

UNTIMELY INTERFERENCE: ANACHRONISTIC TEMPORALITIES IN NINETEENTH-
CENTURY BRITISH POETRY

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Bernadette Sharyn Guthrie

February 2016

© 2016 Bernadette Sharyn Guthrie

UNTIMELY INTERFERENCE: ANACHRONISTIC TEMPORALITIES IN NINETEENTH-
CENTURY BRITISH POETRY

Bernadette Sharyn Guthrie, Ph.D.

Cornell University 2016

Challenging prominent accounts of secularization that draw a hard line between pre-modern and modern experiences of the self and of history, this dissertation contends that pre-modern and religiously-inflected understandings of the world paradoxically subsist in modernity through their marked absence, inarticulacy, and inscrutability and that this subsistence renders the poems I consider not modern but rather "untimely." It ultimately associates this "untimeliness" of nineteenth-century poetry with the current state of the humanities, in which they appear increasingly obsolescent in a world where knowledge production is often understood as inseparable from technological production. I argue that it is precisely the anachronistic nature of the humanities, their being constantly "behind the times," that allows them to remain a present and powerful social force.

The dissertation is framed by an Overture and Coda that investigate Romantic and contemporary understandings of the nature of literary knowledge. The opening section considers William Wordsworth's attempt to articulate the nature of poetry and its relationship to other forms of knowledge in his 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and the closing section examines scholars' present attempts to bring humanities research into conversation with more dominant technological discourses, focusing especially on how the digital humanities can engage with historical texts in ways that bring into focus their resistance to full incorporation into our own dominant epistemological discourses.

The body of my project is focused on close readings of three major nineteenth-century poems. My reading of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* in Chapters 1 and 2 locates in this autobiographical poem, which has long been considered paradigmatically modern, pre-modern experiences of the self and post-modern experiences of literature. My reading of Percy Shelley's "The Triumph of Life" in Chapter 3 similarly positions the poem between the pre-modern conceptions of temporality and history that I associate with Dante and the post-modern ones that I associate with Paul de Man. The final chapter, in moving from the Romantics to the priest-poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, explores how the particular "untimeliness" I locate in Wordsworth and Shelley both subsists in and is radically altered by Hopkins's explicitly religious framework.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Bernadette Guthrie received her A.B. in English in 2005 from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA, where she graduated *cum laude* and was awarded high honors for her undergraduate thesis *The Function of Transgression in the Marquis de Sade, Jean Genet, and Dennis Cooper*. In 2010, she received an M.A. in English from The Pennsylvania State University. She received her Ph.D. in English from Cornell University in February 2016 and she is currently employed in the Cornell English department as the Joseph F. Martino Lecturer in Undergraduate Teaching. Her work has appeared in *New Literary History*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I must express my deep gratitude to my committee without whose guidance and support this project would never have been possible. Each member's contribution has been unique and invaluable. Jonathan Culler first sparked my interest in Hopkins when I was in my graduate coursework. (As Hopkins's "mysterious" presence in my largely Romanticist dissertation demonstrates, this interest has never left me.) I am particularly indebted to him for his incisive feedback on Chapter 4 and for his remarkable patience with the many shifts my project underwent from the prospectus to its final form. Cynthia Chase has been tremendously generous with her time; I don't know how this project could have ever been finished without her detailed feedback on multiple drafts of several chapters. Through my experience in her graduate course "Dreaming Romanticism," Cathy Caruth inspired me to shift my research focus to the nineteenth century through her careful and compelling interweaving of close study of Romantic texts with theoretical inquiry. Her feedback on my seminar paper for that course allowed it to slowly develop into what is now my third chapter. Jeremy Braddock graciously agreed to be on my committee even as my project's focus slipped further and further away from the twentieth century. The perspective he brought to my project was indispensable, especially his support of my tentative foray into the digital humanities in my coda.

This project has also greatly benefited from feedback on early drafts of chapters from attendees at the meeting of the Nineteenth-Century Studies Working Group of the Central New York Mellon Humanities Corridor at Syracuse University, the English Department Roundtable at Cornell, and the Cornell English Department's Nineteenth-Century Day. I am especially obliged to Ian Duncan for his suggestion of using allegory as a way into my discussion of Shelley, Dante,

and de Man and to Joselyn Almeida-Beveridge for drawing my attention to striking similarities between the figure of the speaking book in *The Prelude* and in Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's account of the meeting between the Spanish Conquistadors and Atahualpa.

I would never have reached this point in my academic career without the support and encouragement of faculty members from my master's and undergraduate institutions. From Penn State I must thank, in particular, Nicholas Joukovsky for first convincing me that I had something of worth to say about Wordsworth as well as Claire Colebrook and Jeff Nealon for providing my first introduction to Derrida. My decision to pursue graduate study would never have been made in the first place had it not been for the support of my professors in the department of English at the College of William and Mary, especially Thomas Heacox, Suzanne Raitt, and Varun Begley.

I owe special thanks to my parents for nurturing my life-long love of books and for supporting me in my decision not only to major in English in undergrad but to make the even more questionable choice of going to graduate school. Without their emotional and financial support, I could never have been in the place I am today, in all senses of that phrase.

While working on this project, I have been sustained by the emotional support of far too many people to acknowledge individually here. However, I would be remiss if I did not specifically thank Steve Justice, everyone at The Berkeley Institute, and Fr. Carsten Martensen for reminding me of the value and responsibility of academic research at times when I was close to forgetting both and Gail for her tireless attention and support during some of the most difficult periods of my graduate studies. I have also been privileged to enjoy steadfast emotional and intellectual support from the members of my cohort and other graduate students, both within the English department and beyond.

Last but not least, I owe a great debt of gratitude to all of my students. Their enthusiasm and candor brought new life to questions and texts that had begun to grow old for me, and I have benefited immensely from discussions in and out of the classroom about many of the themes and texts that are central to this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Historic Occasions	15
Chapter 1: (Self-)Possessions: The Spirit of the Past in <i>The Prelude</i>	31
Chapter 2: Reading the Future and the Future of Reading in <i>The Prelude</i>	62
Chapter 3: “The Bridge Thrown Over the Stream of Time”: “The Triumph of Life” between the <i>Divina Commedia</i> and “Shelley Disfigured”	95
Chapter 4: Marking Time in <i>The Wreck of the Deutschland</i>	128
Coda: The Obsolete, the Accidental, and the Undead: The Mysterious Survival of the Humanities	173
Bibliography	206

Introduction

In the opening book of *The Prelude*, William Wordsworth confesses to a youthful desire that out of “the life/ In common things, the endless store of things” he might “lay up/ New stores, or rescue from decay the old/ By timely interference” (ll. 124-27). Presumably, this preservation of the past will prove “timely” because the poet is able to “rescue” it just before such recuperation becomes impossible. In this dissertation, by contrast, I will argue that the poetry of the long nineteenth century is instead “untimely.” Through its anachronism (*ana-khronos*, literally “backward time”), it fails to fit fully within the modernity of which it is also a product. Yet its “rescue” of the past is achieved through a different form of anachronism: its attempts to read the past in terms of the present make it equally incapable of fully representing a premodernity that it can never entirely grasp even as it is itself grasped by that past.

“Modernity,” in the context of this project, is meant to signal both a social understanding and a particular experience of the social world. As a social understanding, it is radically “epochal,” one which, according to Habermas, “lives for the future, [one] that opens itself up to the novelty of the future.” This “present that understands itself from the horizon of the modern age as the actuality of the most recent period has to recapitulate the break brought about with the past as a *continuous renewal*.”¹ The experience of the world, meanwhile, is one which is both increasingly “reflective,” to borrow Charles Taylor’s parlance, and increasingly mediated by new technologies of communication. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor argues that this reflective quality is principally the result of secularization and pluralism: “We live in a condition where we

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 7.

cannot help but be aware that there are a number of different construals, views which intelligent, reasonably undeluded people, of good will, can and do disagree on.”² Thus, “we all learn to navigate between two standpoints: an ‘engaged’ one in which we live as best we can the reality our standpoint opens us to; and a ‘disengaged’ one in which we are able to see ourselves as occupying one standpoint upon a range of possible ones, with which we have in various ways to coexist.”³ Such an experience is only possible, according to Taylor, due to the development of the “buffered self,” in which “the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside of the mind.”⁴

Against this reflective and “buffered” modernity, Taylor proposes a “naïve” experience of premodernity in which “the line between personal agency and impersonal force was not all clearly drawn” and the difference between belief and experience less clearly demarcated, which resulted in a “porous” experience of the world—often manifested as a fear of “possession”—“in which “meaning can no longer be placed simply within; nor can it be located exclusively without.”⁵ Thus for Taylor, the shift from premodernity to modernity as a result of secularization is a shift from a “sense of our world [...] from one in which [...] spirits were just unproblematically there, impinging on us, to one in which they are no longer so, and indeed, in which many of the ways they were there have become inconceivable. Their not impinging is what we experience naïvely.”⁶

² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 11.

³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 12.

⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 32; 35.

⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 30.

While my argument borrows heavily from Taylor's definition of a reflective modernity and a "naïve" premodernity, it challenges his own "epochal" thesis of a sharp divide between pre-modern and modern experiences of the world where one is mutually exclusive of the other.⁷ What I will suggest instead is that the very absence of the pre-modern facilitates experiences that are themselves "naïve," experiences in which the encounter with the absence of pre-modern experiences and understandings of the self, nature, and history is equally a negative encounter *with* them. By functioning as a sort of wound—as gaps which are marked in various ways throughout the texts I will consider—these absences create "porous" texts and authorial *personae* that are unable to hermetically seal themselves off from the past even as they are unable to directly represent or experience it.

In making this argument, I push against long-standing narratives of nineteenth-century poetry in general, and Romantic poetry in particular, as representative of a progressive modernization and secularization of pre-modern, religiously-inflected understandings of subjectivity, nature, and knowledge. A number of more recent studies, most notably David Collings's *Wordsworthian Errancies: The Poetics of Cultural Dismemberment* and Debra Elise White's *Romantic Returns: Superstition, Imagination, History*, have challenged the view of a simply secular Romanticism, noting the degree to which the experience of "superstition" is itself a product of modernity. But even this more nuanced narrative of Romanticism, modernity, and secularism still takes for granted a hard divide between the modern and the pre-modern in which a truly "naïve" pre-modern experience is purely inaccessible from within modernity. Conversely, other recent narratives of Romanticism as purely a reaction *against* modernity, for instance

⁷ For a critique of Taylor's argument that locates elements that Taylor identifies as "modern" within the pre-modern, see Steven Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?" *Representations* 103, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 1-29.

Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre's *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, risk overemphasizing the past-orientedness of Romanticism and underemphasizing the degree to which it is still defined by modernity (and, as I will suggest in Chapters 2 and 3, often predictive of postmodernity).

This study has implications beyond determining the historical position of Romantic and post-Romantic poetry, however. As I will suggest throughout this dissertation, the liminal position of the poets discussed here arises largely in response to the difficulty of establishing what kind of knowledge, if any, literature produces within a social system that largely takes for granted the fact-value distinction. As inheritors of this epistemological framework, humanists continue to find it difficult—if not impossible—to explain the nature and value of the knowledge they produce. While I would not go so far as to propose that studying similar dynamics within nineteenth-century poetry would help us articulate the nature and value of our work, it will allow us to draw connections between the historical position of the texts we study and our present disciplinary “crisis.”

The extended close readings of individual poems that compose the bulk of this project are bracketed by two sections that explicitly consider this problem of literary knowledge. The “Overture” explores Wordsworth’s attempt to articulate the nature of poetry in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and its accompanying Appendix on Poetic Diction and introduces a theme that will run throughout this study: the (un)grounding of nineteenth-century poetry in a past that remains a present and shaping force through its absence. The concluding “Coda” will turn to scholars’ present attempts to provide grounds for the humanities’ continued institutional presence in the face of their alleged “obsolescence.” The rise of the digital humanities marks one attempt to bring humanities research into conversation with more dominant technological

discourses. I focus particularly on several forms of computerized reading practices that have developed as part of the digital humanities; while these approaches may, at first, appear to simply reduce literary texts to “data,” on closer examination they reveal how the humanities remain a space for an encounter, as Alan Liu has put it, with the “unknown *within* the known.”⁸ Nowhere is this more apparent than in our scholarly engagement with texts that preserve their own modes of knowledge through their resistance to full incorporation into dominant epistemological discourses, a resistance often achieved by drawing attention to the mediality of our own scholarly encounters with and representations of them.

While these considerations of literary knowledge frame this project, its body is comprised of close readings of three poems: William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “The Triumph of Life,” and Gerard Manley Hopkins’s “The Wreck of the Deutschland.” My reading of *The Prelude* associates Wordsworth’s autobiographical poem, which has been considered paradigmatically modern, with pre-modern experiences of the self and post-modern understandings of literature. My reading of “The Triumph of Life” similarly locates the poem between pre-modern and post-modern understandings; I place it between pre-modern conceptions of temporality and history that I associate with Dante and post-modern conceptions that I associate with Paul de Man. The final close reading, in moving from the Romantics to the priest-poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, explores how the particular “untimeliness” I located in Wordsworth’s and Shelley’s poems both subsists in and is radically altered by Hopkins’s explicitly religious framework.

The first two chapters examine *The Prelude*. Chapter 1 turns from the metaphorical

⁸ Alan Liu, *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 306.

“grounds” of poetry considered in the “Overture” to a more literal ground that plays a central role in the poem’s “spots of time.” In a key episode from the poem, the boy Wordsworth encounters the ground on which a gibbet mast used to stand. The boy’s (non-)encounter with the gibbet, itself a “relic” of a “barbaric” past, demonstrates that the poetic subjectivity represented in *The Prelude*, which is often considered one of the earliest examples of modern “self-making,” is constructed instead on the ground(lessness) of a pre-modern experience that continues to haunt the present.

Chapter 2 moves from an examination of the connection between the present and the past in *The Prelude* to an analysis of how the poem’s apostrophic addresses to Coleridge figure its relationship to the future. While the previous chapter argued that the scene of the gibbet mast demonstrates the degree to which the poet’s subjectivity was still entangled with pre-modern conceptions of the self as “given,” this chapter argues that our conception of *The Prelude* as an unproblematically “modern” poem is also challenged by the way the scenes of reading within it, both in the addresses to Coleridge and in Book V, the so-called “Book of Books,” anticipate post-modern and post-structuralist understandings of textuality.

Chapter 3 explores Percy Shelley’s unfinished final poem “The Triumph of Life”. While my reading of Wordsworth’s poem focused principally on concepts of subjectivity, my reading of Shelley’s poem focuses primarily on representations of history. By locating the presentation of history in “The Triumph of Life” between the representation of history in two texts central to the poem’s own literary history—Dante’s *Divina Commedia* and Paul de Man’s “Shelley Disfigured”—I suggest that the poem proves resistant to our attempts to place it within a static literary historical position.

Chapter 4 moves from the Romantic to the Victorian period in its study of Hopkins’s

“The Wreck of the Deutschland” and the “Author’s Preface” that Hopkins intended to publish alongside the poem. The Preface, which represents Hopkins’s most systematic explanation of sprung rhythm, has rarely been the subject of the type of rhetorical readings that have long proved central to critical approaches to Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Yet Hopkins’s Preface, when so approached, reveals a similar trajectory of literary history and a similar representation of the poet’s *persona* as Wordsworth’s text. Perhaps more unexpectedly, given the stark contrast between Shelley’s atheism and Hopkins’s devout religiosity, parallels arise between the representations of history in “The Triumph of Life” and in “The Wreck of the Deutschland” even as the end result of those representations are markedly different. The overlapping of pre-modern and modern, sacred and secular histories in “Triumph” results in both historical visions becoming simply illegible, a situation that undermines attempts to ascribe a particular meaning to the text or to the march of history itself. In the “Wreck,” by contrast, Hopkins draws on the multiple temporalities of the Eucharist—which he believes to include simultaneously past, present, and future—to render the overlap of pre-modern and modern historical narratives in the poem as a religious mystery that abides even within a secular age, one which allows the poet to render his “untimely” position meaningful even as—and indeed largely *because*—it remains incomprehensible.

Overture

Historic Occasions

The Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* has long been regarded as one of the most defining documents not only of the Romantic era but of literary history from the eighteenth century to the present. Jon Klancher argues that the Preface's implicit claim that "[i]t has now become impossible to write the smallest, humblest poem of worth without framing it with an ambitious theory of social transformation, individual and collective psychology, literature and the interpretation of signs" is due to a crisis in reading which resulted from a larger socio-historical crisis: "A theory of poetic signs has become absolutely necessary to arrest the historical, semiotic spiral in which it has become impossible for readers to distinguish true signs of value from the false."¹

The Preface reflects the need to create a new—and potentially “evermore about to be”—poetic theory in the face of changing understandings of the nature of knowledge. While traditional, classical definitions of poetry, most notably Aristotle's, had associated it with the representation of universals, with the advent of the Enlightenment, particulars increasingly became the privileged site of knowledge production. John Locke would go so far as to suggest that there was no qualitative difference between the particular and the universal, which was merely a “creature of our own making.”² While not necessarily questioning the essential nature

¹ Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences 1790-1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 139.

² Of universals, Locke writes, ““universality belongs not to things themselves, which are all of them particular in their Existence [...] When therefore we quit Particulars, the Generals that rest, are only Creatures of our own making, their general Nature being nothing but the Capacity they are put into by the Understanding, of signifying or representing many particulars. For the signification they have, is nothing but a relation, but by the mind of Man is added to them.” John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 429.

of universal categories, scientific empiricism focused on material particulars while, in philosophical discourse, the subjective, particular experience of consciousness often served as the starting point for inquiry.

Considering this context, the prominence of “particulars” and “particularity” within Wordsworth’s Preface is hardly surprising. Most of the Preface presents poetry as universal in its aims and views particularity as a vice; it even draws explicitly on Aristotle’s definition of poetry to support its argument for poetry’s “general nature.”³ Yet the Preface also roots its theory of poetic knowledge within the subjective nature of the poet—a man separated not in kind (though very much in degree) from other men—and locates the genesis of poetry in the experience of a particular occasion. As a result, the ideal, universal nature of poetry can never fully extricate itself from the vice of particularity. This tension is related to others in the Preface, many of which have been widely discussed, especially those between historical and ahistorical understandings of poetry and reading and between natural and artificial modes of composition.⁴

I will focus here not only on how the Preface’s attention to the particular illuminates many of these tensions but also on how its attention to the *absence* of the particular—especially particular occasions and particular associations—also contributes to these tensions. I begin with

³ Within the *Poetics*, of course, “poetry” designates literature as such. The Preface, by contrast, is conceived with the more narrowly-defined concept of poetry in mind.

