer, for example, understand the beggar's self as surviving its own death. The former writes: "*The Prelude* itself appears [as] but a label on a blind man's chest: Wordsworth is composing his own epitaph too" (359). And the latter writes that the episode of the blind beggar "is an act of self-reflection that seeks to perpetuate what it symbolizes as destroyed" (623). Jacobus argues that if the "blind beggar is the most threatening of all Wordsworth's Dark Interpreters," if he is "the spectre of spectacle," he is also "the means of its exorcism" (632). Friedman, who presents the most sustained analysis of the scene and the most penetrating account of the disfiguration that the blind beggar figures, writes: "The text must immediately suppress this history [that the beggar indicates] and simultaneously tell the story of the suppression" (143). See also, for Cynthia Chase's "The Accidents of Disfiguration: Limits to Literal and Figural Reading of Wordsworth's 'Books'," which does not dwell on the blind beggar but is essential for any reading of 'him'.

[lxxii] For more on the power of the stage in London, see Meyer's "Theatrical Spectacles and the Spectators' Positions in Wordsworth's London" in which he notes that even Wordsworth cannot but be placed onstage: "The poet presents London as a stage where the spectator Wordsworth turns into a character, who enters a potentially deluding play-within-the-play." Friedman's "History in the Background of Wordsworth's 'Blind Beggar'" also has an interesting discussion about the generalization of threatricality in London. She argues that the generalization of the theater beyond the 'actual' theater was conceived by Burke and Wordsworth as a French rather than English phenomenon, but that both Burke and Wordsworth cannot represent this theatricality without being interpellated by it.

[lxxiii] Meyer, "Theatrical Spectacles and the Spectators' Positions in Wordsworth's London."

[lxxiv] For the term "absolute image," I am once again indebted to Cathy Caruth, who used the term in her seminars while at Emory University between 2007 and 2010.

[lxxv] In this sense, Wordsworth's desire, in *Lyrical Ballads*, to return to the ordinary can be understood as a way of reopening the possibility of the extraordinary.

[lxxvi] My analysis of temporality is indebted to Gabriele's essay "Visions of the City of London: Mechanical Eye and Poetic Transcendence in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Book 7."

[lxxvii] For more on the now and the new in *The Prelude*, see Karen Hadley's discussion of "quantitative indifference" in "Inventing the 'little space of intermediate time': Wordsworthian Reflexive Historicism in *The Prelude*, Book 7 and 8."
[lxxviii] For a rather convincing reading of this passage as describing the flow of capital and commodities, see Benjamin P. Myers' "Wordsworth's Financial Sublime: Money and Meaning in Book VII of *The Prelude*."
[lxxix] Baudrillard is also interested in the dissemination of what remains. In critique, we unmask the real behind the illusion (ideology behind art, power behind innocence, etc.). The illusion then disappears, but it leaves a disseminated trace. For example: when religion can no longer be religion (when it has been revealed as delusion), instead of simply disappearing, it disseminates itself, infecting everything with religion (Kierkegaard: the faith in knowledge). When we critique technology, technology reveals itself everywhere (Heidegger: the shelter, the road, the hand, the brain, and the psyche are always already technological). When we critique sex and reveal that it is power, sex finds its home elsewhere—i.e., everywhere: sex now virally and virtually haunts everything (Freud), and all "real" sex becomes illusory (ready for the camera) and all illusory sex (pornography) becomes realer than real (Flynt, Hefner). When we finally critique critique, critique becomes disseminated to everything, and texts themselves become auto-critical (Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida).
[lxxx] Derrida, of course, would privilege Rousseau and the eighteenth century, but I do not think it entirely misleading to say that he privileges not so much the Enlightenment as the Enlightenment's discontents, which end up amounting to something like "Romanticism." Indeed, Rousseau is arguably more of a romantic figure than an Enlightment one.
[lxxxi] To offer just one example of a particularly sophisticated disagreement with Foucault, Koselleck, de Man, and Derrida: in *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* Friedrich Kittler locates around 1800 not the division or deferral of identity but rather its coalescence. In his account, the development of hermeneutics (the location of meaning beyond the circulation of dead letters) and hence the privilege of the proximity of oral speech to thought (the location of meaning as anterior to language) emerged in the particular discursive network—the material, technological, mediatic, and exterior modes of inscription that constrain and produce the body and its thoughts—circa 1800. In a dazzling amalgamtion of historical events—the phonetization of oral speech and the privilege afforded to minimally signifying phonemes, the reduction of language to natural sound and the concomitant regularization and nationalizing of dialects, the restructuring of elementary education around the mother and the valorization (if othering) of the Woman both philosophically and politicially, the reaction to memorization and the emergence of the modern university, to name just a few—Kittler argues that what Derrida reads as the originary opening of temporality could only have emerged in the late nineteenth century. In contrast to 1800, he argues that the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence comes to the fore only around 1900. However, I would argue that Kittler's own analyses suggest that the disruption of presence was already under way by 1800.
[lxxxii] My translation.
[lxxxiii] He elaborates this skeptical tradition of the Enlightenment through a reading of William Drummond's *Academical Questions* and argues that radical skepticism allows

for a revolutionary politics insofar as no moment can be known to follow from the next. For Shelley, according to Roberts, the most important aspect of Drummond's thought is that change is a radical leap into the unknown: no tock necessarily follows from the tick. If change were guaranteed to be good, or if change could be predicted, then it would not be *change* at all, but would be of the same order as the status quo: if we can know the result of a change, then change does not in fact radically break the system it is changing from, but is rather a preprogrammed causal occurrence (41-7).

[lxxxiv] In opposition to "revolutionary skepticism," Shelley also inherits what Roberts calls "therapeutic idealism," an idealism that attempts to integrate discontinuity into continuities (49-126). Idealism, according to Roberts' account, seeks to unify parts into a total whole, texts into their context, events into narratives, and heterogeneities into unities. In contrast to skepticism's account of radical breaks, the reactionary impulse of idealism introduces a historicism that reintegrates all breaks and discontinuities.

[lxxxv] Roberts also puts this doubled unity in terms of Shelley's anxiety of influence (via Rousseau and Paine) and anxiety of amnesia (via Burke and Coleridge) (224-32). On the one hand, Rousseau and Paine view the repetition of the past as, in effect, a death and thereby desire to radically break from the father or his tradition. On the other hand, Coleridge and Burke consider any radical break to amount to groundlessness or to total death, and so argue that maintaining the tradition we inherit is essential for the continuance of human life. Shelley, though, combines both arguments into a single movement: the break from the father or his tradition is in fact a repetition of the father's break, and the repetition that eschews the death of a break is itself the death of pure mechanical repetition. Memory and escape imply each other: memory can only remember the past if it reinvents and thus breaks with that past, and the escape from memory is the memorial repetition of a tradition of the attempt to escape.

[lxxxvi] Although I will ultimately want to assert that readings of *A Defence* have failed to engage its most challenging questions, my own reading has been influenced by a number of scholarly works that should be singled out. John Ross Baker's "Poetry and Language in Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*" reads Shelley's essay as at once asserting its medium and trying to rid itself of any medium at all, thereby dividing poetry from itself. Paul Fry's essay in *The Reach of Criticism* argues that while Shelley places the imagination prior to reason in conformity with enlightenment thinkers, he argues, against them, that reason can never move beyond or outgrow the imagination, even if the imagination resides outside the domain of truth and falsehood. And Fry highlights that Shelley's reliance upon the imagination *does not* entail a reliance upon the pre-linguistic, but is, in Shelley's terms, "vitally metaphoric." Deborah Elise White argues in *Romantic Returns* that while *A Defence* seems to be a sort of third *Critique* that will bridge the ethical and the epistemological, it instead finds itself disjoining all the syntheses it seems to make. This disjunction between will and power, she continues, "exposes the power of historicity," for this disjunction entails the delay between what it would be "to know and legislate, create and apprehend, understand and communicate" (124-5). By framing her discussion with the question of futurity—and the peculiar referential status of futurity—White's argument is the closest to my own. Indeed, I will argue that *A Defence* ends up situating poetry as potentially a radical evil, and White writes that, "poetry, too, may enslave humanity…. Poetry may not be guilty, but it remains indefensible" (127). However,

while I am indebted to what I take to be her claim that the nothingness of futurity is the ultimate referent of poetry, I try to push—as I think *A Defence* does—this nothingness in directions that have not been pursued.

[lxxxvii] Carol Jacobs makes this same point in "On Looking at Shelley's Medusa," 177-8.

[lxxxviii] In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley writes that Prometheus "is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends" (207). And in "On Love," Shelley writes: "We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man" (504).

[lxxxix] See Wasserman, 257-261.

[xc] For more on this point, see William Keach's *Shelley's Style*, pages 97-111

[xci] There are crucial differences between the idealized self that Shelley privileges and the enclosed, unified, and utilitarian self that he does not. And yet, the insight of Shelley's notion of the self resides in his keen realization that the difference between the ideal self and the utilitarian and capitalist self is not a rigorous one, that the one self can quickly become the other. For an account of the difference between "self-knowledge" and "self-anatomy," see Wasserman's chapter on *The Cenci*.

[xcii] In his recent article "Centre and Circumference: Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*," Tim Milnes takes issue with this deconstructive reading of *A Defence*. He argues that while Shelley destabilizes the dichotomies between fact and value, interiority and exteriority, language and thought, and activity and passivity, Shelley does not shatter these dichotomies: "The problem comes down to this: by opening the *Defence* with such severe distinctions between imagination and reason, synthesis and analysis, evaluation and enumeration, Shelley divides two kinds of mental activity when according to the drift of many passages of that work, there is no such distinction to be made, since all knowing is a coming-into-being, an infinite 'unveiling.' …Ultimately, then, the centrifugal force of the *Defence*'s attack on knowledge is countered by a logocentrism represented by a continuing investment in epistemological dualism, and especially empiricist dualism…" (14-5). The problem with Milnes's reading and his polemic against the deconstructive idiom with which *A Defence* has been read is that the deconstructive reading never insists upon a *shattering* of the dichotomies at hand. In fact, deconstructive readings insist quite the opposite, namely, that the dichotomies are irreducible and can be destabilized but not abandoned or destroyed. To attack the deconstructive reading by asserting that the deconstruction in *A Defence* is not *complete* is to misunderstand entirely the force of both deconstruction and Shelley's essay. Milnes's reading confronts not deconstruction, but René Welleck's claim that "Poetry loses its identity completely," quoted in Fry, 158.

[xciii] For a similar point, see Jacobs, 177.

[xciv] Language's familiarizing violence is framed most acutely in Shelley's "On Life." "[T]he existence of distinct individual minds similar to that which is employed in now questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion…. The words *I,* and *you* and *they* are grammatical devices invented simply for arrangement and totally devoid of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them" (508). For Shelley, the mind and its consciousness are delusions, mere effects of words, suggesting that they neither

preexists nor control language. And just as language spuriously constitutes the speakers of language as the cause rather than effect of language, so too it spuriously constitutes terms that only have meaning and existence linguistically as non-linguistic referents: "The difference is merely nominal between those two classes of thought which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and of external objects" (ibid.). The difference between ideas and things is a *nominal* difference. Elaborating on the texture of things, Shelley writes: "[A]ll familiar objects are signs, standing not for themselves but for others, in their capacity of suggesting one thought which shall lead to a train of thoughts" (507). "By the word *thing* is to be understood any object of thought, that is, any thought upon which any other thought is employed" (508). Objects cannot be divorced from the meanings constitutive of them and therefore emerge out of a differential semiotic system just like signs. One of the minimal ideas at play, it seems, is not a radical idealism in which only the mind exists, but that the difference between language and the non-linguistic world is not a rigorous or stable difference. This does not imply that language and its referents can be conflated or are in an original continuity, but only that they cannot be strictly kept apart.

[xcv] See Fry, 130-7, where he tracks how reason always already is imagination, such that the former can never overtake the latter without the delusion of thinking it has surpassed rhetoric.

[xcvi] See de Man's "Shelley Disfigured": "For the initial violence of position can only be half erased, since the erasure is accomplished by a device of language that never ceases to partake of the very violence against which it is directed" (118-9). In other words, the performativity that interrupts meaning can only be erased by meaning that is itself performative.

[xcvii] To be fair, the meaning of "extinction" or "destruction" fluctuates throughout *A Defence*. Sometimes, "extinction" signifies a mere suspension: "Civil war, the spoils of Asia, and the fatal predominance first of the Macedonian, and then of the Roman arms were so many symbols of the extinction or suspension of the creative faculty in Greece" (521). Here, "extinction" is appositional to "suspension": the poetic principle is momentarily extinguished, but, as we know, that extinction leads to a rebirth. But sometimes, extinguishing the poetic principle amounts to its absolute annihilation.

[xcviii] One might be tempted to argue that while poetry deals with the mental world of *thought*, calculative reasoning deals with the physical world of things, commodities, and markets. But as I argue in a note above, the difference between language and its referents or between mind and world cannot be maintained for Shelley. The "circumscri[ption]… of the internal world" is proportional to the expansion of calculative reason precisely because the invention of *things* in fact is the invention of *signs* or *thoughts*.