⁴ The tensions between a historical and ahistorical presentation of literary value are explored in detail in Thomas Pfau, “Elementary Feelings’ and ‘Distorted Language’: The Pragmatics of Culture in Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” *New Literary History* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 125–46. Tensions between ideal and actual language in Wordsworth’s discussion of the “real language used by men” is explored in great detail in David Ferry, *The Limits of Mortality: An Essay on Wordsworth’s Major Poems* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959). Barbara Johnson has noted how “Wordsworth attempts to prevent the poetic figure from losing its passion, from repeating itself as an empty, mechanical device of style. But the formula for recollection in tranquility involves just such a blind mechanical repetition of the lost language,” and this inability to separate natural and mechanical language is present even in the literary history provided in the Appendix on Poetic Diction. Barbara Johnson, “Strange Fits: Poe and Wordsworth on the Nature of Poetic Language,” in *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, eds. Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 47

a consideration of Wordsworth's invocation of Aristotle's *Poetics* in his contrast between the poet and the "Man of Science"; in this passage, the Preface stresses the continuity between classical and contemporary poetry by stressing poetry's "universal" nature. The literary history provided in the Appendix on Poetic Diction, by contrast, underscores the loss of the particular historical and social *habitus* that was central to classical poetics. By tying this historical absence to other absences of occasion that are discussed in the Preface, I suggest that the loss of occasions—both historical and personal—functions not merely as a lack but also as a shaping force in Romantic poetry.

"The most philosophic of all writing"

In the Preface, Wordsworth alludes to a quotation from Aristotle's *Poetics*:

Aristotle, I have been told, hath said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so, its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; [...] The obstacles which stand in the way of the fidelity of the Biographer and Historian, and of their consequent utility, are incalculably greater than those which are to be encountered by the Poet who has an adequate knowledge of the dignity of his art. The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, that of the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer or a natural philosopher, but as a Man.⁵

Wordsworth's representation of Aristotle is not quite accurate, as the *Poetics* formulation was not superlative but comparative: "poetry is a more philosophical and more serious thing than history, since poetry speaks more of things that are universal, and history of things that are particular. It is what is universal, the sorts of things that a certain sort of person turns out to say or do as a result of what is likely or necessary that poetry aims at, even though it puts names on

⁵ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 87.

people.”⁶

The Preface’s separation of “general” truth from that which is “individual and local” superficially repeats Aristotle’s position. There are, however, key differences. In this passage, the *Poetics* draws a distinction between universals and particulars to demonstrate the nature of poetic mimesis, which while not representing actual facts nonetheless represents what is probable; in contrast, in Wordsworth’s Preface, the focus is not on the general nature of what is represented but rather on the experience of the reader, who is affected at the most essential level, “as a Man.” To experience things “as a Man” is to transcend any particular realm of knowledge; while Wordsworth begins, in keeping with the *Poetics*, with a contrast of the poet and the historian, in the following paragraphs he will offer a much more extended comparison between poetry and the sciences. By shifting the grounds of comparison from poetry and history to poetry and most other realms of knowledge and by extending the conception of “universals” from the relatively restrictive definition of the *Poetics*—in which poetry is generalizing in a way that history is not—to an association of poetry with what Wordsworth will call “general nature,” a term which serves to gather together and conflate human sentiment, the natural world, and social experience, the Preface offers in some ways a *more* universal vision of poetry than that proposed by Aristotle.

Thomas Pfau notes that in the Preface “the affective becomes the focal point of Wordsworth’s persistent and significant metaphoric blending of ‘essential’ and ‘general’ features [...] Their paradigmatic and exemplary force, throughout the Preface, inheres in their simultaneous capacity to *signify* a collective meaning and to *appear* as the very essence or

⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newport: Focus Publishing, 2006), 32.

intuition that ‘grounds’ such meaning.”⁷ By insisting on the poet’s ability to speak to the reader “as a Man,” the Preface seeks to re-privilege modes of knowledge production whose dominance was being rapidly supplanted by the empirical sciences; the “universal” knowledge provided by poetry was not simply more general but also *more essential* to human life than the particular knowledge produced by science. Additionally, the Preface’s citation of Aristotle within its own explanation of the nature of poetic knowledge helps create a sense of historical continuity; not only is poetry’s value universal but its essential nature is transhistorical.

But it is not just the definition of the universal that has been extended; Wordsworth also extends the connotations of the particular. In his contrast of the Poet and the “Man of Science,” Wordsworth will link together subjective particularity with knowledge derived through empirical particulars and his description of the poet will associate the universal nature of poetry with the poet’s own “binding” power. His comparison begins by noting a shared quality between the poet and the scientist:

We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. The Man of Science, the Chemist and Mathematician, whatever difficulties and disgusts they may have had to struggle with, know and feel this. However painful may be the objects with which the Anatomist’s knowledge is connected, he feels that his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has not pleasure he has no knowledge.⁸

As Rowan Boyson points out, “the pleasures of knowledge are the pivot around which Wordsworth first links poetics and science and then sunders them.” This sundering is achieved when “Wordsworth withdraws from science the communicative, sociable, and sympathetic potential of man’s active principle of pleasure, and unexpectedly attributes private, subjective,

⁷ Pfau, “‘Elementary Feelings,’” 126.

⁸ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 87.

incommunicable pleasure in its place.”⁹ In other words, even if the knowledge that science produces is ultimately one of “general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts,” there is still something permanently individual about its acquisition:

the poet, prompted by this feeling of pleasure which accompanies him through the whole course of his studies, converses with general nature with affections akin to those, which, through labor and length of time, the Man of Science has raised up in himself, by conversing with those particular parts of nature which are the object of his studies. The knowledge of both the Poet and the Man of Science is pleasure; but the knowledge of one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings. The Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing the song in which all human beings join him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion.¹⁰

The Man of Science does not merely do his work in “solitude” but his pleasure is also the result of his own, solitary creation, for he has “raised [it] up in himself.” In contrast, the poet’s pleasure arrives naturally and involves a “habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings.” In short, poetry is human in a way that, it seems, science cannot—or, at least at present, *is not*—capable of. In this schema, empirical data, the very element that is usually regarded as rendering the sciences objective, transforms science into a more deeply *subjective* experience than that of poetry. Meanwhile the poet, whose knowledge is ultimately *more* objective, as it is the “first and last of all knowledge,” not only “converses with general nature” but himself takes on a general nature: “the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time.”¹¹ Such a claim requires as

⁹ Rowan Boyson, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment Idea of Pleasure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 115.

¹⁰ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 88.

¹¹ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 88.

its *a priori* the assertion later in the Preface that the poet does not differ “in kind from other men, but only in degree.” Clifford Siskin has noted the centrality of this assertion to the Preface’s larger vision of affective community: “Eliminating kinds makes sympathetic identification possible; positing degrees makes it desirable. Poets can speak to men, for example, because they are of the same kind. The men *want* to listen because the poet is more sensitive.”¹²

This insistence on a difference of degree instead of kind between the poet and others also makes it clear that the “general nature” of poetry must extend beyond a single class. Wordsworth’s principle indictment of the poetry of his time—that it relies on “poetic diction”—is not based on the fact that this diction is peculiar to a particular poet but that it is an esoteric language peculiar to poets as a class. Even though the “individual” acquisition of scientific knowledge was achieved within the context of a burgeoning scientific community, it was not enough to save it from its “particular” quality; similarly, a poetry that is written “for Poets alone” fails to achieve its truly universal aims.¹³

Nonetheless, poetic production does begin with particular experience. In one of the best known passages of the Preface, Wordsworth asserts that

all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of our past feelings; and as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act feelings will be connected with important subjects¹⁴

The most obvious contrast to be found here with the *Poetics* is that the *poet* performs at an

¹² Clifford H. Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 53.

¹³ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 89.

¹⁴ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 79.

individual, affective level the movement from particulars to universals that the *Poetics* identifies with poetry, especially the epic and dramatic forms that are the text's principle focus. In the *Poetics*, poetry transforms particular happenings, be they historical facts or events in a fictional plot, into a generalizable experience; in the Preface, it is the poet's particular feelings which are made to transcend their individual occurrence and to instead reveal "what is really important to men." In this sense, then, the contrast reveals the shift from a (neo)classical poetics based on mimesis to a Romantic one rooted in affect. Derek Attridge points out that "Wordsworth [...] sustains the Renaissance and neoclassical demand for an art that excludes the particular in favor of the universal, but he locates the universal not in that which is most widely shared by mankind but that which is most purely born—however rare it might be."¹⁵ By revealing what is "really important," the poet oftentimes *separates* himself from a society that has poured out "general approbation" on literature that includes the "gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers."¹⁶

There is, however, also an important shift in the nature of the poetic occasion. The *Poetics* speaks only briefly about the lyric and it identifies it by its oldest definition: words accompanying lyre-playing. A largely non-mimetic form, the lyric with which Aristotle would have been familiar was largely defined by its occasion (though, of course, the occasion during which a particular lyric was performed might well shift over time). Jonathan Culler notes that "[i]n general, we can say that in Greece the lyric is a form for public or private performance and reperformance, with a strong ethical dimension and a variety of conventionally prescribed roles

¹⁵ Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Methuen, 1988), 72.

¹⁶ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 77.

through which meaning and value can be negotiated, as singers perform lyrics created at particular moments.”¹⁷ And, “[i]n archaic Greece, even after the development of writing, melic or lyric verse was performed on various social occasions, which inclines critics to posit for lyric a fundamental social role: it works to constitute groups of listeners as social groups, offering discourse about the relations of men to the gods and about what is to be valued.”¹⁸ Wordsworth never explicitly states in his Preface what is meant by the term “lyrical ballads,” though the hybrid form would seem to suggest a combination of the narrative structure of the ballad with a lyrical form that is connected to a (personal) occasion and has the strong affective quality that tends to define Romantic lyric.

Like ancient lyric, Wordsworth’s poems aim to constitute a community. The “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface” will locate this community almost entirely in the future, as “every Author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed.”¹⁹ However, while the community-forming aspects of the classical lyric often manifested in public occasions in which a physical community was already present, the Preface presents a personal poetic occasion that is separated from the moment of its performance or reading. Moreover, the occasion that provokes a poem is often at a remove from the poem’s composition as composition requires “emotion recollected in tranquility.”²⁰ This is one reason why the poet must be possessed of a “disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present.”²¹

¹⁷ Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 55.

¹⁸ Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 307.

¹⁹ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 522.

²⁰ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 92.

Particular Associations

Absent occasions, however, will take on a very different valence in the “Appendix on Poetic Diction.” In the Preface’s account of poetic composition, the absence of the (personal) occasion proved to be central to poetic production; in the Appendix, the absence of the originary poetic occasion is responsible for the “poetic diction” that Wordsworth condemns. In the Appendix, Wordsworth associates the origins of poetic language with occasions that unite an entire community:

It is indeed true that the language of the earliest Poets was felt to differ materially from ordinary language, because it was the language of extraordinary occasions; but it was really spoken by men, language which the Poet himself had uttered when he had been affected by the events which he described, or which he had heard uttered by those around him. To this language it is probable that metre of some sort or other was early superadded. This separated the genuine language of Poetry still further from common life, so that whoever read or heard the poems of these earliest Poets felt himself moved in a way in which he had not been accustomed to be moved in real life, and by causes manifestly different from those which acted upon him in real life.²²

Essentially, Wordsworth identifies the earliest poetry as occasional poetry, though his account is more mythic than historical.²³ While, in the Preface, Wordsworth had drawn heavily on classical poetics’ focus on the universal nature of poetic knowledge, in the Appendix, by contrast, he emphasizes its more contingent nature and implicitly references the lyric’s own origin as a performed work (while he does not mention musical accompaniment, he does conjecture that meter was likely “early superadded”).

²¹ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 85.

²² Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 157.

²³ As Mary Jacobus has observed, Wordsworth’s story of the development of poetic language borrows heavily from Hugh Blair’s primitivist account of literary language in which it involved “the whole burst of the human mind,” which though “wild and disorderly” still “transports the mind.” Blair will also associate this “primitive” poetic form with Native American practices in which “men in their savage state” had “music and song [...] carried on with an incredible degree of enthusiasm.” Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 189.

Poetry's devolution into "poetic diction" is itself the result of the loss of this particular occasion, which rather than producing a general or universal art instead increases the particularity of poets:

the first Poets, as I have said, spoke a language which though unusual, was still the language of men. This circumstance, however, was disregarded by their successors; they found that they could please by easier means: they became proud of a language which they themselves had invented, and which was uttered only by themselves; and, with the spirit of a fraternity, they arrogated it to themselves as their own.²⁴

Importantly, the issue becomes not merely that the poet has turned from the external world and from external experience and to a language that is purely "invented," but that poets had also turned in on themselves with a "spirit of fraternity" that both produced and, presumably, was sustained by an increasingly esoteric language.

This concern with the particularity of poets as a class extends to Wordsworth's consciousness of potential faults in his own work:

I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, I may have sometimes written upon unworthy subjects; but I am less apprehensive on this account, than that my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connexions of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases from which no man can altogether protect himself.²⁵

Association will, of course, prove important to much of Wordsworth's understanding of the poetic self, especially when he introduces the idea of "spots of time" in *The Prelude*. Some critics have linked the "arbitrary connexions" referred to in this passage to Locke's theory of language.²⁶ Locke expresses concern about the effect of arbitrary associations on philosophical

²⁴ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 158

²⁵ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 93.

²⁶ While not principally concerned with the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Ross Hamilton's treatment of Wordsworth in *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (University of Chicago Press, 2007) assumes that Wordsworth's work draws heavily on Lockean influences.

language:

Some of our *Ideas* have a natural Correspondence and Connexion with one another. [...] Besides this there is another Connexion of *Ideas* wholly owing to Chance or Custom; *Ideas* that in themselves are not at all of kin, come to be so united in some Men's Minds, that 'tis very hard to separate them, they always keep in company, and the one no sooner at any time comes into the Understanding but its Associate appears with it.²⁷

In *Power, Plain English, and the Rise of Modern Poetry*, David Rosen argues that Wordsworth's original 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* attempted, in its insistence upon "the discriminating powers of the mind," to appropriate Locke's understanding of "simple ideas" and transport a precise philosophical language into the poetic sphere.²⁸ I argue, however, that Wordsworth's "connexions"—and their relationship to the concerns of the Appendix—are better understood through the lens of Edmund Burke's account of literary language, which ties its power specifically to its non-referential quality.

Locke's attempt to produce a true philosophical language is undertaken to purge language of words that ultimately lack any real meaning, "the using of Words, without clear and distinct *Ideas*; or, which is worse, signs without any thing signified."²⁹ Locke cautions that if a man were to try and use a word to describe "things he knows not" then he has succeeded only in making "signs of nothing, sounds without signification." Burke similarly locates an absence behind abstract terms, but for him this absence also takes on an affective presence. Speaking of "compound abstract words" (he gives as examples "honour, justice, and liberty"), Burke argues that

Such words are in reality but mere sounds; but they are sounds, which being used on

²⁷ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 395.

²⁸ David Rosen, *Power, Plain English, and the Rise of Modern Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 36.

²⁹ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 490.

particular occasions [...] produce in the mind [...] effects similar to those of their occasions. The sounds being often used without reference to any particular occasion, & carrying still their first impressions they at last utterly lose their connection with the particular occasions that gave rise to them; yet the sound without any annexed notion continues to operate as before.³⁰

For both Locke and Burke, certain abstract words lack a referent. Yet in Burke's account, they do arise in "*reference to a particular occasion.*" The formation of an association through the accidental congruence of elements—in this case sounds and occasions—recalls Lockean associationism, but what is produced by the congruence is precisely *not* an idea, but merely the affective "impression" left by a "sound *without any annexed notion*" and without any direct recollection of the "particular occasion." Nonetheless, the particular event that conditioned the association continues to operate precisely *through* its absence; the arbitrary nature of abstract language is manifested not by the insistent, crowded presence of confused ideas that so commonly appears in Locke as the risk of un-rigorous modes of speech and thought, but rather by a feeling whose very power is dependent upon the forgetting of its own origins. This forgetting, however, cannot be inserted into Locke's narrative of a lost referent, since Burke's account suggests that language's power is ultimately not tied to signification. Indeed, the pervasive affect produced by this language resembles Pfau's description of Romantic paranoia: "the subject cannot locate itself as the origin or 'owner' of the emotion but [...] appears wholly in its grip" and the emotion represents "an evaluative response to an experiential complexion *before*

³⁰ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. David Womersley (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 188-89. Burke distinguishes two other classes of words: "*aggregate words*" which "represent many simple ideas *united by nature* to form some one determinate composition, as man, horse, tree, castle, &c" and "*simple abstract words*" which "stand for one simple idea of such compositions and no more; as red, blue, round, square and the like" (188). Ultimately, however, Burke will take the "compound abstract word" as representative of a dynamic in *all* language: "I am of opinion, that the most general effect even of these words [aggregate and simple abstract words], does not arise from their forming pictures of the several things they would represent in the imagination; because on a very diligent examination of my own mind, and getting others to consider theirs, I do not find that once in twenty time such picture is formed, and when it is, there is most commonly a particular effort of the imagination for that purpose. [...] strange as it may appear, we are often at a loss to know what ideas we have of things, or whether we have any ideas at all upon some subjects" (190-91).

the latter is broken down into its isolated parts by analytic and discursive understanding.”³¹

Wordsworth’s Appendix shares one strong similarity in its account of language’s poetic power with that proposed by Burke: poetic language arises in response to a particular, proper occasion. However, in Wordsworth’s account, the power of language is tied to a conscious response to this occasion. The original sin of poets was their turning away from an “extraordinary occasion” which gave birth to “the original figurative language of passion” and toward a language of their “own invention” which was “distinguished by various degrees of wanton deviation from good sense and nature”; in short, it is the loss of proper occasion which marks the decline of poetry.³²

And yet the Preface nonetheless recognizes—both explicitly and implicitly—the importance of “absent” occasions to the poet. Not only is he more adept than other men at being “affected [...] by absent things as if they were present,” one of his chief qualities is being able to produce emotions entirely severed from actual, particular, external events. He possesses the

ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than any other thing which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves; whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feeling which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him *without immediate external excitement*.³³

Yet even as these absences of external occasion are central to poetic production they threaten the universalizing aims of poetry, since the “occasion” of poetry has shifted from an explicitly

³¹ Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 31

³² Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 157-58.

³³ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 85; Emphasis mine.

communal one to a personal one that must become generalizable in order for poetry to fulfill its function by the poet fulfilling *his* function as a binding force. The emotions that arise without the presence of “real events” must nonetheless express a “general sympathy.”

The two faults that Wordsworth locates in his own poems threaten this binding power. The first “fault” is that the poet may have “given to things a false importance”; in short, his poetry may lack the proper occasion. Of course, in Burke’s theory of poetic language, it is precisely this *loss* of the appropriate occasion that creates the “union of affecting words” which is “the most powerful of all poetical instruments.” Burke’s logic would then relate the second “fault” that Wordsworth identifies in his poetry—“that my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connexions of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases, from which no man can altogether protect himself”—to the first, for the arbitrary connection of words with feelings is created by the loss of occasion.

When read in light of the Appendix, we may identify the first fault as principally historical: the loss of proper occasion is not merely something to which Wordsworth is subject but is symptomatic of a larger loss of ancient conceptions of language and community. The second fault, the “arbitrary connexions,” proceeds from the loss of a particular, personal occasion. Moreover, it is the *forgetting* of this occasion which is so destructive; “no man can altogether protect himself” from these “arbitrary connexions” because he can never locate their origin to begin with.