[xcix] In "Legislators of the Post-Everything World: Shelley's *Defence* of Adorno" Robert Kaufman presents a much more hopeful reading of Shelleyan poetry vis-à-vis calculative reason. He argues that in the face of a nascent capitalism, Shelley responds with a Kantian aesthetics that suspends determinate truths, aims, and even the determinate negation of repressive structures. In this way, Shelley institutes a formal critical thinking that is the precondition for a progressive politics, even and especially if such an aesthetics cannot guarantee its own progressive politics. Kaufman's essay thereby makes a powerful case for saving Shelleyan aesthetic experience from the new historicist diagnosis of

romantic ideology as well as from the De Manian insistence that aesthetics as such is ideological. But while Kaufman does not entirely overlook Shelley's emphatic reminder that such a negative aesthetics will always be reinscribed within (if it is not the very same thing as) what it resists, he does not seem to acknowledge that once this concession is made, he finds himself much closer to the De Manian position than he would like to be. No doubt, the terms would change and differences would remain, but the structure would be quite similar: de Man would focus on the play between aesthetic ideology and the politics that emerges from a commitment to the unknown. Kaufman would focus on the play between ideology and the political aesthetics that emerges from a commitment to the unknown. In both scenarios, the later term would be the interruption or disarticulation of epistemological foundationalism and ethical teleology. More importantly though, both of these positions—the Adornian and the De Manian—overlook Shelley's concern with the *absolute* end of poetry. As I mentioned above, the only account to my knowledge that takes seriously the devastating consequences of Shelleyan poetry is White's chapter in *Romantic Returns*. In *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism*, which is quite attentive to the machinal and violent undertones of Shelley's poetry, Marc Redfield discusses a point also discussed by White concerning the proximity of Shelley's account of the soldier in *A Philosophical View of Reform* and his account of the poet in *A Defence of Poetry*: "the two figures share an appeal to the particular kind of affectlessness that can be associated with a tool—a technical prosthesis of, in this case, voice (the trumpet) or hand (the knife). That the poetic trumpets 'sing to battle' tightens this counterintuitive accord between poet and soldier. Not only are they both tools, blind to the sensation they elicit or the meaning they perform, but they both also seem caught up in political forms of violence" (170). While both White and Redfield highlight the violence of poetry and the poet, they both read this violence as constitutive of history, which is to say that they both overlook the specific relationship between the poet and the *end of futurity as such*.

[c] See the final chapter of Lyotard's *The Differend* for an analysis of the relationship between time and techno-science in capitalism.

[ci] See for instance "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism" in *The Postmodern Condition* and chapter 7 to 9 of *The Inhuman*.

[cii] See "Introduction: About the Human" in *The Inhuman*.

[ciii] Lyotard's notion of postmodern art should be mentioned here. Postmodern art presents unpresentability *in and as* its own presentation. It is an absolute act, entirely unrelated to its temporal context, which is to say that it is absolutely new. Of course, though, for both De Manian positing and Lyotardian art, the absolute is always already synthesized by other acts. As soon as it is processed, recorded, or perceived, it is no longer an absolute presentation but rather something presented. Presentation itself cannot, *a priori*, be presented without being erased, without being turned into a past presentation rather than preserved as the moment, the now, the act, of presentation. However, the integration of absolute presentation cannot erase the presentation entirely, since the erasure itself is an absolute act that will in turn be integrated. See, again, de Man's "Shelley Disfigured," where he 'opposes' *the positional power* of language to the integrative (but no less positional) power of *narrative* or *trope*. For Lyotard, the hope of futurity lies precisely in being able to distinguish (if always unsatisfactorily) postmodern art's act of presenting

from postmodern techno-science's performative. For Shelley, that hope exactly is called into question.

[civ] I take this image from Paul de Man's "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" in his *Aesthetic Ideology*.

[cv] For an extremely thorough argument that each section of the poem is a sonnet, see François Jost, "Anatomy of an Ode: Shelley and the Sonnet Tradition."

[cvi] The OED lists this line as a reference to "hectic flush."

[cvii] Both Earl Wasserman and James Chandler refer us to a passage from *Queen Mab* (Wasserman 241 and Chandler 550):

> Thus do the generations of the earth
> Go to the grave, and issue from the womb,
> Surviving still the imperishable change
> That renovates the world; even as the leaves
> Which the keen frost-wind of the waning year
> Has scattered on the forest soil, and heaped
> For many seasons there, though long they choke,
> Loading with loathsome rottenness the land,
> All germs of promise. Yet when the tall trees
> From which they fell, shorn of their lovely shapes,
> Lie level with the earth to moulder there,
> They fertilize the land they long deformed,
> Till from the breathing lawn a forest springs
> Of youth, integrity, and loveliness,
> Like that which gave it life, to spring and die. (V.1-15)

In this earlier take on the leaves and the circle of life, the leaves eventually act as fertilizer and are physically incorporated into new life. But in "Ode to the West Wind," the leaves are not linked to rebirth.

[cviii] The first and second sonnet are connected through a simile pivoting on "leaves": "Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,/ Loose clouds like Earth's decaying leaves are shed" (ll. 15-6). But instead of integrating the "winged seeds" of the first sonnet and the "approaching storm" of the second, the simile only serves to keep them separate, as two parallel events.

[cix] Curran, expecting to see the processes in the second sonnet lead to the third sonnet, writes: "The energy of the storm proceeds from a 'solid atmosphere' (27), visiting the earth with wholesale destruction, forcing the Atlantic waves to 'Cleave themselves'…" (157). But in the poem it is *not* the storm that acts upon the Atlantic, but rather the wind.

[cx] Wasserman and Curran take the opposite view, namely, that rather than presenting his reader with a fragmented ecosphere, Shelley's "metaphors tend further to diminish any distinction among the three regions [land, sky, and sea]…. Consequently, wherever the poet glances—about, above, or below, land, air, or sea—the same imagistic pattern of relationships presents itself" (Wasserman 240). Similarly, Curran writes: "The decaying leaves of the first stanza are like the loose clouds of the second and like the 'sapless foliage' (40) of the 'oozy woods' (39) in the third. The airy 'stream' (15) with its 'blue surface' (19) in the second stanza prefigures the 'crystàlline streams' (39) of the third. The 'Black rain, and fire, and hail' (28) descending from the storm, recapitulate the

'black, and pale, and hectic red' (4) leaves swept before the storm and look forward to the undersea plants that will 'grow gray with fear' (41) when the wind touches the Atlantic" (158). Both writers note the similarity of the imagery in the first three sonnets, but overlook the striking absence of processes by which the elements on the land transform into the elements in the sky, or by which the elements in the sky transform into the elements in the sea.

[cxi] In *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode*, Paul Fry points out this play between interruption and continuity on a formal level: "The frequency of enjambment in the ode, a forward thrust of continuity, functions in opposition to the way the tercets and couplets hug themselves in separate spaces on the page, fragmenting each of the stanzas" (213).

[cxii] See Hogle's *Shelley's Process*. For the term "metaphoricity," see Derrida's "White Mythology" in *Margins*.

[cxiii] Wang argues that the wind is a "radically indeterminate, destabilizing quality rather than… any idealized transcendent identity. The wind can't be spatialized precisely because it actually generates the poem's sense of space in the first three stanzas. It can't be placed in space because it *makes* space" (167). For the opposite understanding of the wind as a unified, unchanging, and selfsame force, see Wasserman (239-141).

[cxiv] For the peculiarity of the term *enchanter*, see Chandler, 533; and Paul Fry's *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode*, 210.

[cxv] Wang too emphasizes that the wind is not a single, unified, or transcendental force:

> As a number of readers have observed, the wind appears through the vertiginous catalogue of its effects, from those upon seed and leaf to cloud and rain to sea and ocean plant life; as Ronald Tetreault asserts, "Because the wind itself is like Intellectual Beauty an 'unseen presence,' it can only be known by its effects." The point, however, would be to take the "Wild" in "Wild Spirit" seriously, *not* to see all these effects simply radiating from the first principle of the wind but to sense the wind instead as the incalculable collection of all these shifting effects impinging upon one another. The wind is everywhere insofar as everything is either hurtling, dropping, floating, spinning, or still, with some forms ushered to sleep and others to the explosion of storm. The wind is nowhere insofar as at no one moment can all these intensities and vectors of force, with their infinitely expanding effects upon one another, reciprocating and deflecting, be frozen into one calcified identity, or force field. (167-8)

For an understanding of *power* in "The Ode to the West Wind" as a unified, unchanging, and selfsame force, see Wasserman (239-141).

[cxvi] For a dialectical reading of this movement or moment as the sublime in Shelley, see Angela Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime*, 112-3.

[cxvii] It should be noted that while Wasserman holds that deaths make future rebirths possible, they do not make them necessary: "there is no inherent guarantee that man will not continue to deflect the operations of the Power by his will" (251).

[cxviii] See Edward Duffy's "Where Shelley Wrote and What He Wrote For: The Example of 'Ode to the West Wind'"; Hogle's *Shelley's Process*, 176; among countless others who make this claim. Shelley himself, of course, explicitly says as much: "it may be assumed as a maxim that no nation or religion can supersede any other without incorporating into

itself a portion of that which it supersedes" (*A Defence* 525); see also the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*.

[cxix] See Wasserman's *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, 282-4; Hugh Roberts' *Shelley and the Chaos of History*, 43-6; P. M. S. Dawson's *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics*, 120-33; Jerrold Hogle's *Shelley's Process*, 195.

[cxx] Roberts writes: "For Shelley, the struggle is usually against the existing order rather than toward a utopia. Or, if he does posit utopias, they are literally utopian: no-places, blank spaces whose meaning will only be filled on arrival" (43); and Jeffrey N. Cox writes: "Nor, as Demogorgon reminds us at the end of *Prometheus Unbound*, is there any millennium, if by that we mean an end of history" ("The dramatist" 77).

[cxxi] Stuart Curran understands the question dialectically in his seminal 1975 reading in *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis*. He argues that the spring of revolution can only come about if the poet first becomes passive before the force of the wind. The poet, though, does not become passive like the natural objects in the poem, since, as a human, he is able to assert his passivity actively. The poet's self-creation comes through a self-annihilation by actively submitting himself to the forces of necessity: "The poet destroys his own vision, the solace of a mere aesthetic serenity, and, beyond that, the resolved circling of the world's past literature, in order to participate in creating 'that great poem, which all poets, like co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world' (*Prose*, 7: 124)" (170). The creative spring, in Curran's reading, will follow winter precisely because it submits to its own destruction.

[cxxii] In his 1984 "Where Shelley Wrote and What He Wrote For: The Example of 'Ode to the West Wind'," Duffy makes an argument similar to Curran's dialectical account, but with more qualifications about the ease in which submission produces creativity and thus futurity. Duffy argues that "Ode to the West Wind" names a dilemma of which Shelley was all too aware: the discovery of truth does not lead to its implementation. The question then becomes: how to create change? In Duffy's reading of the Biblical allusions permeating the poem, changing a tradition can only come from absorbing oneself in the most ancient traditions we inherit. In this reading, Shelley realizes that at the origin of the very tradition that gains its power by constituting words as referential and static is the word as *act*, the creative and performative *logos*. As such, action becomes possible precisely by laboriously rereading the tradition that seeks to submerge any possibility of radical change. While Duffy asks whether the question might be "a question more real than rhetorical," it is, in the end, a speech act that springs up in the winter of constative locution (372). In this sense, Duffy maintains that the question itself guarantees spring.

[cxxiii] Curran compellingly makes a case for an allusion to the apocalypse here, but he quickly brushes it aside: "Still, if the allusions to the Last Judgment are deliberate attempts by Shelley to secularize the inscrutable God who speaks to Job out of the whirlwind and who in the end will have the power to summon a universal destruction, other Biblical contexts represent the wind as a symbol of harmony or of the vatic force. When 'God made a wind to pass over the earth, …the waters asswaged' (Gen. 8:1), and the earth was reborn for the sons of Noah" (159). But the image in the poem does not give us any reason here to appeal to the healing power of the wind or the rebirth succeeding destruction. Only if the reader assumes that second sonnet should be read not

according to its own image but according to the theme of death as rebirth, can he or she conclude with Curran that the storm's destruction of the void is in fact a production.

[cxxiv] Ross Chambers, in *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*, attributes the use of this term—as opposed to *fabula*—to Victor Shlovksy's "Parodijnyj roman. *Tristram Shandy* Stern." See also Jonathan Culler's "Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative" in his *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*.

[cxxv] For one of the more explicit examples among the innumerable instances where remnants of antiquity signify the original reconciliation of humanity with nature, see the first page of Schiller's *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, where the only human forms included among images of nature are the barely-human inhabitants of the country and "monuments of ancient times… many an artifact of remote antiquity" (180).

[cxxvi] For more on this relationship, see the work of Desmond King-Hele, especially *Shelley: His Thought and Wok*, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets*, and "Shelley and Erasmus Darwin" in *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Greynog Conference*.

[cxxvii] In the second volume of *Zoonomia*, Darwin writes: "Thus it would appear, that all nature exists in a state of perpetual improvement by laws impressed on the atoms of matter by the great CAUSE OF CAUSES; and that the world may still be in its infancy, and continue to improve FOR EVER AND EVER" (page 318, Sect. XXXIX, 11.5)

[cxxviii] The full passage from Darwin reads:

> Then, whilst the sea, at their coeval birth,
> Surge over surge, involv'd the shoreless earth;
> Nurs'd by warm sun-beams in primeval caves,
> Organic Life began beneath the waves.
> ……
> Organic Life beneath the shoreless waves
> Was born, and nurs'd in Ocean's pearly caves;
> First forms minute, unseen by spheric glass,
> Move on the mud, or pierce the watery mass;
> These, as successive generations bloom,
> New powers acquire, and larger limbs assume;
> Whence countless groups of vegetation spring,
> And breathing realms of fin, and feet, and wing (I.231-4, 295-302)

After discussing Venus as originally emerging from the sea, he continues:

> Still Nature's births, enclos'd in egg and seed,
> From the tall forest to the lowly weed,
> Her beaux and beauties, butterflies and worms,
> Rise from aquatic to aerial forms.
> Thus in the womb the nascent infant laves
> Its natant form in the circumfluent waves;
> With perforated heart unbreathing swims… (I.385-91)

Just as a particular human originally swims in the sea of the womb, so life itself originally emerged from the waters of the sea.