But the dual-absence structure that is responsible for the “faults” of Wordsworth’s poems is also key to the Preface’s vision of the Romantic poet. The absence of the classical *habitus*, which produced a particular, historically-contingent experience of community, opens up a space that privileges the personal experiences of the poet and makes his “own feelings [...] his stay and

support.” And it is these “feelings,” not what occasions them, which ultimately matters and abides. In Wordsworth’s poetry, he claims, “the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling.”³⁴ Yet the loss—or, at the least, the dismissal—of the particular, personal event does not necessarily produce a “universal” poetics. It does, however, produce a poetic subjectivity always at risk of being “culpably particular.”³⁵

In this sense, then, the Poet and the Man of Science have both become “particular” in their pursuits. Yet, while the Man of Science deals directly with particulars *as* particulars, the poet is shaped instead through the *absence* of particular circumstances, both historical and personal. While Locke’s Enlightenment-based logic regards the absence of the particular as evidence of meaninglessness, Burke’s linguistic theory encourages us to think about how the absence of a particular occasion can serve as a present, powerful, and even potentially destructive force that shapes the present. This shaping nature of absence will be explored in the following chapter.

³⁴ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 80.

³⁵ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 82.

Chapter 1

(Self-)Possessions: The Spirit of the Past in *The Prelude*

The Prelude has long been regarded as a key text in the development of a properly modern literature.¹ Many critics, most notably M.H. Abrams, have brought the radical nature of the *The Prelude*'s new vision of epic poetry to the fore by contrasting it with earlier epics, especially Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In the opening of the *Divina Commedia*, the narrator has lost the "straightforward way" and will only regain it by a journey through a supernatural landscape that is, quite literally, organized around a transcendent divine presence that determines not only the relationship of individuals to God but also their relationship to one another. While *Paradise Lost* does not draw upon Dante's medieval notions of sacred temporality and spatiality, the poem's attempt to "justify the ways of God to men" (l.26) is authorized by "Eternal Providence" (l. 25) and a "heav'nly Muse" (l. 6). In contrast, *The Prelude* begins with the poet asserting that "I cannot miss my way" (l. 19) and that he is free to "fix my habitation where I will" (l. 10).² Moreover, in an apostrophic address at the end of the poem, Wordsworth assures Coleridge that

It will be known—by thee at least, my friend
Felt—that the history of a poet's mind
Is labour not unworthy of regard:
To thee the work shall justify itself. (XIII. 407-10)

¹ For instance, Paul Jay notes that *The Prelude* "provides a unique insight into the paradoxes of literary self-representation in a period when the self was coming to be thought of less as a creation of a deity and more as the construction of humankind's own mental power." Ultimately, *The Prelude* "forges [...] an absolute link between Romanticism, the problematic subject, and the rise of autobiographical art as a self-conscious *literary* form." Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984, 33; 42.

² Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from *The Prelude* come from the thirteen-book version of 1805 as printed in the Norton Critical Edition.

In moving from the “ways of God” to the “poet’s mind,” from a supernatural world of fixed relationships to a natural world in which man may “fix his habitation where he will,” and—most notably—in moving from a work whose purpose lies in its relationship to a transcendent truth to a work which is immanently self-justifying, *The Prelude* appears to fit within a larger social movement away from a *Weltanschauung* shaped by “dogmatic” religious and philosophical appeals to authority in which the self is, to borrow Clifford Siskin’s terms, “static, metaphysical, and inherited” and towards a modern conception of subjects as “rounded, psychological, and self-made.”³

Yet there are key moments in *The Prelude* that resist attempts to represent the poem as a unilaterally modern text. These scenes gesture towards the subsistence of an earlier, pre-modern conception of the self as ontologically given, even though they can only dramatize this type of selfhood as an experience of non-knowledge or even absence. Moreover, the poem’s anxieties about readerly agency suggest an awareness of the potential failure of the modern autobiographical text, or at least a recognition that the modern self it constructs must be ever re-made, re-read, and thus, to remain viable, must also remain “evermore about to be” (VI.542). The poem is thus positioned between two encounters with alterity: first, with an unknowable otherness at the origin of the self—which can neither be experienced as positive transcendence nor be fully incorporated into the immanent experience of a subject—and, second, in the poem’s orientation toward a non-teleological future, which is ensured neither by tradition nor even by the poet but which can only be determined by another, a reader-to-come. Despite the fact that both of these experiences involve something beyond the self that either precedes or exceeds it,

³ Siskin, *Historicity of Romantic Discourse*, 12.

both remain insistently particular. In this chapter, I will attend to the first of these experiences: the negative subsistence of a pre-modern experience of the self as given by and related to a transcendent realm beyond it. In the following chapter, I will argue that the poem's apostrophic addresses to Coleridge correspond to the second experience of alterity, in which the unknowable future of the work is determined by its opening toward the other.

As briefly mentioned in my introduction, Charles Taylor understands secularism and the development of modernity as a shift in our "sense of our world [...] from one in which [...] spirits were just unproblematically there, impinging on us, to one in which they are no longer so, and indeed, in which many of the ways they were there have become inconceivable. Their not impinging is what we experience naïvely."⁴ Yet I will argue in this section that we *do* find spirits impinging upon the boy Wordsworth in key moments of *The Prelude*, spirits of an earlier age that is dead but still haunts precisely in and through its absence. Both the "spirit" that "hallows" the scene of the drowned man and the "efficacious spirit" that "lurks" within the spots of time muddle "the line between personal agency and impersonal force" in the experiences of the boy Wordsworth. In a reading of the gibbet mast on the moor episode, I will argue that the poet's attempt to account for these types of experiences demonstrates, as Taylor suggests, a growing illegibility of the past due to the loss of a pre-modern conception of a "given" self, one defined in relation to a transcendence which precedes and exceeds it and that could easily accommodate and explain these "porous" experiences. But it is precisely the encounter with this past—or rather the experience of its absence, a *missed* encounter with it—that enables the very "porous" (and supposedly "pre-modern") experience it also renders illegible.

⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 30.

“Spirit hallowing”

In Book V of *The Prelude*, we encounter what appears to be a sinister image. From the “beauteous scene” of Esthwaite Water arises the body of a drowned man with a “ghastly face, a spectre shape/ Of terror even” (V.470-73; 1805). And yet the boy Wordsworth, who witnesses the scene, is not “possessed” by “vulgar fear,” for

my inner eye had seen
Such sights before among the shining streams
Of fairyland, the forests of romance—
Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
With decoration and ideal grace,
A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
Of Grecian art and purest poesy. (V.473-82; 1805)

It appears that the boy has not only escaped “possession” by fear but that he has in fact achieved a feat of “self-possession” through his ability to mediate potentially unsettling experiences through an aesthetic lens.

In his reading of this episode, Ross Hamilton ties it to the other, explicitly identified, “spots of time” and detects within them “a lingering metaphysics of substance and accident.” He thus provides a felicitous account of Wordsworth’s ability to transform accidental events into substantive form through contemplation. This “lingering metaphysics” is itself the vestiges of a pre-modern understanding of accident as existing always in relationship to substance; yet this understanding is significantly troubled by the Lockean treatment of elements in the world as solely “accidental.” For Locke “the formation of concepts, raw materials largely composed of accidental qualities, replaced the Aristotelian notion of enduring and commonly recognized

realities.”⁵ In Hamilton’s account, Wordsworth preserves the older relationship between accident and substance, but with a difference. Substance is now closely associated with the power of consciousness itself: “what remained accidental was the transitory observations and fluctuating feelings that became attached to memories; what he recognized as substantive was the preservation of such accidents of experience in the form of eternal images.” This “preservation” buffers Wordsworth from the direst consequences of a Lockean associationism while still recognizing Locke’s central proposition that “accidental associations imprinted on the mind formed the basis for formulating new ideas.”⁶ For instance, in his contemplation of the “unclaimed garments” of the drowned man, it is the boy’s own mind—not the object itself—that really matters. It is the particular disposition of the individual that defines what objects affect him:

To initiate a lasting impression, an accidental sign need not possess [sic] features that would create a comparable effect on any beholder. The sight of the pile of clothes acquires its power from the boy’s state of mind and perceptions. [...] Watching beside the Esthwaite in expectation of some undefined illumination, the boy achieved a talismanic memory that the poet would develop into a personal mythology.⁷

This personal “talismanic memory” also serves as an experience of the transcendent and permanent power of mind: “If Christ’s abandoned clothes marked his triumph over mutable time and ascent to immortality, the abandoned garments of the drowned man assert a different kind of immortality: through this vision the poet’s imagination was empowered to create an archetypal ‘spot of time’ that transcended the mutable world.”⁸

⁵ Ross Hamilton, *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 127.

⁶ Hamilton, *Accident*, 198.

⁷ Hamilton, *Accident*, 209.

⁸ Hamilton, *Accident*, 210.

Yet Hamilton's reading elides the much less redemptive reading of the garments that Andrzej Warminski proposes when he notes the obvious—though easily overlooked—fact that these garments actually belong to a corpse. Thus the traditional formula that clothes are to the body as the body is to the soul is rendered deathly by altering the formula to “garments are to *corpse*,” which means that “the corpse occupies the slot that the spirit or the soul, analogously, occupies in relation to the body or the corpse. This means that the corpse—in the relation garments to corpse—can now be read, now *has* to be read, as the figure for a *dead spirit* or a ‘deathful spirit,’ as it were.”⁹

Similarly, we encounter difficulties if we try to read the boy's reaction according to Hamilton's account of the felicitous secularization and immanentization of an earlier, religious metaphysics. At first glance, it does appear that the boy is able to free himself from terror not by a traditional appeal to the immortality of the soul but rather by his own ability to interpret the scene through his past reading. The earlier experience with books familiarizes the scene and grants it “a dignity, a smoothness” (l. 480). The location of hope simply shifts: from a linear future to a sort of “eternal” space of memory and from the realm of the literal to that of the metaphorical. Correspondingly, the source of that hope shifts from external forces (God will raise up the dead on the last day) to internal ones (the boy's imaginative power allows him to transform the scene). This final shift could also be traced through *The Prelude*'s history of revisions. In the 1799 version Wordsworth does not allude to any mediating influence of books, focusing instead on the effect of this type of scene on “later years.” The “numerous accidents in flood or field” (l. 280) that compose the “tragic facts/ Of rural history” (l. 282-83) have

[...] impressed my mind

⁹ Andrzej Warminski, *Material Inscriptions: Rhetorical Reading in Practice and Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 16.

With images to which in following years
Far other feelings were attached—with forms
That yet exist with independent life,
And, like their archetypes, know no decay. (l. 283-87)

Yet in the 1805 version, when the sequence is placed within the book of “Books,” the boy is able to buffer himself from the event through recourse to imaginative scenes based on past experience. The poet has correspondingly distanced himself from those “accidents in flood and field” by more fully reading and revising his own account of them; in this schema, the mediating books could be figured as the poet’s own earlier text. Yet this understanding of the scene as both a triumph of the boy’s self-possession and as evidence of the poet’s increased competence at autobiographical self-fashioning is complicated by the passages that precede and follow the drowned man’s appearance in the 1805 *Prelude*.

The episode of the drowned man actually begins with a *dispossession*. The boy watches the discarded clothes with care only to discover that “no one owned them” (l.463). In Hamilton’s reading, the poet is able to possess the “unclaimed garments” by appropriating them as a marker for the spot of time just as the boy avoided being “possessed” (l.475) by “vulgar fear” (l. 473) by recourse to memories of his reading. Yet the whole scene is soon possessed by a “spirit hallowing what I saw/ With decoration and ideal grace” (ll. 478-79) which proceeds from “fairyland” and “the forests of romance” (l. 477), scenes from books that the boy had read. Of course, it is the boy’s *memory* of these texts that appears to effect the transformation, a fact that would seem to bolster a reading of the scene as an exercise in self-possession through imaginative transformation. But the next stanza troubles this idea of the boy’s possession of the books whose “spirit” he calls upon.

The “precious treasure” (l. 482) of the boy Wordsworth was a “slender abstract of the *Arabian Tales*” (l. 485), the very sort of fanciful reading he draws upon in his encounter with the

drowned man. When he learns that his book is merely a summary, “a block/ Hewn from a mighty quarry” (ll. 487-88), he and a friend agree to

[...] lay aside
The monies we possessed, and hoard up more,
Till our joint savings had amassed enough
To make this book our own. [...] (ll. 493-96)

Ultimately, however, the boys cannot sustain their “vow,” though they maintained it “religiously” for some time (l.497), and the book remains unclaimed. They were never “masters of our wish” (l. 500). This failure of mastery, both of books and of desire, undercuts the supposed self-mastery of the episode with the drowned man and the location of the origin of the “spirit hallowing” within the boy’s own masterful mind. This is in keeping with other portions of Book V, including the opening depiction of books as “shrines so frail” (l. 49), which exhibits concern about books and their congruence with “the Mind” (l. 45).

More telling still is the dénouement of the story of the attempted possession of the

Arabian Tales:

And afterwards, when, to my father’s house
Returning at the holidays, I found
That golden store of books which I had left
Open to my enjoyment once again,
What heart was mine! (ll. 501-5)

The books are finally received not through an act of calculated individual possession but, rather, as something given. What emerges in the return to the father’s house is a logic of inheritance—one only fully appreciated after the poet’s temporary sojourn away from the house—not one of self-mastery. But, in the larger context of *The Prelude*, the father’s house is also a haunted house. In his early adolescence, eight years after the encounter with the drowned man, Wordsworth will experience a more traumatic return home:

Ere I to school returned

That dreary time, ere I had been ten days
A dweller in my father's house, he died
And I and my two brothers, orphans then,
Followed his body to the grave. (XI.363-67)

The father's house, then, is a scene both of inheritance and of loss. Moreover, insofar as the father's (ghostly) presence is related to the boy's reading—from which the "spirit hallowing" proceeds—we might read the scene of the drowned man as a scene of possession *by* an outside and antecedent source, rather than as a scene of self-possession.

"Efficacious Spirit"

The dynamic at work in the interaction between the drowned man scene and the subsequent *Arabian Tales* episode in the 1805 *Prelude* points toward a deeper underlying tension in the spots of time. To approach it we must visit another spirit; namely, the "efficacious spirit" that is the "virtue" of the spots:

This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will (XI.268-72)

As in the drowned man sequence, this "spirit" is not itself "the mind" and yet it appears (indeed "lurks") in a passage that seems to praise moments of self-possession and the mind's triumph over "outward sense." As Thomas Wieskel has noted, a spirit that "lurks" is not likely to be a purely beneficent influence: "[The 'passages of life'] 'give' knowledge but conceal the efficacious spirit; at the very least this spirit, lying, as it were in ambush, is to be distinguished from the mind's sovereignty [...] The knowledge or feeling of the mind's great power is often given to Wordsworth, but the spirit comes not as a consequence of this insight but as if in

response to it.”¹⁰ In short, the spirit—while interacting with the mind—is nonetheless not a product of it. Indeed its independent, responsorial quality suggests that it may, in fact, be a type of counter-spirit.

In the so-called “double spot” that proceeds his introduction of the term “spots of time,” Wordsworth offers some examples of these “passages of life.” As I will suggest, these only make the presence of the “efficacious spirit” more unsettling. One of the moments that most clearly correlates with Wordsworth’s description of the spots of time as a place where “our minds/ Are nourished and invisibly repaired” (ll. 263-64) is the sight—invested with “visionary dreariness”—of a “naked pool,” a “beacon on the lonely eminence,” and a woman with “her garments vexed and tossed/ By the strong wind” (ll.312-15). Yet the peculiar potency of the scene comes from a very different sort of encounter—that with the gibbet mast on the moor.

The gibbet mast passage underwent significant revisions between the 1799, 1805, and 1850 texts of *The Prelude*. Strikingly, Wordsworth’s rewritings were increasingly concerned with the presence of a “monumental writing” at the spot: this writing is completely absent from the two-book *Prelude*, first appears in the thirteen-book *Prelude*, and by the final revision the poem asserts that a mere “casual glance” at its letters causes the boy Wordsworth to “flee” the scene. In Hamilton’s account of the scene and its revisions, the rewriting of the passage demonstrates the mind’s role as “lord and master” as it wrests itself free from slavery to “outward sense” and accidental impressions:

As Wordsworth recounted in the 1805 version, what he actually saw on this spot was a mouldering gibbet post driven into the ground. Removing the physical relic, as he did in [later revision of] this passage, transforms the long green ridge into an arbitrary sign invested with a grim history. Association, which led him to imagine the ridge as a grave containing a hidden body, turned the spot as place into a spot of time. Rather than falling

¹⁰ Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 169.

prey to uncontrollable accidental associations (the process Locke feared could lure the mind into madness), he showed in various versions of the remembered event his full control over the experiential material: he could move imaginatively closer to or further away from complicity between himself and the past.¹¹

Hamilton's account assumes that the early versions of the scene recount what Wordsworth "actually saw" and that the future revisions demonstrate his control over the effects of this event. But this reading fails to account for why writing—the very medium allowing for this "full control"—becomes an increasingly terrifying power in the text. Weiskel, in contrast, will link this writing—the supreme representation of the symbolic order and the *logos* by which "[t]he order of the law is inserted into the order of nature by means of writing"—to rituals of atonement and substitution (the execution of the murderer) and, in his reading of the Salisbury Plain passage (XII.312-353), to the deep psychic history suggested by Freud's primal horde.¹² David Collings has suggested, conversely, that in Wordsworth's *oeuvre* it is not the "symbolic order" that threatens but rather the realization of its liability to breakdown. Far from dramatizing "[t]he idea that certain cultural archetypes are permanent," the survival of the "monumental writing" only because of its regular and "superstitious" upkeep by the townspeople demonstrates that "their survival depends upon an endless process of return and renewal" which is a form of re-enacted cultural violence that is precisely not substitutive: "Rather than substituting the name for the body, they carve the name onto the body, making language intervene directly into the phenomenal world instead of taking its place. [...] [T]he name loses its symbolic status and becomes merely phenomenal, something seen and not read."¹³

¹¹ Hamilton, *Accident*, 211.

¹² Weiskel, *Romantic Sublime*, 178.

¹³ David Collings, *Wordsworthian Errancies: The Poetics of Cultural Dismemberment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 146.

My own reading will also attend to the “monumental writing” and to its connection to an experience of history, though I am interested specifically in Wordsworth’s interpretation of its subsequent preservation by the townspeople. Unlike Hamilton, I do not assume that any of the descriptions provide an accurate representation of what the boy “actually saw,” though I will suggest that the earlier versions of the scene do dramatize a greater “porousness” in the boy’s experience that is mirrored by the poet’s representing the scene without rationalizing or dismissing the effect of the encounter. My intervention into the question of Wordsworth’s experience of history is less archetypal and psychoanalytic than Weiskel’s and focuses primarily on how this passage dramatizes a particular moment in the development of modernity. While Weiskel’s reading of *The Prelude*’s anxieties as a “rejection” of the “Oedipus complex” is consistent with the text’s own concern with deep psychology, this critical stance of interpreting the text within an already assumed “immanent frame” is itself a result of Wordsworth’s—and our own—historical situatedness.¹⁴ Thus, my own reading is most closely related to Collings’s. Yet Collings’s larger project is to illustrate Wordsworth’s awareness of continuities between past (or anachronistic) forms of barbarism and their present critique. The poet recognizes that “one cannot distinguish between one’s total critique of a violent culture and one’s longing to overturn it in total violence” and thus “[a]bsolute tyranny and total Enlightenment are indistinguishable.”¹⁵ The division between past and present is, according to Collings, established by a growing awareness of their shared essence; once culture has “attained the knowledge of its constitutive violence,” it can only exist “in the mode of its destruction.”¹⁶ In contrast, my

¹⁴ Weiskel, *Romantic Sublime*, 203; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 539.