[cxxix] In the controversial geological theories of the earth that were popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the association of water with the beginning of land

and life was a commonplace. William Smith, the English geologist, argued that the rock record contains "treasures of an ancient deep, which prove the antiquity and watery origin of the earth" (quoted in Heringman, "The Rock Record and Romantic Narratives of the Earth" 64). Similarly, the internationally influential Abraham Gottlob Werner popularized the term and concept of Neptunism, which hypothesized that the earth was originally a landless ocean (see Nicholas A. Rupke's "Caves, Fossils and the History of the Earth"). Lastly, Buffon argues in his *Epochs of Nature* that life had its origin when the earth became cool enough for waters to flood it without being vaporized (See Alan Bewell's *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment*, page 249). For a discussion of the relationship between the Diluvialism in geology and Biblical accounts of the flood, see John Wyatt's *Wordsworth and the Geologists*, especially pages 35-44 and 151-6.

[cxxx] "Oceanus, who has made the genesis of everything" (Ὠκεανοῦ, ὅς περ γένεσις πάντεσσι τέτυκται) (*Iliad* XIV.246, my translation).

[cxxxi] In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle writes: "Most of the philosophers thought that principles in the form of matter were the only principles of all things; for the original source of all existing things, that from which a thing first comes-into-being and into which it is finally destroyed, the substance persisting but changing in its qualities, this they declared is the element and first principle of existing things… but Thales, the founder of this type of philosophy, says that it is water (and therefore declared that the earth is on water), perhaps taking this supposition from seeing the nurture of all things to be moist…" (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 88-9).

[cxxxii] According to Aetius, "Anaximander said that the first living creatures were born in moisture, enclosed in thorny barks…"; and according to Censoronius, "Anaximander of Miletus conceived that there arose from heated water and earth either fish or creatures very like fish; in these man grew" (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 140-1).

[cxxxiii] In a peculiar passage, Hippolytus writes: "Xenophanes thinks that a mixture of the earth with the sea is going on, and that in time the earth is dissolved by the moist. He says that he has demonstrations of the following kind: shells are found inland and in the mountains, and in the quarries in Syracuse he says that an impression of a fish and of seaweed has been found, while an impression of a bay-leaf was found in Paros in the depth of the rock, and in Malta flat shapes of all marine objects. These, he says, were produced when everything was long ago covered in mud, and the impression was dried in the mud. All mankind is destroyed whenever the earth is carried down into the sea and becomes mud; then there is another beginning of coming-to-be, and this foundation happens for all the worlds" (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 176-7).

[cxxxiv] Hippolytus writes: "Animals ([Anaxagoras] says) originally arose in the moisture, but later from one another" (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 382).

[cxxxv] For Aristotle, life as such is not traced back to an original slime in the sea, but he traces spontaneously generated life to oozy, slimy, muddy, and putrid waste: "All those things which do not bud off or 'honeycomb' are spontaneously generated. Now all things formed in this way, whether in earth or water, manifestly come into being in connexion with putrefaction and an admixture of rain-water" (*Generation of Animals* 762a9-11). "As a general rule we may state that such animalcules are found in practically anything, both in dry things that are becoming moist and in moist things that are drying" (557b10-13, see also 539a21-25). To highlight the muddy and slimy qualities that Aristotle has in

mind: "As a general rule, then, all testaceans grow by spontaneous generation in mud… oysters growing in slime, and cockles and the other testaceans above mentioned on sandy bottoms" (547b18-21).

[cxxxvi] All citations from the Bible are from the Oxford 1769 Authorized King James Version. In *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, Wasserman notes another reference to this verse of Genesis in *Prometheus Unbound*: "Let they malignant spirit move/ In darkness over those I love" (I.276-77) (296). In the context of the first act of *Prometheus Unbound*, which Shelley had completed before writing "Ode to the West Wind," the allusion certainly takes on sinister connotations. Curran mentions this line from Genesis in *Annus Mirabilis* 159; and see James Chandler in *England in 1819* in reference to Shelley's Spinozism, 547.

[cxxxvii] The association of water with life (and death) runs throughout all of Shelley's poetry, to the "slimy caverns of the populous deep" in *Alastor* (l. 307), to the "secret springs… of human thought" (ll. 4-5) in *Mont Blanc*, to the watery scene framing *The Revolt of Islam*, to the watery terrain of *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills* and *Julian and Maddalo*, to the liquid verse of *Prometheus Unbound* with Asia's Aphrodisiacal birth, to the "secret fountain," "Austral lake," and "old Nilus" (ll. 56, 428, 498) in *The Witch of Atlas*, to the streams guiding the triumph and the shape all light in *The Triumph of Life*, to, finally, the "leaves of wasted autumn woods [that] float around [Shelley's] head" ("Stanzas.—April, 1814" 13).

[cxxxviii] The logic of self-destruction has an important place in Shelley's poetry: evil, if it is to be destroyed, must "sting itself to death" (*Queen Mab* vi.38). This motif gets the most sustained treatment in *Prometheus Unbound*, where the attempt to destroy evil only repeats the destructiveness of evil. But as I argue in this chapter, the self-destruction of evil is figured as a success, which will amount to a *total* destruction.

[cxxxix] As Sharon Ruston has detailed in her *Shelley and Vitality*, Shelley followed and was influenced by the debates among English scientists concerning the true nature of life—some arguing it was a substance superadded to organisms and some arguing it was the result of the organism's organization. Ruston aligns these two positions with, respectively, conservatives who linked the superadded substance to god and king and the French-influenced progressives who challenged hierarchies. Interestingly, the figurations of life in Shelley's poetry and prose seem to fluctuate between these two positions, and it does not seem to me that the scientific and the political align as well in Shelley as Ruson asserts.

[cxl] Against my reading, critics have traditionally read these lines as Shelley's pronouncement that he must submit to necessity in order to be free (see, for example, Curran's *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis* 168 and Chandler 542-3). Only after Jesus has fallen on the thorns can he save humanity. And only after he realizes that he cannot *be* the wind can he *use* its disseminating force.

[cxli] See for example Eben Bass's "The Fourth Element in 'Ode to the West Wind'"; Curran's *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis* (especially 161-6); James Rieger's *The Mutiny Within*, 169-71.

[cxlii] "More simply put, the point is that, in the *Ode*, as in *Prometheus Unbound*, 'fire' involves two ranges of connotation—not only light, heat, and electricity but also the ability to control these things: intelligence. It stands both *as* an element and *for* the power

to control the elements…. Is the operation of fire to be understood *among* the play of the objective elements of nature or as over *against* the other three elements? …The central question for the *Ode* might therefore be posed: Is the poet's fire like the other elements in the lawlike way it is subject to that force for change that is represented by the wind?" (533).

[cxliii] See Lloyd N. Jeffrey's "Cuvierian Catastrophism in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and 'Mont Blanc'" and Noah Heringman's "The Rock Record and the Romantic Narratives of the Earth." The standard passage to consult for Shelley's interest in fossils, geological time, and extinction is *Prometheus Unbound* iv.270-318.

[cxliv] See Noah Heringman's *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology*, Roy Porter's *The Making of Geology: Earth Science in Britain, 1660-1815*, and Nicholas A. Rupke's "The Apocalyptic Denominator in English Culture of the Earth 19th Century" and *The Great Chain of History: William Buckland and the English School of Geology, 1814-1849*.

[cxlv] For an introduction to millenarianism in the romantic age, see Morton Paley's *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* and *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, edited by Tim Fulford. Also of interest is Jasper Cragwall's "The Shelleys' Enthusiasm." Cragwell argues that the interior and transcendentalizing imagination of the romantic poets was not an evasion of the spirit of the age but was part and parcel with the millenarianism that constituted that spirit. He continues that as much as Shelley wanted to critique the evangelical language to which he ceaselessly made recourse, this strategic appropriation of concepts such as inspiration, prophet and prophecy, divinity, and eternity did not come easy. In fact, Cragwell argues that insofar as Shelley was suspicious of rigorous distinctions, he "never entertain[ed] an oppositional (or even independent) vocabulary that could parse the inspirations of the poet from the inebriations of the crowd" (639). We could extrapolate that he also could not rigorously differentiate his concept of 'futurity' from the evangelical millennium propounded by Wesley, Southcott, Brothers.

[cxlvi] In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault squarely situates the modern beginnings of biopolitics in the romantic age. Very little scholarship in the literary world of Romanticism, however, seems to have taken advantage of this.

[cxlvii] Wang cites Lukács's claim in *The Historical Novel* that "history [as] a *mass experience*" developed during "the decades between 1789 and 1814" (173). It has long been argued that both the notion of Europe and the global developed during the romantic period in the context of colonialism and the Napoleonic wars.

[cxlviii] Similarly, Shelley's own poetry, in a major shift in romantic poetry, takes up the task again and again of imagining humanity from before its origin to its present condition and beyond. One thinks of *Queen Mab*, the first canto of *The Revolt of Islam*, "Ode to Liberty," *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Witch of Atlas*, and, in its own peculiar way, *Hellas*. In all of these poems, the human species is placed within a time scale more expansive than its own; moreover, Shelley's concern in these poems is not only with humanity's future—its progress or repetition or cyclicality—but also with its survival.

This time span offered new ways in which to view either the mirroring or disjunction between human history and natural history, which "Ode to the West Wind" is about. On the one hand, not only does the earth record its history on rocks and archive itself as we do, but it might also be progressive or teleological, starting from violent and

catastrophic beginnings but eventually becoming more and more peaceful. On the other hand, humanity could be viewed as a mere burp in the context of the cyclical eternity of a nature that survives catastrophes, however great they might be. Humanity might then be a precarious and fragile species susceptible to extinction by disease, volcano, or flood on a global scale. Like most of Shelley's poetry, especially *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus Unbound*, "Ode to the West Wind" flirts with both the similitudes and differences between natural and human history.

[cxlix] Of course, as Wang notes, Shelley's self-conscious desire to figure the unfigurability of the historical sublime cannot but fail: "The sublime as a register of objective denotation would suddenly appear to have always been circumscribed by plodding, subjective cognition…. Simultaneity would itself be an illusory figure for the retroactive hypostatizations of a subject constantly projecting freedom and possibility beyond, or before, itself" (179). The material alterity of the historical event is history itself, but this event, insofar as it is readable, can only ever be a retroactively posited illusion. While a historically singular event may interrupt the historian's generalization, contextualization, and narrativization, it has no objectivity or truth outside that interruption, which is to say that it can only be posited by that which it interrupts.

[cl] To think 'beyond' deconstruction seems to be an absurdity if that thinking takes deconstruction into account in the most rigorous of ways. Indeed when we pose the question of moving beyond or in excess of deconstruction, our very question can only be posed in a dialectical register undone by deconstruction. And yet, as unimaginable as it is to imagine the displacement of the logic of displacement, so too it must have been just as impossible to imagine a negation of Hegelian system prior to Bataille (or, arguably, Kierkegaard). A new concept—say, absolute expenditure or displacement—would have to be invented. But this new concept, arguably discovered from within the Hegelian system, invented how all inventions are repetitions, thus calling into question our understanding of the 'new', the 'invention', the 'beyond'. Deconstruction, after all, does not attempt to 'break' with Hegelianism but bears a profound affinity with it. Our best tools for thinking what it means to 'break' with deconstruction come from deconstruction itself. But unless deconstruction can welcome an other somehow more other than its own understanding of alterity, it remains precisely endless and has announced itself as the meta-discourse that cannot be displaced.

[cli] In *The Odes of John Keats* Helen Vendler argues that the reconciliation between the inner (psyche) and the outer (Psyche) fails and that Keats registers this failure by abandoning the attempt in the later odes of May. In "Reading Aright: Keats's *Ode to Psyche*" Geoffrey Hartman analyzes how the poem's disruptive language stumbles upon and loses itself, producing a dark and erotic feminine writing that cannot quite sustain an inevitably masculine psyche. Both critics underscore that while the poem seems to move towards the interiority of the ego, it fails, either because it sacrifices precisely what it hopes to gain or because its language forbids the passage towards a pure and non-textual psyche.

[clii] See, for instance, James Chandler's chapter on the ode in *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*, Homer Brown's "Creations and Destroyings: Keats's Protestant Hymn, the 'Ode to Psyche'," and Stuart Sperry's *Keats the Poet* all of which I will discuss below. See also Jeffrey N. Cox's

Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle, where he argues that rather than an escapist move inward, the poem elaborates a politics of sexuality that proceeds outwards from the self. See also John Savarese's "Psyche's 'Whisp'ring Fan' and Keats's Genealogy of the Secular," which contextualizes Keats's uptake of Psyche both as nineteenth-century Orientalism and as a genealogical critique of that Orientalism insofar as Keats highlights that the emergence of the secular contains the very religiosity it hopes to bypass. See also Erin Ferris's "Owing to Psyche," which profoundly asserts the historicity of Keats's poem as well as its undoing of any linear or periodic history. See also Daniel P. Watkins' contribution to *Keats and History*, where he places Keats's erasure of Psyche and celebration of his own psyche within a commercial and misogynist context. While this essay is helpful in placing the poem in the context of "the quantifying pressures of an emergent and powerful commercialism that would transform all things (including poetry) into commodities to be exchanged on the open market; an increasingly militarised state apparatus established to secure and extend the operations of capital; the demise of religion as a master discourse, and its replacement by an individualistic ethic grounded in a cash nexus; new forms of government repression; rampant urbanisation and its accompanying problems of unemployment and poverty," the essay does not show just how critical and thoughtful Keats's poetry is (89).

[cliii] In his "Keats's *Ode to Psyche* and the Transformation of Mental Landscape," James H. Bunn writes: "Before the poet envisioned Psyche and Cupid, he either had no soul or was unaware of her…" (582). In "To See or Not to See: Keats' (Un)visual Treatment of the Psyche Myth," Claudia Corti makes a similar point: "As long as the poet desires this object [Psyche], so he will lose it, and his defeat is translated, or *transferred*, into the hypostasis of lack of attributes and absence of context of the object. Psyche offers herself to her bard under the significant sign of *negation*. She has *no* temples, nor altars, nor grove, nor hymns nor songs, nor incense, nor oracles (third verse). Psyche does not *have*, because she *is* not, inasmuch as she is poetic material" (115).