¹⁵ Collings, *Wordsworthian Errancies*, 154.

¹⁶ Collings, *Wordsworthian Errancies*, 15.

argument is principally concerned with the ways in which Wordsworth experiences the past as discontinuous and inaccessible, though it still haunts. This is less the result of a gain in knowledge, which makes the poet better able to decipher the underlying reality of past cultures than the people of the time, than it is of a loss of earlier modes of knowledge and knowing, a loss that renders those past cultural experiences illegible. While the revisions of the scene between the three major versions of *The Prelude* represent an increasing movement away from even the remnants of those archaic forms of knowledge and knowing, they paradoxically attempt to render this past more legible in order to escape its power by accounting for it. The pattern of these revisions does reliably track with Collings's thesis: the condemnation of a "dark" past enacts its own violence and superstition.

The first version of the gibbet mast episode, before the appearance of the "monumental writing," is quite brief and marked by its affectless quality. The boy Wordsworth, so young that he "scarce/ Could hold a bridle," (ll. 299-300) is "disjoined" (l. 305) from his guide by "some mischance" (l. 304). "Dismounting" (l. 306), he then

[...] led my horse, and stumbling on, at length
Came to a bottom where in former times
A man, the murderer of his wife, was hung
In irons. (ll.307-10)

The descent, first from the horse and then from higher land, also serves as a descent into "former times." There are two executions to which the passage could refer: one from 1767 and one from 1672, but "former times" suggests that the reference is to the earlier event and thus that the site represents a past beyond living memory.¹⁷ Indeed, it is a past that is all but invisible, for it is unclear if there is any material trace of the execution left to see:

¹⁷ See n. 8, pg. 9 *Norton Critical Prelude* for more details about the referenced executions.

[...] Mouldered was the gibbet-mast;
The bones were gone, the iron and the wood;
Only a long green ridge of turf remained
Whose shape was like a grave. (ll. 310-13)

The near complete inaccessibility of the past event—signaled not even by a relic of that event but merely by a “ridge of turf [...] whose shape was like a grave”—suggests that we might also read the “pastness” represented by the site not merely as that of 1672 but also the deeper past of premodernity.

Wordsworth’s own prose reflections on his encounter with the gibbet mast, presented in *An Unpublished Tour* (composed 1811-12), further the strange position of the gibbet mast and its relationship to the past and to Wordsworth’s own memory.¹⁸ Wordsworth recalls that in the area there “formerly stood a gibbet, upon which the body of some atrocious Criminal had been hung in Chains near the spot where his crime had been committed. Part of the Irons & some of the wood work remained in my memory.” While the lines suggest that some of the elements of the gibbet mast may have remained when Wordsworth encountered them, the insistence that they remained *in his memory* undercuts their physical presence while exalting their haunting effect. The next line encourages us to conjure our own grisly vision of the past of the place: “Think of a human figure tossing about in the air in one of these sweet Valleys.”¹⁹ Wordsworth proceeds to denounce the practice, saying “it would be well if this odious custom of exposing the Bodies of Criminals, of whatever description, were abandoned & all traces of this relic of barbarism had disappeared from the land.” The practice of gibbeting is a “relic of barbarism”—a “trace” of the past—but the “trace” of the gibbet mast is also itself a “relic” and, oddly, one that *does* disappear

¹⁸William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth Vol. II*, edited by W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 333-343.

¹⁹ Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, 333.

from Wordsworth's description both in the *Unpublished Tour*, where he asserts that "[n]o vestige probably now remains of the object which led me to these reflections," and in the *Prelude* where the mast is "mouldered."²⁰

Indeed, the experience of absence in the scene is closely correlated with its connection to the past. The iron and wood of the gibbet mast—like the body ("bones") of the executed man—were, presumably, once here but now are "gone." Could an "efficacious spirit" lurk here? At first, such a possibility seems unlikely not merely because of the grave nature of the spot itself but also because of the dearth of any clearly affective response on the part of the boy. We are told nothing beyond the fact that he "came to" the site. Not only is there nothing to see here, it appears that there is also nothing to feel or to know. This affectless quality becomes even more pronounced when contrasted with the second part of the "double spot." In it, the encounter with the (absent) gibbet mast will begin to exert its own sort of power.

While the possibility of this unhallowed spot being haunted will come to the fore more explicitly in later revisions of the scene, it is clear that something accompanies the boy Wordsworth as he leaves the "spot" and encounters the vision of the naked pool and wind-tossed girl:

[...] I left the spot,
And reascending the bare slope I saw
A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
The beacon on the summit, and more near
A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
Against the blowing wind. (ll. 313-19)

The descents that marked the gibbet mast passage are now replaced by a "reascent" that returns

²⁰ Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, 334.

the boy to the spot from which he came. While the boy merely “came to” the site of the gibbet-mast (where, it would seem, there was little to see), he “saw” the pool. At first, then, the movement from “the long green ridge of turf” to the “naked pool,” from site (“spot”) to sight, would also appear to be a movement from absence to presence. Yet it quickly becomes clear that it is not the scene itself that accounts for its powerful impact on the boy:

[...] It was in truth
An ordinary sight, but I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
Did at that time invest the naked pool,
The beacon on the lonely eminence,
The woman and her garments vexed and tossed
By the strong wind. (ll. 319-27)

The unspeakable “visionary dreariness” only appears after the encounter with the (absent) gibbet mast, proceeding as it were from the grave-shaped spot. Moreover, like both the “efficacious spirit” and the “spirit hallowing,” this “visionary dreariness” does not appear to be a possession of the boy, for it is framed in terms of its relationship to the external scene instead of its relationship to him. At the same time, the insistence that it was “in truth/ An ordinary sight” recognizes that the effect of the scene is not merely the result of its material reality. Rather it is the encounter with the site of the gibbet mast that enables the “investment” of the later scene with “visionary dreariness” as the “ordinary sight” of the pool is displaced by the absent presence of the gibbet mast, even as the site of the pool replaces the site of the gibbet mast as the locus for visionary power. In this sense, the encounter with the gibbet mast—a representative of a pre-modern, “barbaric” past—unsettles the lines between mind and world, inside and outside, producing the very conditions that Taylor associates with “porous experience”: “meaning can no

longer be placed simply within; nor can it be located exclusively without.”²¹ In a pre-modern cosmology, this experience of being in the world would be explicable through reference to a supernatural and a transcendent realm, a realm within which the self was not self-generating and self-sustaining but related to a larger order beyond it. Yet this early version of the scene eludes any reference to the supernatural, even as the “haunting” effect of the gibbet mast causes the boy to have a “porous” experience that remains unnamed and perhaps even unnameable. What would the location of such an experience in a scene which is meant to show us the “efficacious spirit” that “lurks” in the spots of time mean for an understanding of the spots of time as constitutive of Wordsworth’s autobiographical self?

Christopher Bundock has suggested that the site of the gibbet mast is best understood as a “preface of the impression” made by the spots of time.²² Rather than representing an impression itself, it instead makes the boy “capable, subsequently, of bearing impressions,” and it offers the experience of a curiously affectless affect, a “‘feeling’ of the dislocation of sensibility itself, the uncanny return of the quality of impressionability”: it “suggests [...] that there is something senseless at the very heart of sensation.”²³ Bundock argues that this quality of “impressionableness,” which is more persistent than any particular impression, is itself constitutive of modern conceptions of time and subjectivity. It “reveals” the poet’s “historical being or his being historical” for “the exceptional impression in the gibbet mast episode is lighter and yet more profound than any caesura at the centre of empirical impression.” In other words, in “the condition of *impressionability* [...] Wordsworth’s subject ‘senses,’ as it were, the radical

²¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 35.

²² Christopher Bundock, “‘A Feeling that I was not for that hour/Nor for that place’: Wordsworth’s Modernity,” *European Romantic Review* 21, no. 3 (2010), 386.

²³ Bundock, “Wordsworth’s Modernity,” 388.

openness of temporalized history.”²⁴ While I agree with Bundock’s assessment that Wordsworth’s (non-)experience at the gibbet mast is particularly modern, I would argue that the encounter and its subsequent effects are an experience of something outside of and *prior* to the self, one which possesses and shapes that self. This experience, which would have been legible in a pre-modern ontology, is now a relic of a pre-modern experience that has been untethered from its original milieu and therefore can no longer be fully accounted for. It is precisely this quality that causes the gibbet mast to be experienced as a site of absence and non-knowledge.

If, as we have suggested, the gibbet mast serves as the originary ground of the “spot of time,” it is a curious ground indeed for the gibbet mast is gone and what remains has a shape “like a grave” (l.313; 1799). Thus if the spots of time ground the poet’s subjectivity, as has often been asserted,²⁵ then the gibbet mast would also serve as the deeper ground of that very subjectivity. Insofar as this ground of the self is literally *nothing*, then this origin of the self is commensurate both with Locke’s *tabula rasa* and with the larger modern project of self-making. Yet this ground is not simply *no thing* but also the absence of a thing—a time—which once was, a thing which preceded the boy and which, in its resistance to incorporation into the self, also exceeds him. Indeed, insofar as this absence functions as a haunting presence, it serves as a ghostly remainder not only of the past but of past understandings of a “given” self that exists in relation to an *a priori* transcendence. If, in this earlier self, the exceeding and preceding of the self was rendered legible and present by the assumption of a transcendent referent, in

²⁴ Bundock, “Wordsworth’s Modernity,” 386-87.

²⁵ A common interpretation that is perhaps best represented by M.H. Abrams’s claim in *Natural Supernaturalism* that “the persistence in memory of ‘spots of time’ helped him [Wordsworth] to reestablish continuity between the self that he is and the self that he was [...] he finally reachieved the integrity of being that he had lost, although now on a level of consciousness which preserved the critical experiences through which he had passed.” M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 284.

Wordsworth's untimely experience of it, it can be experienced only negatively. At the heart of his subjectivity lies something utterly other than and outside of the subject, something that cannot be experienced directly but, like a trauma, reveals itself through its effects and symptoms ("visionary dreariness") which have been internalized by the subject but without being fully incorporated.

It is significant that this particular absence that precedes and exceeds the self is that of a gibbet mast. While gibbeting, the public exhibition of an executed criminal's body within an iron cage, would be actively practiced in Britain until 1832, it was increasingly seen as an inappropriate mode of punishment for modern times. A letter to the Home Secretary complained that it was "dishonourable to the law's omnipotence, and discreditable to the administrators of the law." The 1834 parliamentary debate about banning the practice is particularly instructive in this regard:

When [...] Ewart moved to abolish gibbeting, he called it "an odious practice", and Lord Suffield agreed that it was "unsuited to the present state of public feeling". The most interesting implication of the speeches was that gibbeting was no longer understood. Its "only effect", Lord Suffield declared, "was that of scaring children, and brutalizing the minds of the people. It could produce no moral effect whatsoever."²⁶

The rhetoric surrounding discussions of gibbeting suggest that legislators had begun to sense that the practice was no longer appropriate to the more humane disciplinary regime of a more enlightened British state. Indeed, in some ways the continuation of public execution in Britain—

²⁶ V.A.C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 268-69. The details of the final gibbetings in Britain suggest that there was still public fascination with and appetite for the spectacle regardless of the rhetoric deployed against it: "The last two men gibbeted, both in 1832, were a Jarrow collier, William Jobling, for murdering a colliery owner, and a bookbinder, James Cook, for a gruesome murder in Leicestershire. The vulgar still flocked to the spectacle. Twenty thousand people watched Cook's crumpled body hoisted in its cage on a gibbet thirty-three feet high." Nonetheless, later treatment of the bodies suggest changing attitudes: "Jobling's body was removed from its gibbet by his fellow colliers and given a decent burial. Cook's body had to be removed pre-emptively by order of the home secretary. That spelt the end of the punishment."

it would not be abolished until 1868—represents the subsistence of an earlier, pre-modern form within an increasingly modern and “disciplined” society. An unsettling anachronism, it calls into question society’s own self-representation as increasingly humane and disciplinary just as the origins of the Wordsworthian self in the ground(lessness) of the gibbet mast challenges representations of the poet’s self as a triumph of self-possession and modern self-making.

In *The Prelude*, the gibbet mast represents not just the fate of a particular individual but also the history of the place itself. The adjective used to describe the mast—“mouldered”—connects the passage to other moments in *The Prelude* in which place and past are closely aligned. The word appears twice in the 1799 *Prelude*, first as a descriptor of the gibbet mast and later as a description of a site that the boy Wordsworth frequently visited: “a [...] small island where remained/ An old stone table and one mouldered cave,/ A hermit’s history” (II.61-63). Once again the word is connected to an encounter with an earlier time—in this case, one that is clearly associated with now alien ways of life. By the 1805 *Prelude* this second reference has disappeared but the word “mouldered” now appears in connection with an even more ancient and “darker” time as part of Wordsworth’s vision on Salisbury Plain:

There on the pastoral downs without a track
To guide me, or along the bare white roads
Lengthening in solitude their dreary line,
While through those vestiges of ancient times
I ranged, and by the solitude o’ercome,
I had a reverie and saw the past,
Saw multitudes of men, and here and there
A single Briton in his wolf-skin vest,
With shield and stone-ax, stride across the wold;
The voice of spears was heard, the rattling spear
Shaken by arms of mighty bone, in strength
Long mouldered, of barbaric majesty.
I called upon the darkness, and it took—
A midnight darkness seemed to come and take—
All objects from my sight; and lo, again
The desert visible by dismal flames

It is the sacrificial altar, fed
With living men—how deep the groans!—the voice
Of those in the gigantic wicker thrills
Throughout the region far and near, pervades
The monumental hillocks, and the pomp
Is for both worlds, the living and the dead. (XII. 315-36; my emphasis)

The “arms of mighty bone” recall the long “gone” bones of the executed man, but what is “mouldered” here is not the bone itself but rather its “strength,” suggesting not merely the loss of a particular person or event but of a particular way-of-being in the world. The precise nature of that world comes to the fore when we move still further back in history and into a greater “darkness.” The scene of human sacrifice and the co-dwelling of the worlds of the living and the dead evoke what Taylor has labeled the “enchanted world” of premodernity. While the druids are particularly ancient figures and while human sacrifice is both the most alien and the most horrifying—that is to say, in both cases, the “darkest”—“enchanted” practice, it also offers something like the polar opposite of the modern, “buffered” self: in human sacrifice the victim is (literally) opened towards death, towards infinity, towards the otherness of the spirit world and, in the act of sacrifice, the boundaries between the living and the dead, men and gods, become porous. It is a site of orientation towards—and openness to—the transcendent.

Moreover, in the figure of the barbarian and the druid, Wordsworth locates not just a profoundly different type of individual than modern man or even a profoundly different life-way but also a specific, “deep” history of Britain itself and of the very land, the very “spot” on which he stands. We see a similar dynamic with the gibbet mast, in which the “spot of time” marks not merely a spot in the time of Wordsworth’s own personal history but also a spot that connects the poet’s present to a past that pre-dates his own existence and can never fully become his own possession but which, to the contrary, always exceeds (and precedes) him. In this sense, the “spot of time” represents a peculiar reiteration of the *genius loci*. According to Geoffrey Hartman, a

traditional understanding of *genius loci* is “linked to that of a collective (folk) memory composed of popular legends and songs [...] [p]oems are valued as the emanation of particular places or regions. The relation of poetry to place—the inspiring or organic relation—may be a superstition or at best a generous error, but to celebrate one’s native land or to lament its loss has always fostered national sentiment.” But Hartman also suggests that “in the most original poetry of the romantic period, genius as individual talent separates off from the *genius loci*, which stands against it as the self-incurred burden of tradition, as what poetic genius has itself—imperfectly—engendered.”²⁷ There is certainly no doubt that the *genius loci* as it appears in both the scene of the gibbet mast and that of Salisbury Plain is different from the traditional version; in both cases, the relationship to place is one of ambivalence more than “celebration,” even though the sense of historical depth remains. Yet, as I have suggested, these scenes do not suggest a full movement of agency—and genius—away from the place and to the poet who “engenders” it. If we take these spaces as relics of the *genius loci*, then we might see the experience of them as something akin to the experience of tradition, as Hartman suggests. But if the site of the gibbet mast is, actually, the site of an absent gibbet mast (or, suggestively, the grave of the gibbet mast), then at the heart of the spots of time we find tradition as absence—more specifically, as a haunting absence.²⁸ And insofar as these scenes represent an attempt on the part of the poet to define himself against “the self-incurred burden of tradition,” then that attempt will operate as a sort of exorcism. This exorcism begins through the rendering of the past as a “dark” place whose darkness can be expelled by a more enlightened reason. The increased illegibility of the past

²⁷ Geoffrey Hartman, *The Fateful Question of Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 4.

²⁸ It is perhaps worth noting that the “waiting for horses” scene—which coincides with the death of Wordsworth’s father—occurs directly after the gibbet mast scene. Thus, we find Wordsworth both literally “orphaned” but also increasingly an orphan from “tradition.”

proves to be both the cost and the cause of this operation.

The “darkening” of the past—particularly the “deep past” of origins—is related to the shifting cosmology of the nineteenth century. As David Collings has argued, Wordsworth’s “knowledge of geological processes has clearly undone his confidence that humanity is sheltered by a divine guarantee.”²⁹ Similarly, Taylor explicitly links modern geology’s unsettling of biblical history to the development of “a new cosmic imaginary” in which pre-modern cosmology increasingly seemed not merely untenable but “no longer fully intelligible.”³⁰ The result is a shift toward an understanding of nature and natural processes which is both limitless and, because limitless, “dark,” for the

Scripture-derived framework [...] sustained a certain kind of understanding of the world, interwoven with those underlying the cosmos ideas [*sic*]. The understanding of things as signs, and as signs addressed to us by God, entrenches the fixity of the cosmos in its short time scale. [...] From a contained cosmos of a mere 5,000-6,000 years, we come to see ourselves as issuing from what Buffon called 'le sombre abîme du temps'. This arresting image derives its force from the fact that the vast expanse of time which lies behind us, unlike the tracts of space which lie around us, hides the process of our genesis, of our coming to be. The immense universe of galaxies can indeed, be thought of as dark, insofar as most of it is empty; but it can also be thought of as lit up by the countless stars. The countless aeons of time which lie behind us are dark in another sense; in attempting to explore them we meet the twilight of our own dawn, and then beyond that the night from which we conscious—light-bearing—animals emerged.³¹

The past Britons that Wordsworth sees, representatives of Britain’s own prehistory and beginnings, are not concerned with origins that are this deep. Nonetheless, the marked difference between modern cosmology and the “enchanted” cosmology of the ancients renders this past “dark” precisely because its mode of being is “no longer fully intelligible.” And, of

²⁹ David Collings, “After the Covenant: Romanticism, Secularization, and Disastrous Transcendence,” *European Romantic Review* 21, no. 3 (2010), 347.

³⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 334; 324.

³¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 325-26

course, it is out of the “dark” past of the ancients that the “light-bearing” thinkers of the Enlightenment will emerge. Immediately after recalling the Salisbury Plain incident, Wordsworth increasingly individualizes the experience, connecting it to the power of imagination:

[...] an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without:
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power,
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees. (ll. 376-79)

This interiorizing is even more marked in the revisions of the gibbet mast episode. While the gibbet mast, the “dark” past it embodies, and the opening to alterity that it implies, never cease to haunt, its power is increasingly reinterpreted in individual and immanent terms.

A psychologizing dynamic is present even in the earliest versions of the scene. As I have suggested, the encounter with the gibbet mast—at least in the 1799 version of *The Prelude*—functions almost as an anti-experience. The boy Wordsworth doesn’t appear to respond to the scene in any way, but it makes itself felt in the “visionary dreariness” that colors the scene of the naked pool. Thus, the encounter functions like a trauma. Because Wordsworth is unable to directly experience the encounter, he instead repeatedly but obliquely reproduces it in his reaction to other scenes. In this way, the structure of the “double spot” sequence corresponds to the dynamic that Geoffrey Hartman locates in “The Boy of Winander,” where human time is experienced as both “mortifying and bonding. In short, traumatic.”³² What I have tried to suggest is that the boy’s inability to fully access the pre-modern world signaled by the gibbet mast and the mirroring of this by the poet’s inability to subsequently account for the experience is as much

³² Geoffrey Hartman, “Reading: The Wordsworthian Enlightenment,” in *The Wordsworthian Enlightenment: Romantic Poetry and the Ecology of Reading*, edited by Helen Regueiro Elam and Frances Ferguson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 37.

the result of a historical condition as it is the result of a psychological coping mechanism. In short, it is “no longer fully intelligible.” And, insofar as it *is* intelligible, it must be rearticulated (by Wordsworth and subsequently by us) in an immanent and indeed individual narrative of trauma. At the same time, precisely because it cannot fit comfortably into the “immanent frame,” it creates an unsettling effect, by making the gibbet mast one of the sites which—in Peter Larkin’s description—serve not just as “failed sources of imaginative transformation but as inveterate sources of *nontransformation*.” Larkin will suggest that, as a result, the site “remains amenable to a poetic self-hollowing granting at least a partial shift from blank enigma towards addressable mystery,” but I will suggest that the later revisions of this scene increasingly foreclose such a possibility.³³

The early draft of the gibbet mast episode is haunting precisely because of its lack of any explanation of or accounting for the scene: its meaning is never codified and Wordsworth appears to have no immediate affective reaction to it at all. In contrast, by the 1805 revision, the site has been granted an explanation, indeed a “monumental” one:

I led my horse, and stumbling on, at length
Came to a bottom where in former times
A murderer had been hung in iron chains.
The gibbet-mast was mouldered down, the bones
And iron case were gone, but on the turf
Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought,
Some unknown hand had carved the murderer’s name.
The monumental writing was engraven
In times long past, and still from year to year
By superstition of the neighborhood
The grass is cleared away; and to this hour
The letters are all fresh and visible.
Faltering, and ignorant where I was, at length
I chanced to espy those characters inscribed
On the green sod: forthwith I left the spot, (XI.287-301)

³³ Peter Larkin, “Wordsworth’s Maculate Exception: Achieving the ‘Spots of Time,’ in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Promising Losses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 126.

We still don't see much by way of an affective response from the boy Wordsworth, though he is "faltering." This faltering seems at least partially related to the fact that he is lost, and the "characters" serve as a sort of guidepost. But where—and perhaps more importantly *when*—do these characters situate him? To answer this question, we must attend both to the "monumental writing" and, just as importantly, to the poet's reading not of the writing (which he doesn't seem to *read* at all) but of the townspeople's upkeep of it.

J. Douglas Kneale points out that the appearance of the "monumental writing" in the 1805 version also marks the disappearance of the grave simile of the 1799 version, arguing that the "'monumental letters' are an epitaph for an effaced tomb. They are the metonymy of an absence, a word put for something that the text cancels."³⁴ In this radical division of the proper name from the (already dead) body it was meant to reference only the "name remains; but the bare proper noun seems bereft of its referent, divested of its temporality; it is a text almost without a context: it appears to have been created at some point in time, yet does not seem to exist within time. [...] the name is a text that knows no decay."³⁵ Kneale further notes that a change in grammatical voice also accompanies the monumental writing; the poem shifts to the passive voice once the boy arrives at the bottom and largely continues until he "left" the spot. "The critic that is concerned to address the question of language might in an elementary way ask: Who is the 'doer' of all this action? The grammar declines to say."

As a result, the image of the "unknown hand" becomes particularly fraught as it "disembodies" the already absent writer:

³⁴ J. Douglas Kneale, *Monumental Writing: Aspects of Rhetoric in Wordsworth's Poetry* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 133.

³⁵ Kneale, *Monumental Writing*, 133-34.

Can we suggest that the ‘unknown hand’ in the first ‘spot of time’ is, like the hand in the Book of Daniel, from God? Yet what would such a thing mean? The admonitory aspect seems clear enough in both cases, but it is the literalness of the divine handwriting, arbitrary signs rather than natural symbols, which perplexes—and yet which helps to ground both the supernatural quality of the letters and the strange fact that the neighborhood superstition is focused on the name rather than the once-exposed man. The fatal handwriting says not *Ecce homo*, but *Ecce signum*!³⁶

For Kneale, what the presence of the monumental writing will ultimately reveal is that “*language* is lord and master, and life itself the obedient servant of its will,”³⁷ for the “unknown hand” is ultimately both the hand of the murderer who “wrought” the deed that led to his corpse’s own imprisonment in a cage “wrought in iron” and the eventual disappearance even of that body, which has now been replaced by writing itself, and the hand of the author who has “wrought” his own sort of death through his insertion into language. In Kneale’s reading, the exceeding and proceeding of the self that appears in this scene is not the result of an encounter with a transcendent otherness but rather with the otherness of a purely immanent language. Such a reading of the scene is certainly plausible and, in the following chapter, I will similarly argue that *The Prelude* anticipates post-structuralism’s concern with the deathly logic of linguistic immanence. Yet Kneale’s own perplexed suggestion that the “unknown hand” could be read as the hand of God, even though it seems difficult if not impossible to imagine what such a possibility could “mean,” indicates that the “hand” points both ways: backwards towards a premodernity in which the supernatural and the natural, the transcendent and the immanent touched, as well as forwards towards Kneale’s project of what he terms “semiotic psychoanalysis.”³⁸

³⁶ Kneale, *Monumental Writing*, 141.

³⁷ Kneale, *Monumental Writing*, 145.

³⁸ Kneale, *Monumental Writing*, 130.

Yet the “unknown hand” disappears between the sentence that concludes in line 293 and the one that begins on line 294, which marks the letters simply as “The monumental writing” and transfers agency from the “unknown hand” of the past to the present townspeople who work to preserve the writing. In this disappearance, Wordsworth appears to have followed the forward path indicated by the hand, dismissing the supernatural valences of the “unknown hand” as the work of the hands of superstitious townsfolk. Wordsworth’s reading of the upkeep of the writing—like that upkeep itself—serves as an exorcism. The townspeople keep the ghost of the murderer at bay while Wordsworth keeps the very notion of “ghostliness” at bay by declaring it a superstition, sheltering himself from the magic of an earlier “dark” age. We might rearticulate this development of the scene from the 1799 to the 1805 version of *The Prelude* in Taylor’s terminology by saying that as Wordsworth moves away from a more “porous” experience of the world in which he directly experiences the haunting absence of the gibbet mast (the 1799 text) and moves towards a more “buffered” and disengaged stance that distances him from what is now labeled “superstition” (the 1805 text), the “naïve” experience of pre-modern ontology is increasingly foreclosed.

But the final revision of this scene suggests that this foreclosure is not necessarily felicitous. Indeed, the increasing inaccessibility of the past—dramatized in both the Salisbury Plain episode and gibbet mast episodes—inspires its own terror. While the letters could have been read as a signpost in the 1805 version, there is no possibility of such a reading now:

A casual glance had shown them, and I fled,
Faltering and faint, and ignorant of the road (ll. 246-247)

In contrast to the 1805 revision where he “chanced to espy” the characters—which at least carries the possibility of close attention to them—in this version a mere “casual glance” is enough to cause him to flee “faltering and faint.” Notably, this terror was not present when the

Wordsworth had, in the 1799 version, a far less mediated experience of the haunting absence of both the gibbet mast and any concrete indication of what had happened there. But now he flees from what is, in essence, an exorcised site, which should be safe from the forces that once possessed it. As Collings has suggested, this sort of exorcism of a pre-modern “superstition” ends up losing the very power of “exorcism” necessary to cultural functioning:

The supernatural becomes natural, the ghostly an aspect of the mind’s invisible workings, and the uncanny a dimension of the canny or familiar. As a result, nature begins to seethe with the energies of the supernatural, the mind haunts itself like a ghost, and social relations become strange. This muted, pervasive ghostliness no longer threatens the symbolic order so openly that culture can respond to it with a narrative resolution or ritual expulsion; on the contrary, it poses an implicit threat from a place that remains perpetually out of reach. [...] Culture begins to verge on the unnameable, as if it is founded not in the dead father but in the experience of encountering his ghost.³⁹

It is precisely Wordsworth’s *own* exorcism of the power of the spot—by declaring its upkeep as “superstition”—that now grants it power even as it renders the “enchanted” past more fully inaccessible. In his fleeing from “superstition”—the label itself and the activity it is meant to describe—Wordsworth both marks himself as a modern and reveals his discomfort with this role. The unsettling power of the exorcism that achieved this transformation suggests an embryonic version of a realization that Simon Jarvis finds more fully formed in other portions of *The Prelude*: “the stripping of meaning from the world, on the grounds that the idea of meaning is a superstitious fiction, only promotes a rival superstition, which is that our own activity is the source of all meaning.”⁴⁰ This is not to suggest that the gibbet mast ceases to have an effect, for the “visionary dreariness” still accompanies the scene of the naked pool, but this effect will be

³⁹ Collings, *Wordsworthian Errancies*, 8-9.

⁴⁰ Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth’s Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 68. Jarvis speaks specifically about Wordsworth’s admonition in Book XIII to readers “who are fed/ By the dead letter, not the spirit of things” who would dismiss his recognition of the “sanctity of nature given to man” as “A shadow, a delusion.” They have, Wordsworth claims, mistaken the “dead letter”—“waxen image which yourselves have made”—for “truth.”

rearticulated in interior terms. And, in spite of the latent awareness of rationalism's own "superstition," the more disenchanted encounter with the gibbet mast leads to a more individualized explanation of its effects.

In both the 1805 and 1850 versions, Wordsworth more thoroughly accounts for the effect of the vision of the "naked pool" than he does in the 1799 version:

Oh mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours! I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands—but this I feel,
That from thyself it is that thou must give,
Else never canst receive. The days gone by
Come back upon me from the dawn almost
Of life; the hiding-places of my power
Seem open, I approach, and then they close;
I see by glimpses now, when age comes on
May scarcely see at all; and I would give
While yet we may, as far as words can give,
A substance and a life to what I feel:
I would enshrine the spirit of the past
For future restoration. (ll. 328-42, 1805)

One could hardly ask for a clearer expression of Siskin's "rounded, psychological, and self-made" self than that self which "from thyself [...] must give." What Wordsworth sees "by glimpses now" is not the transcendent world that Paul saw "through a glass darkly" but rather the immanent yet hidden world of the self in "the dawn almost/ Of life." But it is more difficult to locate the exact nature of the "spirit of the past" that the poet "enshrines," though it is this spirit that would appear to be what renders the spots "efficacious." At the most obvious level, it is the spirit of Wordsworth's own past—his own memories—which he seeks to capture. But the "monumental writing" at the gibbet mast also suggests another, more deadly, "enshrining" of a deeper historical past, which has been laid to rest at the spot and in the spots of time. Moreover, it is this past and its understanding of the relationship of self and world which, increasingly, the

poet can “scarcely see at all.” Nonetheless, the residual awareness of it—in the poet’s flight from attempts to exorcise its power, in the “lurking” of an “efficacious spirit” that is never quite coequal with the poet’s own mind, and in the subsistence of a logic of inheritance in Book V—suggests that its absence still has the ability to haunt, though the experience of that past is no longer communal but individualized, particularized, and psychologized. While the “spirit of the past” still possesses the poet, it is increasingly represented as his own possession.

Chapter 2

Reading the Future and the Future of Reading in *The Prelude*

While the gibbet mast on the moor episode is concerned with the origins of poetic subjectivity, the apostrophic addresses to Coleridge that help shape *The Prelude* point toward the future of the poem itself. In my reading of the gibbet mast in the previous chapter, I argued that the scene demonstrates the subsistence of a pre-modern conception of the self and challenges critical attempts to understand Wordsworth's subjectivity, as it is presented and constructed in *The Prelude*, as unproblematically "modern." In this chapter I will argue, conversely, that the apostrophic addresses to Coleridge anticipate post-modern and post-structuralist understandings of textuality. Nonetheless, there are aspects of Wordsworth's presentation of *The Prelude*—and of his *oeuvre*—that are distinctly modern: Wordsworth pioneers that New Critical concept *par excellence*, "the work itself," and opens the way towards an immanent, formalist understanding of literature. I will investigate these "modern" aspects first and then will suggest the ways in which the apostrophic figure of Coleridge—and *The Prelude*'s overall presentation of readers and reading—undermine this understanding and point towards a related, though much more de(con)structive conception of the literary work.

The Work Itself

The emergence of the "work itself" in Wordsworth's poetics is, I will argue, the result of a crisis in authority that leads to the poetic work's value increasingly being located not in a poetic tradition that precedes and exceeds the work but, rather, immanently within the work itself. This

relocation of value within the work also affects the role of the individual reader. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, where Wordsworth declares himself to be different from other men “only in degree” and distances himself from the traditional prestige afforded to poets, whose “poetic diction” perversely led to the admiration of the reader since “the Poet spake to him in the character of a man to be looked up to, a man of genius and authority. Thus [...] this distorted language was received with admiration.”¹ While Wordsworth remains a privileged reader of his work because of his proximity to it, he cannot have the last word on it. Nor, for that matter, can present criticism or popular taste, both of which are rejected as irremediably corrupted. But the individual reader seems to be granted more power. Wordsworth enjoins his reader “that in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection on what will probably be the judgment of others.” Yet almost immediately after this proclamation, Wordsworth points toward Joshua Reynolds’s claim that an “*accurate* taste in poetry” is “an *acquired* talent, which can only be produced by thought and a long continued intercourse with the best modes of composition.” He continues:

[t]his is mentioned, not with so ridiculous a purpose as to prevent the most inexperienced Reader from judging for himself (I have already said that I wish him to judge for himself), but merely to temper the rashness of decision, and to suggest, that, if Poetry be a subject on which much time has not been bestowed, the judgement may be erroneous; and that, in many cases, it necessarily will be so.²

The reader, then, is asked to act on his own authority and, simultaneously, is reminded how unfounded that authority may be. While the authority of poetic diction and even of the poet have come under question, the reader does not so much solve this crisis of authority as demonstrate its

¹ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 89; 157. This is not, of course, to suggest that poetic authority is not still being performed in its own way at this moment, precisely through the rejection of differences of “kind.”

² Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 95.

inescapability.

This paradoxical position of readerly agency in Wordsworth's conception of his work is intensified in his presentation of the *Recluse* project in the Preface to *The Excursion*. Here Wordsworth makes his most startling claim for the autonomy of his work, but also demonstrates how essential a reader's recognition is to the appearance of the work's coherence. Wordsworth compares the structure of *The Recluse* to a gothic church, an arrangement that subsumes not only all of the poems meant to comprise the project but, ultimately, *all* of his work, even that which was written before the *Recluse* project was conceived:

The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two Works have the same kind of relationship to each other, if he may so express himself, as the ante-chapel has to the body of a Gothic church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add, that his minor Pieces, which have been long before the Public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices.³

The focus on "proper arrangement" and the "attentive Reader" implies that this structural coherence is not something imposed from without but is, rather, an immanent feature of the works themselves if they are properly read. This point is made explicitly in the proceeding paragraph: "It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system; it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course, and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself."⁴ Thus the poet must direct the reader towards the necessary recognition of a structure while simultaneously denying the announcement of a system. The

³ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 444.

⁴ Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 444

reader, meanwhile, is in an equally divided position: absolutely essential to the success and coherence of *The Recluse* yet, by virtue of the project's need for inherent coherence, treated as completely irrelevant to the very project that he or she is enabling. Whether the "extraction" of such a system was meant to be possible without the presence of the "main Work" is unclear, though some critics—most notably Kenneth Johnston—have attempted to sketch a coherent portrait of the "gothic Church" out of the few written fragments of *The Recluse*.⁵

In both prefaces, a drama between good and bad, competent and incompetent readers helps to secure the work's own authoritative status. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth carefully steers the reader away from attention to (supposedly suspect) critical authority while also suggesting that the reader's individual inability to appreciate the work may be the result of inexperience; in the Preface to *The Excursion*, the reference to an "attentive reader" implies the existence of less worthy, "inattentive" readers who would be unable to recognize the coherence of the work. In both cases, it is the work itself that ultimately holds the value that a properly experienced, attentive reader ought to be able to locate.

The distinctly modern quality of this conception of the "work itself" is easily illustrated by a contrast between Wordsworth's "gothic church" and the actual works of architecture that serve as the vehicle of his metaphor. The architecture of a gothic church points beyond itself and towards a transcendent realm, literally in the form of its spires and figuratively in its cruciform shape. Moreover, its unique interior effects are actually the result of its interaction with the

⁵ Of course, we might question whether the coherence of *The Recluse* is merely "recognized" by Johnston's scholarship or if it is, to the contrary, a result of his own critical *praxis*. Tellingly, Johnston's argument for the existence of *The Recluse* is its ability to support "constructive reading": "*The Recluse* exists, not as an unrealized idea, but as a coherent though incomplete body of interrelated texts, comprising nearly twenty thousand lines of poetry susceptible of constructive reading [...] close attention to the large number of texts attributable to the project discovers a poem more substantial and valuable than critical tradition has allowed." Kenneth R. Johnston, *Wordsworth and The Recluse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), xi-xii.

outside, from which it draws its light. The intricate stained glass that filters that light, most especially the rose window, are typically comprised of scenes arranged circularly in a sacred spatiality that mirrors the cyclical sacred temporality of liturgical time. In his reading of Gothic stained glass, Gerald B. Guest argues that these windows served as “externalized cognitive maps of the medieval world” and even presented a “geography of the sacred.” They were “attempts to transform the fallen exilic world into a collection of sites where connections to the sacred could be made. These connections are reinforced through the linking of individual sites into rhizomatic networks joined together via sacred objects [...] and via religious acts.”⁶ Just as these scenes gain their relationship to one another through a relationship to a central, organizing transcendence so also does the building itself gain its organization through its orientation beyond itself.