[cliv] For readings of Keats and masturbation, see Levinson's *Keats's Life of Allegory*.

[clv] See, respectively, the letter to George and Tom Keats on the 21st or 27th of December, 1817; the letter to Richard Woodhouse on the 27th of October, 1818; and the letter to George and Georgiana Keats on March 19th, 1819, part of the series of letters included in the same package that ends on the 4th of May, in which Keats inscribes "Ode to Psyche."

[clvi] John Savarese provides a fascinating context for Keats's interest in the interaction between the archive, invention, and destruction. He quotes a letter from Keats: "'Parsons will always keep up their Character, but as it is said there are some animals, the Ancients knew, which we do not; let us hope our posterity will miss the black badger with the tri-cornered hat; Who knows but some Revisor of Buffon or Pliny, may put an account of the parson in the Appendix; No one will then believe it any more than we bel[ie]ve in the Phoenix'" (397). Savarese concludes that, for Keats, the future archivization of the parson in natural history catalogues depends upon his extinction. According to Savarese's argument, Keats also realizes that the interplay between cataloguing and effacement can invent precisely what is catalogued and effaced, just as the Orientalist's attempt to know and convert (and hence destroy) world religions contributes to the invention of both 'religion' and the 'secular'. Similarly, Apuleius's recording of Psyche invents her and gives the impression that what is invented is in fact archived.

Savarese quotes another particularly interesting passage, this time from John Potter's *Antiquities of Greece*, which Keats owned: "'[T]he *Grecians* in general, and the *Athenians* in particular, were so excessively superstitious,—that they would not be content to worship their ancient Deities, but frequently consecrated new ones of their own making; and beside these, assum'd into the number of their own, the Gods of all the Nations with whom they had any Commerce…. [T]here was a Custom that oblig'd them to entertain a great many strange Gods, whence it was that they religiously observ'd the Feast of all the strange Gods…. Nay, so fearful were the *Athenians* of omitting any, that, as *Pausanias* tells us, they erected Altars of unknown Gods'" (404-5). Savarese continues: "Potter points to the passage from Acts in which Paul, preaching in Athens, is brought before the Areopagus to 'give an Account of his new Doctrine.' This is, of course, where Paul identifies the 'unknown God' as the one 'God who made the world and all things therein'… This would be the moment at which Greek 'orthodoxy' becomes the vehicle for its own disenchantment" (405). The Greeks welcomed unknown gods, but that hospitality was precisely what destroyed them, since the new unknown God destroys the gods that welcome new unknown gods. This applies equally to Psyche, since the moment the Greek goddess Psyche is invented, she becomes the Christian soul, used in the fight against paganism.

[clvii] In *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*, James Chandler makes a similar argument. He reads Keats as trying to make up for a "double neglect" of Psyche: "the neglect of the pagan-Platonic 'Psyche' in favor of the Christian 'soul' and the neglect of the Psyche/soul in any form whatsoever by the mechanist strain in Enlightenment moral philosophy" (415-6). Just around the time when Apuleius tells the story of the mortal Psyche's apotheosis, Christianity translates the newly deified god into the Christian immortality of the soul. But when the Christian soul is finally demystified, the Enlightenment does not rediscover the pagan Psyche but throws the baby out with the bathwater, as it were, by getting rid of the soul altogether and asserts its own mechanist ideology. And when Wordsworth tries, in turn, to demystify the Enlightment self, he introduces the "egotistical sublime."

[clviii] For the best account of the lack of *telos* in Keats, see Stuart Sperry's chapter on the odes in *Keats the Poet*.

[clix] This scene has been understood as a *tabeau vivant* at least since Bunn's "Keats's *Ode to Psyche* and the Transformation of Mental Landscape" in 1970.

[clx] Such an image, of course, recalls many others throughout Keats's poetry, which is, after all, the romantic poetry of ekphrasis. One thinks most readily perhaps of the beginning of *Hyperion*.

[clxi] As I remarked in the previous chapter, Hugh Roberts reads Romanticism as divided between two heterogeneous tendencies: the absolute moment of revolution that breaks with history, on the one hand, and, on the other, romantic historicism and organicism that deny the possibility of a radical break from history and inheritance. In Keats's metaimage, the play between these two romantic tendencies—the play between the singular and new (the instant) and repetition (the historicity inscribed within that instant)—itself freezes.

[clxii] Sperry writes: "The casement of the mind stands fully open 'To let the warm Love in,' suggesting, as Bloom has noted, the continual accessibility of the poetic imagination.

Yet we are given occasion to pause when we remember that the love between Cupid and Psyche originally took place in secrecy and darkness and that the identity of the celestial visitant was forbidden to be known" (260-1). Hartman writes that Psyche "discovers Cupid's identity by looking at him with the torch perhaps alluded to in the ode's penultimate lines—and so loses him" (218). Cox writes: "More important, this is the point in Keats's poem where Keats connects most directly with the classical story of Cupid and Psyche as related in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, where Psyche waits at night for Cupid to come to her through an open window—though in that version she must keep the room dark so that she will not recognize the god" (119). (However, in the versions of the myth that Keats would have read, Cupid does not come into her room through a window.) Most critics, though, do not register this allusion and assume that love will simply enter. Vendler, for instance, writes: "When Psyche will have been won, and Love will have entered, the initial tableau will have been reproduced entire" (61). Chandler writes: "This is the moment when the poet offers his individual mind as the site of a divinity, the principle of human life, newly reacknowledged and only now, in the history of Psyche, able to be celebrated as it ought to be, and married, as it ought to be, with the principle of love that enables it to reproduce itself" (425).

[clxiii] Indeed, the infinitival "To let the warm Love in" suspends the poem between two temporally reversed moments: "arrested between *one minute past* (that glimpse of Psyche and Cupid) and *one minute before* ('A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,/ To let the warm Love in')." Hartman situates this sense of suspension further by placing it in the context of the *Hyperion* poems, which narrate "an unmoving movement between one minute past (Saturn's stroke) and one minute before (Hyperion's dawn, or Apollo's new-birth)" (223). And, of course, "Ode to Psyche" is suspended after the first *Hyperion* and before the second. The upshot of Hartman's argument is that the suspensions in Keats's texts suspend their own meaning and the very progress they seem to announce, both biographically and in literary history.

[clxiv] For a discussion of the word and concept *still* in Keats, see Timothy Bahti's wonderful chapter "Reading Keats: 'Still Reading'" in his *Ends of the Lyric*.

[clxv] Keats's rewriting of Apuleius's Cupid-Psyche myth is most likely inspired by Mary Tighe's rewriting of the myth in *Psyche; or the Legend of Love*. In Tighe's allegory of medieval romance, Psyche initially loses Cupid due to her suspicions, but throughout her journey she is not suspicious enough and gets duped and led even further astray. Her goal is to live in the present, in the ecstasy of love, which will destroy the desire for what is lost and the desire for what is not yet, but she is ceaselessly caught between remembrances of the past or hopes for the future. The first five cantos of *Psyche* portray Psyche as repetitively going astray, finding her direction, going astray for the opposite reason, finding her direction again, and so on. Psyche barely has a psyche: all her successes during her journey are brought about either by chance, the action of others, or narratological necessity, but not by her own agency. In the final canto, though, this psycheless Psyche seems to be destroyed absolutely. When finally she fulfills Venus's demand and puts an urn—filled with the pure and divine liquid of Beauty—on an alter, the Knight that has been accompanying Psyche reveals himself to be Love. If the *urn* of Beauty (Plato's form of forms, as it were) is not ominous enough, Tighe describes the moment of Psyche and Cupid's reunion not only as a pure union but as an immolation

(VI.469-77). The final stanza of the poem further suggests the pessimistic reading (death) rather than the optimistic (union) one:

> Dreams of Delight farewell! your charms no more
> Shall gild the hours of solitary gloom!
> The page remains—but can the page restore
> The vanished bowers which Fancy taught to bloom?
> Ah no! her smiles no longer can illume
> The path my Psyche treads no more for me;
> Consigned to dark oblivion's silent tomb
> The visionary scenes no more I see,
> Fast from the fading lines the vivid colours flee! (VI.532-40)

The entire romance is not simply revealed to be a fantasy; rather, the presence of the present of a complete unity cannot even be thought or imagined. The union, textual in its inception, remains textual, and as such, can never be and never was. All that remains is the page, but the page cannot produce the illusion that it never created in the first place, since the illusion—"the unutterable ecstasy" (VI.509)—is precisely "too vast for thought." The end of Tighe's romance insists on the *end of romance*, on, that is, the recognition that the romantic dream of unity is a delusion at best. Cupid and Psyche can never join together, and Tighe remains in her "solitary gloom," as Psyche's urn becomes Tighe's "silent tomb."

[clxvi] I thank Elissa Marder for these *i*nsights about the I/i.

[clxvii] Psyche seems to fall out of the picture in Apuleius's myth as well. Or, more precisely, Psyche desires to fall out of the picture. Apuleius gives her a peculiar death drive. While she is not psychologized as suicidal, she again and again endeavors to commit suicide. Five times in the myth she tries to kill herself or asserts that she will kill herself (102, 105, 113, 114, 123). For Keats and suicide, see the first chapter of Morris Dickstein's underread *Keats and His Poetry: A Study in Development.*

[clxviii] For the full significance of my use of the deictic "there," see Deborah Elise White's reading of Shelley's *Mont Blanc* in her *Romantic Returns*.

[clxix] This version of Cupid is reminiscent of Plato's account of Eros, who is defined in the *Symposium* precisely as *in between*. He is "in between mortality and immortality… a great *daimon*… and all *daimones* are between an immortal and a mortal" (203d, my translation). Plato, ventriloquizing Diotima, continues: "interpreting and communicating [or carrying across] the things of humans to the gods, and the things of the gods to humans… he fills in the gap between both of them since he is in between, with the result that he binds together the whole itself to itself" (203e). Eros, here, is the medium or differential space separating but binding together two heterogeneous orders. By translating the Latin back to the Greek and ahead to its English translation, Keats highlights Love as that which is in between, in between heaven and earth and in between lovers. There is, however, no direct evidence that Keats had read the *Symposium.* While he may have known about it from Shelley, it is unlikely that he would have seen Shelley's translation by the time of "Ode to Psyche," since Shelley had left for the Continent before translating it in the summer of 1818. According to our knowledge, Keats only had access to two collections of Plato, neither of which contained the *Symposium* (*The Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides and Timaeus of Plato*, translated by

Thomas Taylor in 1793 and *The Words of Plato Abridg'd*, translated from the French by André Dacier). However, Thomas Taylor did release a *The Works of Plato, viz. His Fifty-Five Dialogues, and Twelve Epistles* in 1804, which Keats could very well have seen. Unsurprisingly, the entries in both Lempriere's *Bibliotheca Classica* and Potter's *Archaeologia graeca* downplay the role of Eros and of the *Symposium*. But the Plato that Keats perhaps would have admired most was the Plato of the *Symposium*, who the Platonists of the day would have admired least. Bailey, from whom Keats would have learned much of the Plato he knew, complained of *Endymion* that "[t]he approaching inclination it has to that abominable principle of *Shelley's*—that *Sensual Love* is the principle of *things*" (Rollings 1.34-5). For more on the relation between Plato and Keats, see Clarence DeWitt Thorpe's *The Mind of John Keats* and Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr.'s "'Platonic Shades' in Keats's *Lamia*."

[clxx] In addition, because Apuleius directly calls Cupid "the god of all fire" and pictures him as carrying fire or a torch along with his bow and arrows, it is difficult to avoid the association of Cupid with Prometheus (113). Both are disobedient and in-between figures and, if we follow Apuleius's figuration of Cupid, both are the gods of fire. And in Romanticism, Prometheus and Satan have to be thought together. The unexpected association of Cupid with Satan is difficult to avoid, since in Apuleius's version of the myth, the oracle of Apollo tells Psyche's parents: "Let Psyches corps be clad in mourning weed/ And set on rocke of yonder hill aloft;/ Her husband is no wight of human seed,/ But Serpent dire and fierce as might be thought" (101). This figure of the serpent—and of Psyche perhaps sleeping with a serpent—repeats throughout the myth.

[clxxi] Richardson writes of Sir Astley Cooper's lecture series at Guy's Hospital, which Keats had attended: "Cooper's lectures covered the new theory of electrical neural transmission that made brain-based accounts of the mind more plausible by proposing a sufficiently rapid means of communication throughout the body. Cooper credits John Hunter with first proposing that the 'Nerves were conductor [sic] of electric fluid,' based on his experiments with the 'Gymnotus Electricus' (an electric fish); Galvani's further experiments have led, Keats notes, to the 'present opinion' that a 'fluid, like that of the electric is secreted in y^{e} brain which is thence communicated along the Nerves' (*JKNB* 58)…. The corresponding passage in [Edward] Reynolds [who attended the same lecture series the next year and took cleaner notes] defines the sympathetic function of the nerves as a 'universal communication between the different parts of ye body—by which one is made to feel for another' (*C/R* 138)" (122). Richardson continues that "the 'bright torch' cannot but also recall the 'ellectric fire' of the human mind and the 'electric' transmission between the brain and the nervous system" (126).

[clxxii] For a reading of these words, see Savarese's "Psyche's 'Whisp'ring Fan' and Keats's Genealogy of the Secular."

[clxxiii] Richardson notes that will, volition, and the psyche itself were beginning to appear—in the context of Joseph Priestley, John Thelwall, Astley Cooper, Charles Bell, Franz Joseph Gall, Johann Gasper Spurzheim, and William Lawrence—as a mere epiphenomenon of the corporeal brain and that the interest was not so much in how material brain produced the phenomenal mind, but in the workings of the brain itself in its connection to the body.

[clxxiv] In deconstructive terms, one might say that there would 'be' *absolute nonrelation* instead of Derrida's (non)relation. See "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve" in *Writing and Difference*.
[clxxv] See for example, Andrew Franta's *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public*.

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