We might also return to the contrast, drawn at the opening of the previous chapter, between *The Prelude* and Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, where, in the latter, the poet who has lost the “straightforward way” is systematically guided through a circular, sacred, and pre-modern landscape while, in the former, the poet meanders through a landscape with an assurance, at the opening of the poem, that he “cannot miss his way.” Of course, as *The Prelude* continues, the poet is increasingly uncertain of his path and, in these moments, he often turns to the apostrophically addressed Coleridge. While Virgil in the *Divina Commedia* serves as a representation of the poetic tradition and helps link Dante’s own work to this tradition, *The Prelude*’s Coleridge is a figure from the poet’s own life and is regularly figured as a promise of the work’s future reception.

The decision to address a present reader is particularly interesting considering

⁶ Gerald B. Guest, “Narrative Cartographies: Mapping the Sacred in Gothic Stained Glass,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 53/54 (April 2008), 142. While I comment earlier upon the organization of rose windows, Guest’s article is principally concerned with windows depicting journeys and pilgrimages.

Wordsworth's fraught relationship to most of his contemporary audience. This relationship participates in a larger dynamic that Andrew Bennett has identified in Romanticism:

For the Romantics [...] posterity is not so much what comes after poetry but [...] its necessary *prerequisite*—the judgment of future generations becomes the necessary condition of the act of writing itself. While the poetry of the Renaissance may be said to be obsessed with the question of immortality and while Enlightenment poetics figure the test of time as the necessary arbiter of poetic value, Romanticism reinvents posterity as the very condition of possibility of poetry itself: to be neglected in one's lifetime, and *not to care*, is the necessary (though not of course sufficient) condition of genius.⁷

The good reader/bad reader dichotomy is repeated in this relationship, though it now has a temporal dimension. In an 1810 letter from Wordsworth to John Miller discussing the lackluster reception of his *Poems, in Two Volumes*, Wordsworth declares:

If my Poems are inspired by Genius and Nature they will live, if not, they will be forgotten and the sooner the better [...] Now unfortunately for me all those who have given their judgment in public are such contemptible creatures in their intellectual power, moral qualities, and in their attainments, that whether they censure or praise, I am compelled alike to say in all the instances that I have seen—
foedissima turba—
Non vestri sum iuris ego.⁸

The final lines represent a slight misquotation of Milton's Latin poem "Ad Patrem": "In me triste nihil, foedissima turba, potestis,/ Nec vestri sum juris ego" (108-09), translated by Charles Knapp as "Most loathsome crew, *you* possess naught of baneful power against me nor am I in *Your* control." The original lines occur in a larger passage where the speaker thanks his father for his education. As a result of it, the speaker insists, he "shall sit amid the victors' crowns of ivy and of laurel; no more now shall I mingle, a figure obscure, with the witless populace, but my

⁷ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

⁸ Wordsworth to John Miller, Grasmere, 4 January 1810, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Chester L. Shaver, Mary Moorman, and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967-93), 2:383-84.

footsteps will avoid eyes profane.”⁹ Wordsworth’s agonistic reading of Milton’s poem is notable. While Milton’s lines recognize a debt to his father and, by extension, to the tradition in which he was educated, they are redeployed by Wordsworth to entrust the work of “Genius”—which, like Imagination, is valued precisely because it is “unfather’d”—to the future. We would be remiss, however, if we were to see Wordsworth’s reappropriation merely as evidence of his own genius—his status as “strong poet”—and not also as evidence of a historical position that makes such a reappropriation possible. Yet we can also not neglect our own historical position, in which as “future readers” we have the dubious honor of playing a starring role in Wordsworth’s conception of his work. While my argument that *The Prelude* anticipates a post-modern reading practice might be accused of anachronistically reading the present into the past, I would plead in my defense that Wordsworth has already read forward, as it were, into us. He has done so both in buffering his work from the critical onslaughts of the present by entrusting it to the future and through his understanding of that fundamentally uncertain future as being structured by perpetual deferral.

Wordsworth’s relationship to his future readers also reaches us through his role in the development of modern copyright law; Wordsworth’s opposition to the copyright laws of his day mirrors the concerns present in his letter to Miller and, according to Andrew Bennett, furthers Wordsworth’s argument for “posterity as the *necessary* time of reception.”¹⁰ In her thorough history of Wordsworth’s involvement in the copyright reform movement in England, Susan Eilenberg notes Wordsworth’s endorsement of “perpetual copyright,” a system whereby

⁹ John Milton, *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 610.

¹⁰ Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*, 42.

ownership of the author's work would always belong to his estate:

By limiting the term of copyright, he contended, the law recognized the right of a writer to profit only from immediate, brief popularity; if he had the misfortune to be neglected by his contemporaries, no later recognition could help him. Failing to distinguish between the genius and the hack, the copyright arrangements acted, Wordsworth believed, 'as a premium upon mediocracy,' encouraging the proliferation of potboilers at the expense of masterpieces.

As further evidence, Eilenberg points towards Wordsworth's impassioned denunciation of the fourteen year copyright term that was in force when he wrote to Richard Sharp in 1808: "The law, as it now stands, merely consults the interest of the useful drudges of Literature, or of flimsy and shallow writers, whose works are upon a level with the taste and knowledge of the age; while men of real power, who go before their age, are deprived of all hope of their families being benefited by their exertions."¹¹ In a formulation that recalls Wordsworth's earlier insistence that the poet's task lay in "*creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed," Wordsworth effectively links the "real power" of poetic genius not with timelessness—or, in Matthew Arnold's formulation, with the poet's working under "the conditions immutably fixed by the laws of poetic beauty and poetic truth"—but rather with its relationship to futurity, its being (to borrow our era's own phrase) "ahead of its time."¹² But, as Wordsworth's enduring concern with copyright law suggests, there is also a corresponding concern about writing's future, which lies (even legally) beyond the poet's grasp.

Implicit in this concern is an awareness of—and, simultaneously, an attempt to hedge against—the dynamics of writing that Derrida elucidates in "Signature Event Context": "To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that

¹¹ Susan Eilenberg, "Mortal Pages: Wordsworth and the Reform of Copyright," *ELH* 56, no. 2 (Summer 1989), 352.

¹² Wordsworth, *Poetry and Prose*, 522.

my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to reading and rewriting.”¹³ And the signature—that which both marks legal, contractual ownership and stands as the clearest sign of artistic ownership—has a particularly complicated position within these dynamics: “By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be said, it also marks and retains his having-been present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in a now in general, in the transcendental form of nowness (*maintenance*),” as though “the condition of possibility for these effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity. In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production.”¹⁴ Insofar as Wordsworth attempts to retain ownership (literally and figuratively) of the work’s future, his actions appear largely reactionary and thoroughly in keeping with an understanding of the work as a coherent object that is unchanging and subject to possession. And yet, in *The Prelude*’s addresses to Coleridge, we find a deep awareness of, and nuanced response to, the second deathly quality that Derrida finds in writing:

My ‘written communication’ must, if you will, remain legible despite the absolute disappearance of every determined addressee in general for it to function as writing, that is, for it to be legible. It must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the addressee or of the empirically determinable set of addressees. [...] A writing that was not structurally legible—iterable—beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing.¹⁵

¹³Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, in *Margins of Philosophy*, ed. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 316.

¹⁴ Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 328.

¹⁵ Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 316.

Placed On Earth to Love and Understand

Coleridge in *The Prelude* both serves as the “first fruits” of a sympathetic reading community already coming into existence and as a promise of that same community. He must be both the particular historical person who heard portions of *The Prelude* from the poet’s own lips and a general representative of an ideal reader and of an idealized future reading community. Perhaps most importantly, the addresses to Coleridge dramatize the tenuous connection between the particular, present reader and a necessarily general address to unknown future readers. Yet even as they demonstrate this contingency, the apostrophic addresses simultaneously attempt to subvert it. The tension between present and future, particular and general that is found in the addresses is related to a tension between speaking and writing that permeates the poem. In focusing on this privileging of speech, my argument presses against the readings of the addresses presented by Eugene L. Stelzig and James O’Rourke, who see “Coleridge” in *The Prelude* as an occlusion of the actual, historical Coleridge. In contrast, I will argue that the historical Coleridge, while never fully present in *The Prelude*, is also never fully effaced.

In “Coleridge in *The Prelude*,” Stelzig asserts that for the poem “the perfect audience—*alter*—would become none other than the author—*ego*.”¹⁶ Contrasting Wordsworth’s confessional poem with Augustine’s *Confessions*, Stelzig pits Augustine’s self-sacrifice against Wordsworth’s primary narcissism: “If at the close of Augustine’s autobiography, the saint looks forward to losing any remainder of his self in the deity to whom he has been speaking, Wordsworth at the close of his remainders the alterity of his addressee to suit his song’s

¹⁶ Eugene L. Stelzig, “Coleridge in *The Prelude*: Wordsworth’s Fiction of Alterity,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1987), 27.

valorized self: so *alter* has become *ego*.”¹⁷ Stelzig’s contrast with Augustine’s *Confessions* is suggestive. While he draws out the contrast between Augustine’s mystic self-loss and Wordsworth’s ego-centrism, we might also note a different contrast between a relationship (of God and a human being) which unites the transcendent and the immanent and a relationship (of author and reader) which remains relational but lacks an obvious transcendent aspect, a movement which places the poem more fully at the mercy of language’s deathly impulse.

Like Stelzig, O’Rourke argues that the “Wordsworth” of *The Prelude* is formed through the confessional structure that Foucault identifies, in *The History of Sexuality*, as constitutive of modern subjectivity. In this self-making relationship, both “Wordsworth” and “Coleridge” are linguistic constructions, but “Coleridge” is especially distant from any “material facts”:

The Prelude does not tell both sides [...] [of the relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge] but only of the occlusion of “Coleridge” by “Wordsworth.” In Wordsworth’s acquisition of the identity of the Poet [...] he is both the speaking subject who compulsively discloses “the truth we think we possess” in the depths of ourselves and the “virtual authority” who “judges, punishes, forgives, consoles and reconciles” [...] As the fabricated union of these roles becomes the “Wordsworth” so beloved of cultural conservatives from Arnold to Vendler and Bate, “Coleridge” becomes an imaginary entity, and the addresses to him in *The Prelude* become increasingly divorced from material facts.¹⁸

O’Rourke ties *The Prelude*’s movement away from the acknowledgement of a historically specific Coleridge to a similar movement of privileging writing over speech, itself a repetition of a movement in Rousseau’s *Confessions*. Both texts privilege future readers over present ones:

Wordsworth envisions his contemporaries slipping into “idolatry,” “servitude,” “ignominy,” and “shame,” and he imagine that it will only be future generations who might be capable of grasping the lessons of his work. If Coleridge was a failure, what hope was there for anyone else? The investment of Poetic identity in posthumous reception reflects Rousseau’s choice of writing over speech. As Rousseau complained

¹⁷ Stelzig, “Coleridge in The Prelude,” 24-5.

¹⁸ James O’Rourke, *Sex, Lies, and Autobiography: The Ethics of Confession* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 85.

that since none of his contemporaries ever recognized his real value in his presence, it would be up to the readers of the future to recognize his value and to vindicate him, so Wordsworth imagines that his own work will only truly be appreciated in a more enlightened future. But that hope only occupies the most overt and declarative level of Rousseau's and Wordsworth's texts. [...] Wordsworth's peremptory declaration on the Cambridge road that "I quit this painful theme—enough is said" (7:436) locate[s] the absence of moral exemplarity in the autobiographer, and [...] confess[es] the inability of words to repair that lack.¹⁹

I will suggest that *The Prelude* does not simply recognize the limits of written language and the moral failures of the author; rather, the persistence of references to speech and, more importantly, to *hearing* in *The Prelude* challenges the critical narrative of Coleridge's "occlusion."

Regularly represented not merely as a reader but as a *hearer* of Wordsworth's text, Coleridge as ideal reader is never simply a stand-in for the future reader but is also a persistently present one; in this presence is a promise that the work will continue to *speak* to future readers. Yet the split role of "Coleridge," in its very promise of uniting speech and writing, present and future, also risks destroying the necessary uncertainty of reading's future.

At no point in *The Prelude* does Coleridge seem more occluded by "Coleridge" than when he is heralded by name at the close of the poem. Yet this is also a moment in which *The Prelude* is most clearly "speaking" to him:

[...]With such a theme
Coleridge—with this my argument—of thee
Shall I be silent? O most loving soul,
Placed on this earth to love and understand,
And from thy presence shed the light of love
Shall I be mute ere thou be spoken of? (XII.247-51)

Coleridge is framed entirely in terms of his capability for recognition—he is one who can "love

¹⁹ O'Rourke, *Sex, Lies, and Autobiography*, 93-4.

and understand” (in Book I he is similarly described as one “so prompt/ In sympathy” [645-46])—and the poet is incapable of being “mute” in his presence. Thus Coleridge becomes not merely the hearer but also the cause of the poet’s speech. In a startling declaration, the poet asserts that Coleridge was “placed on this earth” to perform this sympathetic function; as the addressee, his presence is necessary to the prosopopoeic structure of facing the work through an act of recognition. The passage much more explicitly acknowledges the necessity of this readerly recognition than the other passage in which Coleridge is more subtly drawn on to ensure the (presumably immanent) coherence of the work itself:

It will be known—by thee at least, my friend
Felt—that the history of a poet’s mind
Is labour not unworthy of regard:
To thee the work shall justify itself. (XIII. 407-10)

A similar relationship between a sympathetic reader and the work’s ability to “speak” appears with the invocation of another “friend.” In Book II, the poet relates his childhood “morning walks” before school with “a friend/ Then passionately loved,” identified by critics as John Fleming. He then imagines Fleming reading over the passage:

[...]With heart how full
Will he peruse these lines, this page—perhaps
A blank to other men—for many years
Have since flowed in between us, and, our minds
Both silent to each other, at this time
We live as if those hours had never been. (II. 353-58)

In “perusing” the lines, which he will recognize even though they may be “blank” to other readers, Fleming will overcome the “silence” that has fallen between the poet’s mind and his own and will restore the lost “hours” of their acquaintance. The passage implicitly moves from the realm of reading (“perusing”) to that of listening (with sound being suggested by its opposite—“silent to each other”).

With these associations between reading and hearing, it is notable that the first address to Coleridge is also the moment in which *The Prelude* first acknowledges itself as a *written* text. While the opening two stanzas of *The Prelude* are largely in the present tense and describe the poet's elation as he wanders through the Lake District, free from his earlier residences in London and Goslar, it is only in the third verse paragraph of the poem that we are finally able to locate this event in the poet's past:

Thus far, O friend, did I not used to make
A present joy the matter of my song,
Pour out that day in measured strains,
Even in the very words which I have here
Recorded. To the open fields I told
A prophesy; poetic numbers came
Spontaneously, and clothed in priestly robe
My spirit, thus singled out as it might seem,
For holy services. Great hopes were mine:
My own voice cheered me, and, far more, the mind's
Internal echo of the imperfect sound—
To both I listened, drawing from them both
A chearful confidence in things to come. (l.55-67)

While this marks a temporal shift from the time of the original experience to the time of writing (and, importantly, of reading), the proliferation of deictic words (“*that* day, the *very* words that I have *here*/ Recorded”) attempts to preserve both the singularity of the recollected scene and its manifestation in a particular place. But the “recording” of that time already begins to undercut its singularity by underscoring its iterability. Moreover, the precise and even scientific term “recording” contrasts sharply with the free, musical imagery used to describe the poet's original act of speaking, in which he “poured out” his “song.”

This contrast returns when we are presented with the remembered scene of poetic election, in which “poetic numbers” arrive “spontaneously,” while the recording of the lines occurs at a temporal and emotional distance. While it is the “imperfect sound” of his voice—not

merely his words—that “chear[s]” the poet, the language of “recording” inscribes the reader by suggesting the act of actually reading the “very words” rather than hearing them. Indeed it is the act of writing—not of speaking—that will be figured as the device for the fulfillment of the spoken “prophecy.” In this tension between speaking and writing we locate also a tension between the present and the future that is itself a tension between two types of readers: a particular reader encountering a text at a particular time (in this case, Coleridge) and a more general conception of “Reader” that denotes the potential for continual future transmission of the text. As I have suggested, *present* readers become the locus of much of Wordsworth’s concern about the reception of his work; but the poem expresses concern about writing as a mode of transmission. Yet “Coleridge” can unite the fraught figure of the present reader with the persistently privileged figure of the speaking poet. As Coleridge had literally *heard* the early version of *The Prelude*, it seems only fitting that it is to him that *The Prelude* speaks, both literally, as it is addressed to him, and figuratively, as it seeks to move him and find his sympathy. While in the 1799 *Prelude*, Wordsworth does not directly address Coleridge until the second part of the poem, in the 1805 version Coleridge makes an almost immediate appearance, as though in recognition of his increased readerly proximity to the text. Considering this direct engagement on Coleridge’s part with the 1799 text, as well as his deep investment in the *Recluse* project that *The Prelude* was meant to inaugurate, it is possible to say that, at some level, the “friend” reader is already present at this first moment of writing and of prophecy.

Thus the appearance of the recorded prophecy is the first occurrence in *The Prelude* both of self-reading, as Wordsworth revisits and records his own “spontaneously” spoken “poetic numbers,” and of reading-by-another. In his interpretation of this scene in *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, Ian Balfour links the prophetic structure of repetition and transmission with

reading:

The doubling of echo implies reiteration and perhaps even survival, the possibility not only of a future prophecy but perhaps also of a prophetic tradition. The recollection, in writing, of a past prophecy spontaneously spoken to the fields is what moves Wordsworth back to the future and allows him to draw confidence in things to come. The scene Wordsworth describes is in another respect utterly unlike the characteristic settings of Biblical prophecy: There is no audience. Wordsworth merely speaks by himself to the open fields [...] Yet already in rehearsing this recorded announcement, Wordsworth has taken a step towards the constitution of his audience, without which there would be only imperfect sounds.²⁰

Balfour figures this scene as one of self-reading and self-propheying, and the stanza does indeed proceed as though in anticipation of the appearance of Wordsworth's audience. But this reading-by-another is not merely being prefigured; in some ways it has already arrived with the figure of the "friend" reader.²¹ While it may seem a bold claim to treat this essentially apostrophic address as evidence of an already present reader, the composition history of *The Prelude* renders this claim less radical than it may at first appear. By the time that Wordsworth completed the 1805 *Prelude*, Coleridge would have already seen (and heard) the 1799 two-book version.²²

This recognition of Coleridge's proximity to—and influence on—Wordsworth's writing process is particularly marked at the conclusion of the Salisbury Plain passage, the first portion of which we have already considered in the previous chapter. Just as the initial address to Coleridge reflected back on the opening stanzas as a written text, so also the address to Coleridge here invites us to immediately re-read the Salisbury Plain episode from a greater distance. And,

²⁰ Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 21.

²¹ Balfour identifies Coleridge as Wordsworth's "silent interlocutor" (20) in this passage. Yet, in this purely passive role, Coleridge as "interlocutor" is simply a function that allows for Wordsworth's self-reading. I argue, in contrast, that Coleridge has a much more active, shaping role that allows Wordsworth to extend the reading of his work beyond himself.

²² In an entry to his *Notebooks* from 1804, Coleridge notes that "in the highest & outermost of Grasmere Wordsworth read to me the second Part of his divine Self-biography." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notebooks*, Vol 1, eds. Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christensen (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 525.

once again, this passage strongly links the experience of the past with that of the future. But in this case, in contradistinction to the opening address, Coleridge's particular status as Wordsworth's reader is emphasized; indeed, there is almost no way for a general reader to substitute him or herself for the addressed "friend":

This for the past, and things that may be viewed,
Or fancied, in the obscurities of time.
Nor is it, friend, unknown to thee; at least—
Thyself delighted—thou for my delight
Hast said, perusing some imperfect verse
Which in that lonesome journey was composed,
That also I must then have exercised
Upon the vulgar forms of present things
And actual world of our familiar days,
A higher power—have caught from them a tone,
An image, and a character, by books
Not hitherto reflected. Call we this
But a persuasion taken up by thee
In friendship, yet the mind is to herself
Witness and judge, and I remember well
That in everyday appearances
I seemed about this period to have sight
Of a new world—a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted and made visible
To other eyes, as having for its base
That whence our dignity originates,
That which both gives it being, and maintains
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without:
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power,
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees. (XII.354-79)

From the "obscurities of time," Wordsworth has been guided to the creation of a "new world" by the mediation both of "present things" and of Coleridge's own vision of his work as something decidedly different, something "not hitherto reflected." Coleridge's reading, then, ensures a connection between the past and the future. We also find an ambiguous location of readerly agency, with that ambiguity more or less explicitly acknowledged. Was there already a power in Wordsworth's vision that Coleridge was able to recognize or does it appear, to the contrary, as a

result of his “persuasion”? In either case it appears that it is Coleridge’s reading of his work that convinces Wordsworth of its need to be transmitted to readers, to be seen by “other eyes.” As such, it not only connects the past and the future but also the present (of reading) with future readings; yet, with its focus on Coleridge’s particular relationship to Wordsworth, the passage also keeps a marked distance between Coleridge as present reader and the general, future reader.

In an address to Coleridge directly after the “waiting for horses” sequence, we once again find him framed as a guide, though this time the address is more generalizable. We also find the most explicit equation of Coleridge with Dante’s Virgil, as he is now tasked with guiding “a pilgrim gone/In quest of highest truth”:

Thou wilt not languish here, O friend, for whom
I travel in these dim uncertain ways—
Thou wilt assist me, as a pilgrim gone
In quest of highest truth. Behold me then
Once more in Nature’s presence, thus restored,
Or otherwise, and strengthened once again
(With memory left of what had been escaped)
To habits of devoutest sympathy. (XI.389-96)

Once again we find the ambiguity of agency that predominates throughout the addresses to Coleridge and which we have already identified as a general trend in Wordsworth’s treatment of his readers. When he is asked to “behold” the poet “once more in Nature’s presence,” Coleridge appears to both be *enacting* this change of state (this is his assistance) and merely recognizing a preexistent state of affairs. His presence, it seems, is necessary, but it remains unclear how much control—if any—he might exert over the work.

While the addresses to Coleridge regularly dramatize the ambiguity of readerly agency so often countenanced in Wordsworth’s writing, a key address also repeats the contrast between good and bad readers that we have also identified as a regular dynamic in Wordsworth’s concerns about his work’s reception:

[...] Thou, my friend, wert reared
 In the great city, 'mid far other scenes,
 But we by different roads at length have gained
 The self-same bourne. And for this cause to thee
 I speak unapprehensive of contempt,
 The insinuated scoff of coward tongues,
 And all that silent language which so oft
 In conversation betwixt man and man
 Blots from the human countenance all trace
 Of beauty and of love. (II.471-75)

The poet's "speech" to his friend is opposed to the "silent language" and "insinuated scoff" that, in contrast to the constructive work of recognition, instead effaces as it "blots" the "trace" of the "love" that is so consistently figured as a necessary complement to reading. The fact that this erasure happens on a "human countenance" suggests that the erasure of the reader's sympathy also erases the poem's ability to "speak"; moreover, this erasure is figured in terms of writing: blots, traces. We might also note a contrast here between the destructive "silent language" of critics and the positive "mute dialogues" between mother and child that appear in the "Blessed Babe" passage. (itself an example of the "silent poet" motif that Geoffrey Hartman has located throughout *The Prelude*).²³ The fact that silence can, in certain contexts, not be a block to meaningful, sympathetic communication suggests that it is less speech as such that is being valorized than the open disposition suggested by "hearing." This disposition is similar to that of the Boy of Winander, who listens to "pauses of deep silence" and therefore allows the "voice" of Nature to speak:

Then, sometimes in that silence, while he hung
 Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
 Has carried far into his heart the voice
 Of mountain torrents [...] (V.404-409)

²³ See Cathy Caruth and Geoffrey Hartman, "An Interview with Geoffrey Hartman," *Studies in Romanticism* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1996), 636.

As Geoffrey Hartman notes, the “youngster’s early experiences were so charged and powerful—despite Nature’s gentler aspect—that the mind becomes mute.”²⁴ The experience of this muteness may eventually lead to poetic speech, “[t]he mind of a poet [...] is a survivor’s mind. Its philosophic quality, its way of looking through death, differs from a ratiocinative and dissecting mimesis. [...] The muted child returns in the mature poet, not as a sublimated, dialecticized or lapsed mode of being but as an ecstatic and active memory.”²⁵ Thus Coleridge, as a properly disposed, “hearing” reader, shares the poet’s formative experience. Moreover, as a mute reader he is also a sort of “silent poet.” These mute experiences, which remain tied to “hearing” even as they are separated from speech, imply an encounter that occurs at a particular place and time and which, therefore, remains temporally bound and “present” even as its effects continue into the future. As Hartman suggests, it is the subsistence of these effects that spare the poet from “a ratiocinative and dissecting mimesis.” In the next section, I will demonstrate how another one of *The Prelude*’s examples of “bad readers” links this “ratiocinative” attitude with a very different conception of the future.

The Future of the Work Itself

The “coward tongues” deny a future for the work by laughing it to scorn. But, in his most extended indictment of certain reading practices, Wordsworth points to a yet more brutal fate for literature in which it is granted a future only at the price of a dead repetition. In what is often referred to as the “infant prodigy” section, Wordsworth describes a learned child as a “dwarf

²⁴ Hartman, “Reading: The Wordsworthian Enlightenment,” 30.

²⁵ Hartman, “Reading: The Wordsworthian Enlightenment,” 30.

man” and frames him as a “monster birth/ Engendered by these too industrious times” (ll. 292-93):

[...] 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. He sifts, he weighs,
Takes nothing upon trust. (ll. 332-38)

Yet he lives “a life of lies/ From the beginning, and in lies must end” as “nothing is left which he can love” (ll. 350-51; l. 357):

Forth bring him to the air of common sense
And, fresh and shewy as it is, the corps
Slips from us into powder. (ll. 352-54)

It is not immediately clear to whom this dissolving “corps” belongs: to the child, to his ideas, or to the very books that he has sullied with his deathly readings. Considering the degree of destructiveness that Wordsworth accuses schoolteachers and their “dwarf men” pupils of propagating, it seems possible that the “corps” could contain all three possibilities.

The next stanza provides support for a reading of these ashes as the remains of the misread books themselves:

These mighty workmen of our later 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 upon 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 labor, watchful men
And skilful 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 [...] (ll. 370-83)

We find, in the attempt to “controul/ All accidents” a threat of dead repetition akin to the sort of Hegelian “bad infinity” that Simon Jarvis locates in the “illimitable walk” of London in Book VII, where “the walk is illimitable because one can never in truth *arrive* anywhere, and thus one can never in fact *go* anywhere either [...] however far we walk we are still.”²⁶ It is an infinity that is not merely purely immanent but also deadly repetitive, destroying particularity but without any corresponding gain in grasping “the feeling of the whole” (VII.713). A similar future is threatened by the image of the railroad, an invention much loathed by Wordsworth, who would later describe it as “a false utilitarian lure/ Mid [...] paternal fields at random thrown.”²⁷ The railroad line recalls both the modern, secular conception of linear temporality represented by the concept of a “timeline”²⁸ and the dead repetition that such a conception of temporality perpetually threatens and which finds perhaps its clearest manifestation in those deterministic understandings of history that would attempt to “overbridge/ The froward chaos of futurity.”

Yet in this passage we can also locate a reversal of earlier passages in *The Prelude*, one of a series of reversals that begin to complicate the division between good and bad readers and demonstrate the increased difficulty of escaping the possibility of a deathly repetition. The passage unites two images that were contrasted in the opening stanza of the poem: the guide that assures the poet that he “cannot miss my way” and the “prison” where “he hath been long

²⁶ Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song*, 140.

²⁷ Lines 7-8 of “Sonnet XLV, On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway” from the *Miscellaneous Sonnets* as reproduced in *Wordsworth: Complete Poetical Works*, 224.

²⁸ It is perhaps worth noting that the “timeline,” in something akin to its present form, doesn’t really come to prominence until shortly before Wordsworth began work on *The Prelude*. According to Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton, it is only in the “late eighteenth century” that “the timeline began to flourish in Europe.” Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton, *Cartographies of Time: A History of the Timeline* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010), 15.

immured” (l.19; 9). In a perverse collapsing of roles, the teacher is both “guide” and “warden.” Instead of ensuring the future survival of books through a loving recognition, he instead “overbridges” futurity by reducing the books to “things” that “work.” These are books not as “friends” but as objects, perhaps even as a “corps.” In contrast to the “friends” and “guide” of the opening stanza, which bring “hope” and “vernal promises,” the teachers secure the future only by destroying it. In the instrumentalizing of their books, both they and their books are reduced to ashes.

Nonetheless, the reversal of the hopeful images of the opening of the poem still allows the dichotomy between good and bad readers to stand. A number of other reversals in Book V, however, prove a greater threat to this division. The book of “Books” is not merely a meditation on reading but is, itself, also a de-forming reading of other moments in *The Prelude*. Shortly after his consideration of the reading practices of schoolteachers, Wordsworth reflects on his own childhood encounter with books. In tracing his reading history, Wordsworth laments his lost ability to hear the “works of love,” the romance and adventure stories of his youth (V.518):

[...] I am sad
At thought of raptures now forever flown,
Even unto tears I sometimes could be sad
To think of, to read over, many a page—
Poems withal of name—which at that time
Did never fail to entrance me, and are now
Dead in my eyes as is a theatre
Fresh emptied of spectators. Thirteen years,
Or haply less, I might have seen when first
My ears began to open to the charm
Of words in tuneful order, found them sweet
For *their own sakes* [...] (ll. 568-79)

Catachrestically, the poet can no longer “see” what his “ears” heard in the “words in tuneful order.” The words, while preserved on “many a page,” are dead, slain by the poet’s lack of recognition. Since in this case the fault appears to lie with the books themselves—they are

“false” and “overwrought” (l. 594)—the passage makes it increasingly difficult to determine if a book ceases to “speak” because of an internal failure on the part of the supposedly self-justifying work itself (its words please “for their own sakes”) or because of the reader’s failure to hear the work. This difficulty becomes even more prominent when we read this passage for its contrast with the address to John Fleming discussed earlier in this chapter. While Fleming will “peruse these lines” which might be “[a] blank to other men” and will find that though he and the poet’s “minds” had been “silent to each other” now “[w]e live as if those hours had never been,” Wordsworth experiences almost the direct opposite: lines that once lived for him are now “dead” and the work, far from bridging years of silence, instead underscores the division of the past and the present in the poet’s inability to hear across the gap.

If the childhood reading passage reverses the passage addressed to Fleming, the Dream of the Arab sequence even more startlingly reverses the terms of the prophecy from *The Prelude*’s opening address to Coleridge. As David Collings has argued, the dream sequence also highlights how Book V marks not the absence of God as such but, in an almost equally damning move, his immanentization. The opening of Book V dramatizes the shift towards Providential Deism. In Taylor’s definition of Providential Deism, God shifts from being “the guarantor that good will triumph, or at least hold its own, in a world of spirits and meaningful forces” to serving as “the essential energizer of that ordering power through which we disenchant the world, and turn it to our purposes.”²⁹ And yet the prologue—and certainly the remainder of Book V—also demonstrates an awareness of the limitations of even this basic notion of “providentialism.”

Locating an oblique reference to the “rainbow covenant” in Book V’s opening image of

²⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 233.

the “speaking face of earth and heaven” (l. 12), Collings notes how the prologue almost immediately undercuts this providential assurance by recognizing that this “living Presence” can no longer actually hold disaster at bay:

Nature seems to be as subject to the divine will and intention as in the familiar myths of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and humanity seems to share in the ‘soul’ of the divine. Yet it turns out that this nameless ‘living Presence,’ far from warding off another deluge, would merely survive it the way that nature itself does. Rather than enforcing his own providential law over nature, this God now personifies the law of nature’s own immanent functioning, becoming little more than a metaphysical extension of what he was sworn to discipline.³⁰

The dream sequence only intensifies this dynamic, for in the dream the Arab proves unable to provide any guarantees and “is not much of a guide; he increases the dreamer’s anxiety by sharing with him the prophecy of destruction and then speeds away, abandoning the dreamer to his own devices.”³¹ I will argue that this loss of transcendence and the corresponding turn towards a purely immanent language are the dynamic that both enables the concept of the “work itself” that features prominently in *The Prelude* and threatens that work with destruction.

What ultimately becomes clear in the Dream of the Arab is the dangers of a “monumentalized” reading practice and a correspondent recognition that the only possible hedge against this danger is not (or, more accurately, is no longer) a covenantal guarantee but rather a structure of perpetual deferral. In these recognitions, the poem anticipates several key deconstructive gestures, for instance de Man’s identification, in “Shelley Disfigured,” of reading’s ineradicable tendency towards “monumentalization” and Derrida’s association of literature, in “No Apocalypse, Not Now,” with a “rhetoric of dissuasion” and his assertion that it must always “speak of something else, and invent strategies for speaking of something else, for

³⁰ Collings, *Wordsworthian Errancies*, 183.

³¹ Collings, *Wordsworthian Errancies*, 185.

deferring the encounter with the wholly other.”³² But, most importantly, the sequence represents a coming-to-awareness of the historical conditions that would ultimately allow such critiques to appear.

We can locate these historical conditions in the emergence of a secular conception of futurity. While repetition in sacred temporality was inherently meaningful due to what Benedict Anderson has called the “unselfconscious coherence” of the “great religiously imagined communities” that operated in something akin to Benjamin’s “Messianic time,” the linear temporality of modernity demands constant reinvention in order to avoid dead repetition as much as modern capital demands perpetual reinvestment to avoid stagnation.³³ The threat of not merely an unknown future but a “dead” one underlies not only Romantic notions of innovative “Genius” but also Hume’s attempt, in Thomas Pfau’s reading of his work, to treat language as “a medium as accessible and capable of generating ‘interest’ as the modern conception of capital itself” and, of course, this necessity of inventiveness underlies our own age’s preoccupation with creative destruction.³⁴

Bearing this historical situation of *The Prelude* in mind, we can now trace how the Dream of the Arab de-forms the very “work itself” that this same situation produced. Key to this deformation is the appearance of an object that would, at first glance, appear to solve the tensions between writing and speaking: the “talking book” represented by a shell. Yet far from

³² Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now: Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives,” trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, Vol. 1, 396; 403.

³³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 16; 24.

³⁴ Thomas Pfau, *Wordsworth’s Profession: Form, Class, and the Logic of Early Romantic Cultural Production* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 297.

representing the ultimate defense against misreading, this book will speak not of salvation but of apocalypse. More telling still, the passage will pick up much of the seemingly innocuous language of the opening of the poem in an echo—like the sound of the shell book—that prophecies not destruction to come but an end that is “now at hand” (V.99).

The dream is related to the poet by a “friend” who had it shortly after “perusing [...] The famous history of the errant knight/ Recorded by Cervantes” (ll. 58-66). Thus, we encounter the dream as Wordsworth’s record of another’s dream, and the dream itself is birthed from Cervantes’s own “record.” Laying down his book, the poet’s friend muses

On poetry and geometric truth
(The knowledge that endures) upon these two,
And their high privilege of lasting life
Exempt from all internal injury (ll. 64-67)

Like the idea of the “work itself,” in the friend’s thoughts “poetry”—like “geometric truth”—is “exempt from all internal injury.” After these reflections, the speaker passed into a dream” (l. 70).

But, as the title of Goya’s painting would have it, “The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters”: the dream that follows this confident assertion of poetry’s independence and immortality significantly undermines it.³⁵ In the dream, as in the opening of *The Prelude*, the dreamer finds himself “alone”—though this time the solitude is cause for “distress of mind” (ll. 74). Yet he is relieved when he catches sight of a “guide/ To lead him through the desert” (ll. 82-83). The “guide” recalls not only the “guide” from the opening stanza but also Coleridge, regularly framed as the poet’s own guide through his work. The man comes bearing a stone and a

³⁵ In this context, it is perhaps worth noting that the dream sequence appears to have been based on an actual dream of Descartes. See Jane Worthington Smyser, “Wordsworth’s Dream of Poetry and Science: The Prelude, V,” *PMLA* 71, no. 1 (March 1956):269-75.

shell; he insists, in “the language of the dream” (l. 87), that the stone is Euclid’s *Elements* and the shell is a “book [...] of more worth” (l. 90), a phrase that is traditionally read as indicating that the shell represents poetry.³⁶ The dreamer, as instructed, holds the shell to his ear where he hears

[...] articulate sounds,
A loud prophetic blast of harmony,
An ode in passion uttered, which foretold
Destruction to the children of the earth
By deluge now at hand. No sooner ceased
The song, but with calm look the Arab said
That all was true, that it was even so
As had been spoken, and that he himself
Was going then to bury these two books— (ll. 95-103)

The parallels with the opening stanzas of the poem are manifold: the dreamer’s listening to the shell recalls the poet “cheared” by his “own voice” and “the mind’s/ Internal echo of the imperfect sound”; the “loud prophetic blast” echoes the original “prophecy” spoken to the fields; the “ode in passion uttered” reflects the “spontaneously” appearing “poetic numbers.” While in the third stanza the poet assures us that he spoke his “measured strains,/ Even in the very words that I have here/ Recorded,” in this passage the Arab assures the dreamer that “it was even so/ As had been spoken.” The language of the opening of the dream sequence privileges sound and speech—“harmony,” “uttered,” “spoken.” But rather than a “cheerful confidence in things to come,” we hear of a “deluge now at hand.”

Some clue as to why this speaking book only foretells destruction may lie in the in the Arab’s quest to save the books by burying them, by treating them as corpses. Yet unlike the schoolteachers and their “dwarf man” pupils, he seems to be motivated by fidelity to and love for

³⁶ Geoffrey Hartman tellingly identifies the shell book as representing both “poetry” and “passionate human relations.” Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 228.

the work—he identifies the book of Poetry as of more worth than that of Geometry and he encourages the dreamer to listen to the shell book. In short, he wishes to keep it “exempt from all internal injury.” But instead of actually burying the books, the Arab rides on, “grasping his twofold treasure to his side” (l. 120), and as the dreamer follows him he begins to believe that the man is both an Arab and

[...] the very knight
Whose tale Cervantes tells, yet not the knight,
[...]
Of these was neither, and was both at once. (ll. 123-26)

The Arab-knight’s task, now framed as quixotic, is never completed. Instead of burying the books he carries them with him, always a step ahead of the “waters of the deep” (l. 130) that gather behind him. The Arab, once he has been transformed into the “semi-Quixote,” is constituted by his quest and would be undone at the moment of its completion; after all, a completed quest can hardly be quixotic. The apocalypse is “now at hand” not only because of the deluge but also because of the very “books” that the Arab-Quixote bears with him, because of his very quest to preserve the speaking book both through its entombment; simultaneously, the apocalypse is perpetually deferred insofar as the knight is always deferring his own quest, keeping space between the deathly powers of the deluge (which would destroy the books beyond recognition) and the fulfillment of his quest (the preservation of the book that protects it only by entrusting it to the silence of a tomb).³⁷

³⁷ Andrzej Warminski also reads the Arab-knight’s quest as one of deferral of an already present apocalypse, though he presents this deferral structure as an attempted separation of literal and figurative reading practices: “the Arab-Quixote-poet’s quest is simply (i.e., always double) *reading*: that is, to keep figurative and literal senses apart—to forestall Apocalypse now (“now at hand”) the collapse of the *pre-* (“fore-”) and *re-* (“told”) moments in a self-destructive, self-disarticulating non-present—to save the possibility of the “prophecy” (“saying before”), the pre-figurement, of the mind’s self-destruction from the fulfillment (literalization) of that self-destruction. Apocalypse behind him, Apocalypse before him, the Arab-Quixote rides, reads, on.” Andrzej Warminski, “Missed Crossing: Wordsworth’s Apocalypses,” *MLN* 99, no. 5 (December 1984), 100.

Similarly, we might say that the success of the apostrophic addresses to “Coleridge” lies in the fact they refuse to function either as a purely particular or general address, but instead keep space between a volatile, temporally-bound reading—which could, at any moment, cease to recognize or appreciate the text and in so doing destroy it—and a “monumentalizing” one—which would destroy the very nature of the readerly encounter by determining it in advance. In short, “Coleridge,” as function of *The Prelude*, can only allow the poem to speak insofar as he is unable to have the last word on it. The prophetic tone of many of the addresses (“to thee [...] it will be known [...] that the history of a poet’s mind/ Is labor not unworthy of regard [XIII.408-11]) preserves its power precisely to the degree that it perpetually defers its fulfillment.

Despite the Dream of the Arab’s dramatization of the danger of a monumentalizing reading, the allure of such a reading remains. The poet, after hearing the Dream of the Arab related, imagines the knight as a

living man—
A gentle dweller in the desert, crazed
By love, and feeling, and internal thought
Protracted among endless solitudes
[...]
And thought that in the blind and awful lair
Of such a madness reason did lie couched. (ll. 144-152)

Again, we are reminded that the Arab-knight—like the “friend reader”—is motivated by love and by feeling. Like the poet, he fears that a book is a “poor earthly casket of immortal verse” (l. 165). The “Dream of the Arab” suggests that books, as records, serve as “poor...caskets” in two senses: they are a poor defense against the onslaught of physical disaster and they entomb “verse,” granting it only a deathly immortality. Two stanzas later, the poet gives himself over to the knight’s very quest:

It seemeth in behalf of these, the works,
[...]
That I should here assert their rights, attest
Their honours and should once and for all pronounce
Their benediction, speak of them as powers
For ever to be hallowed. (ll. 214-20)

Of course, it is precisely this “once and for all,” this attempt permanently to preserve the work’s “rights” against misreadings, mishearings, this attempt to preserve “those trumpet-tones of harmony that shake/ Our shores in England” (ll. 206-07), that explains why the seemingly felicitous “speaking” shell book can only speak of destruction, why the constitution of this “reading” undoes reading.

We may return now to the “cheerful” opening passages of *The Prelude*. According to our earlier accounting of this passage, it works through the poet speaking his prophecy “to the open fields” and ensuring the transmission—and through this transmission also the fulfillment—of his prophecy through its record and the friend reader’s recognition of the poet and his “song” in the moment of reading this record. Yet Book V—and “The Dream of the Arab” in particular—undermines this “cheerful confidence in things to come” by suggesting not only the inevitability of misreadings and nonreadings, which deface and efface the work respectively, but also the deathly possibilities at the heart of even the most faithful, “loving” readings. At the moment that the friend-reader appears in the poem, both the possibility for the work’s transmission *and* the possibility for its destruction are present.

“Why doesn’t the book say anything to me?”

There is a final historical context for the “talking book” of the shell, one which may help us draw a connection between the previous chapter and this one, which is to say between *The Prelude*’s

relationship to an illegible but nonetheless haunting premodernity and an indeterminate future that is “evermore about to be.” It is a story that dates from nearly two centuries before the composition of *The Prelude* but nonetheless functions as its own sort of prophecy of an uncertain future. It is the narrative of an encounter between Spanish Conquistadors and the last sovereign emperor of the Inca Empire:

Francisco Pizarro, speaking for himself and Almagro, explained through the Indian interpreter Felipe that he was the messenger and ambassador of a great ruler who desired friendship with the Inca and that this was the only object of his mission to Peru. Atahualpa listened with close attention to the words spoken by Pizarro and then by the interpreter. He answered with great dignity that he had no reason to doubt the fact of the Spaniard’s long journey or their mission from an important ruler. However, he had no need to make any pact of friendship with them because he was too great a ruler in his own country.

After this reply Friar Vicente joined in the conversation. He came forward holding a crucifix in his right hand and a breviary in his left and introduced himself as another envoy of the Spanish ruler, who according to his account was a friend of God, and who often worshipped before the cross and believed in the Gospel. Friar Vicente called upon the Inca to renounce all other gods as being a mockery of the truth.

Atahualpa’s reply was that he could not change his belief in the Sun, who was immortal, and in the other Inca divinities. He asked Friar Vicente what authority he had for his own belief and the friar told him it was all written in the book which he held. The Inca then said: “Give me the book so that it can speak to me.” The book was handed up to him and he began to eye it carefully and listen to it page by page. At last he asked: “Why doesn’t the book say anything to me?” Still sitting on his throne, he threw it on the ground with a haughty and petulant gesture.³⁸

At this perceived insult, the Conquistadors launched an immediate (and preemptively planned) attack on Atahualpa’s men and immediately took him prisoner, subsequently executing him. Yet Atahualpa’s death could not undo the simple fact that the authoritative texts that undergirded both Europe’s monarchical power and its religious understandings had proven, quite literally,

³⁸ Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *Nueva Corónica* (ca. 1615), as cited and translated in *Stages of Conflict: A Critical Anthology of Latin American Theater and Performance*, ed. Diana Taylor and Sarah J. Townsend (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 59

unable to “speak” to an alien culture. While this crisis of authority could be managed by violence so long as it was confined to the colonial margins, by the time Wordsworth writes *The Prelude* a “talking book” and a racially-othered reader appear at the literal and figurative center of the poem. This time, however, the “talking book” will prove not to be a moment of recognition and cultural assimilation, as it would have been if the breviary had indeed “spoken” to Atahualpa, but rather it serves only as evidence of the disastrous nature of attempts at authoritative reading within a space of pure linguistic immanence. In this sense, the sequence anticipates what will become clear in *The Prelude*’s later considerations of the French Revolution. While the Revolution replaced an oppressive and outmoded regime, it proved itself incapable of establishing a viable new system of governance in its place. In a modernity where the narratives of the past can only speak of destruction—if they speak at all—it is equally impossible to establish new authoritative cultural narratives. A new cultural understanding will, by necessity, be ever subject to (re)invention. It is a position that recalls the lines from Arnold’s “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse”:

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head. (ll. 85-87)

Yet both the talking book of the Dream of the Arab and the haunting absence of the gibbet mast remind us that the past world can still speak in *The Prelude*, though only of its absence.

Chapter 3

“The Bridge Thrown Over the Stream of Time”: “The Triumph of Life” between the *Divina Commedia* and “Shelley Disfigured”

The history of “The Triumph of Life” and the history of deconstruction have been intricately intertwined since analyses of the poem appeared in three out of the five essays in the seminal anthology *Deconstruction and Criticism* in 1979. As a result, the poem has become almost synonymous with poststructuralist reading practices and with post-modern understandings of history, language, and meaning. It not only demonstrates the modernity of Shelley’s romanticism but, in proper Shelleyan form, prophesies the post-modern.

But “The Triumph of Life” is itself a presentation not merely of history but of literary history, one that is substantially more complex than the one in which it is usually inserted. In this chapter, I argue that both the material history of the poem’s manuscript and its own presentation of literary history challenge accounts of “The Triumph of Life” as a straightforwardly (post-)modern text. Through a consideration of the poem’s relationship to both a pre-modern, Dantean perspective of history and allegory and a post-modern, de Manian one, I contend that the poem exists in an “untimely” relationship to these perspectives. While, in the *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley compares Dante’s poetry to a “bridge” that allows a crossing between the “ancient and modern worlds,”¹ “The Triumph of Life”, itself replete with Dantean imagery and allusions, does not so much “bridge” ancient and modern conceptions of history and temporality as create a palimpsestic overlay of them that ultimately makes both unavailable.

¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 526.

In the first section, I investigate the presentation of Dante in the *Defence* and will argue that the allegorical structure of Shelley's poetics is located between that of a Dantean, "vertical" allegory and a de Manian, "horizontal" one. I suggest that just as Dante and de Man's understandings of allegory cross in the *Defence*, so their visions of history cross in "The Triumph of Life". I then explain how this crossing thwarts our attempts to definitively read the history presented in *Triumph* and our attempts to decipher the poem's own history. I demonstrate this dynamic through a consideration of the poem from three different—but related—angles: the challenge to reading posed by both the materiality of the manuscript and its language, the challenge to reading posed by the thematic role of absence and erasure in the poem, and the representations of these challenges within scenes of reading in the poem itself.

"The Bridge Thrown Over the Stream of Time"

In *The Defence of Poetry*, Shelley declares that "[t]he poetry of Dante may be considered as the bridge thrown over the stream of time, which unites the modern and ancient world. The distorted notion of invisible things which Dante and his rival Milton have idealized, are merely the mask and the mantle in which these great poets walk through eternity enveloped and disguised."² Shelley's metaphor of Dante as a temporal "bridge" also directs our attention to allegory's central role in the Italian poet's *oeuvre*. In his treatise *Convivio*, Dante invokes the "four-fold allegory" of medieval theology to explain his own use of allegory. Long-standing critical debate persists about the exact nature of allegory in the *Divina Commedia*; it centers on whether the poem was meant to be read according to the "allegory of the poets," in which the

² Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 526.

‘beautiful falsehood’ of literature conceals “eternal truths,” or according to the “allegory of the theologians,” in which both the literal and the allegorical dimension are considered true and valuable, summed up by the dictum *litteria gesta docet, quid credas allegoria*, (“the literal sense teaches events; the allegory what you should believe”).³ While most medieval criticism of the *Commedia* reads the poem according to the “allegory of the poets,” Dante in both the *Convivio* and in the “Epistle to Cangrande” (Dante’s authorship of the latter is disputed) draws on the “allegory of the theologians” to explicate his work. In the theological model, allegory serves as a bridge between particular details and universal significance, a ladder between the immanent and the transcendent. Allegory was intimately tied to a sacred interpretation of history that sought typological meaning beneath a biblical history that was also presumed to be factual.

In the *Defence of Poetry*’s account of literary history, Shelley contrasts the “mask and mantle” of the contemporary theological understandings of Dante and Milton with their works’ “eternal” quality. In keeping with the “allegory of the poets,” he draws a divide between the particular and the universal in which the particulars of these works are discardable falsehoods that nonetheless demonstrate an eternal truth. Poetry is thus separated—and exalted above—the accidents of history; this recalls Aristotle’s claim that poetry is “a more philosophical and more serious thing than history, since poetry speaks more of things that are universal, and history of things that are particular.”⁴ Yet Shelley subtly modifies Aristotle’s dictum by introducing a temporal element in his own division of “story” and “poetry.” Time purges the particular “notions” of Dante and Milton and thus reveals their accidental nature even as it confirms the

³ See Albert R. Ascoli, “Dante and Allegory” in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory* for a fuller account of this debate. Translation from the Latin drawn from notes in Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture, Volume 2*, trans. E.M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 257.

⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 32.

authors' roles as true poets:

There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other bond of connexion than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds. The one is partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events that can never again recur; the other is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible variety of human nature. Time, which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stript of the poetry which should invest them, augments that of Poetry, and for ever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains.⁵

The substantive “eternal truth” can thus be vertically allegorized by “new and wonderful applications.”

Yet the temporal—and literary-historical—dimension of this dynamic complicates Shelley's relationship to both classical and medieval notions of allegory.⁶ While in conformity with the “allegory of the poets” in his exalting of the universal over the particular, this temporal dimension contains a necessarily historical aspect even as it departs from the ordered shape of typological history found in the “allegory of the theologians.” Understood temporally, the relation between ancient and modern is not vertical but rather horizontal; it recalls not the sacred structure of medieval allegory but instead the secular structure of de Man's representation of allegory in “The Rhetoric of Temporality.” The emergence of allegory in Romantic literature, de

⁵ Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 515.

⁶ I am principally concerned in this chapter with the relationship of Shelley's allegorical style to the understandings of allegory presented by Dante and Paul de Man. Thus, medieval concepts of allegory are more central to my argument than classical ones. Nonetheless, classical understandings of literary and religious allegory—especially as they appear in Cicero's *De Natura*—overlap substantially more than they do in later Christian conceptions that insist on a “more emphatic separation of allegory into two kinds.” Nonetheless, the intensely temporal nature of Shelley's allegory remains distinct from the classical conception even as it shares the anxiety expressed by Cotta in *De Natura* that “the meanings are not inherent in the myths [or by extension in any other allegorically understood text] but they have been arbitrarily and selectively foisted off on them by the ingenuity of the Stoics.” Philip Rollinson, *Classical Theories of Allegory and Christian Culture* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), 81; 5.

Man argues, represents “the unveiling of its authentic temporal destiny,” because, unlike symbolism, whose “simultaneity” is “spatial in kind, and in which the intervention of time is merely a matter of contingency,” in

the world of allegory, time is the originary constitutive category. The relationship between the allegorical sign and its significance (*signifie*) is not decreed by dogma [...] it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the *repetition* [...] of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority. The secularized allegory of the early romantics thus necessarily contains the negative moment which in Rousseau is that of renunciation, in Wordsworth that of the loss of self in death or in error.

For de Man the revelation of the latent opposition between symbol and allegory—provided, ironically enough, by Coleridge—brings allegory itself into a realization of its “authentically temporal destiny.”⁷ While medieval allegory both recognized the existence of the universal and transcendent and privileged them over the immanent and the particular, de Manian allegory not only privileges the particular and the immanent but ceases to participate in the universal and transcendent at all. Or, perhaps more accurately, it recognizes the impossibility of such participation and thus manifests itself only through the relation of particular terms within a purely immanent temporality.⁸

⁷ Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 206-7.

⁸ It is worth clarifying what I mean by “transcendence” and “immanence” within the context of this chapter. If understood from a purely experiential dimension, then de Man’s approach certainly allows for the concept of something like transcendence. Indeed, the “historical and aesthetic system of recuperation” of random events that de Man claims is inescapable “regardless of the exposure of its fallacy” would suggest something like transcendence. Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 122. A similar dynamic can be found in de Man’s explication in “The Rhetoric of Temporality” of the bad faith of symbolism, “a defensive strategy” that tries to hide from the “negative self-knowledge” of allegory” (208). Needless to say, such conceptions of the transcendent are markedly different from the *sui generis* transcendence of the medieval (and classical) traditions. In the former, the experience of transcendence is generated by (a reading of) immanent elements. In the latter, the transcendent is ontologically prior to the immanent, though—as Charles Taylor suggests—our tendency to even think of them as separable is distinctly modern: “Everyone understands these [divisions], both those who affirm and those who deny the second term [...] This hiving off of an independent, free-standing level [...] which may or may not be in interaction with something further or beyond, is a crucial bit of modern theorizing, which in turn corresponds to a constitutive dimension of modern experience” (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 14). When the terms are

Thus Shelley's invocation of Dante implicitly invokes both the most sacred and the most secular understandings of allegory; the *Defence* itself becomes a bridge between pre-modern and post-modern poetics. In framing Dante's work as a "bridge," the *Defence*—as much a work of literary history as it is of poetics—both insists on a distance between the ancient and the modern worlds, between ancient and modern literature, and allows for a crossing between the two. Like the *Defence*, Shelley's final, uncompleted poem "The Triumph of Life" also offers a vision of history—one that seems at odds with the one presented in the *Defence*.

In the poem, "A strange trance [...] Which was not slumber" (ll. 29-30) grows over the poet's *persona*. Then, "a Vision on my brain was rolled" (l. 40) and he finds himself along a "public way" streaming with people. None knows "Whither he went, or whence he came, or why/ He made one of the multitude" (ll. 47-49). A chariot soon appears along the same path, driving before it a train of captives in a frightful "triumphal" march. Historical figures ranging from Plato to Napoleon are among the vanquished; only a "sacred few," noted solely by their absence, escape this fate. The shapeless figure piloting the chariot horrifies the poet and he asks aloud who drives this procession. A voice behind him replies "Life" (l. 180). The poet turns and discovers that what he mistook for a stump is, instead, the decrepit, eyeless shade of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The poet asks Rousseau the question whose answer, we have already been told, eludes those traveling along the way: "Whence comest thou and whither goest thou?/ How did they course begin [...] and why?" (ll. 296-97). Rousseau's reply constitutes the bulk of the rest of the poem. He awoke, he claims, beside a mountain and a body of water, from which an

used in this chapter, I intend to invoke the older—namely the medieval—understandings of these terms in order to most clearly dramatize the tension between the two opposing models of allegory and history that I associate here with Dante and de Man. In this context, then, a "purely immanent temporality" would be one in which there is nothing outside of or beyond the temporal; a temporality without eternity.

entrancing “shape all light” emerged. He asked this shape the now familiar triad of questions; he wished to be told “whence I came, and where I am, and why.” In answer, the shape handed him a cup. Rousseau drank and, he says,

[...] suddenly my brain became as sand

“Where the first wave had more than half erased
The track of deer on desert Labrador,
Whilst the fierce wolf from which they fled amazed

Leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore
Until the second bursts—so on my sight
Burst a new Vision never seen before. (ll.405-11)

This was the same procession that greeted the poet when he first entered the dream vision. But, unlike the poet, Rousseau also saw streaming from each figure an infinite train of representations that grew more and more distorted. Rousseau was himself soon swept along with the procession. Yet eventually he was flung aside and landed in his current posture. As Rousseau concludes his strange tale, the poet desperately inquires: “Then, what is Life?” (l. 544). Rousseau’s answer—“Happy those for whom the fold/ Of” (ll. 547-8)—is abruptly ended by Shelley’s own untimely end in a boating accident.

Shelley’s death seals *Triumph*’s place in both literary history and the brief history of Shelley’s own life. Yet placing *Triumph* within a larger history places it, at the same time, within a history of reading. The poem is structured around the attempts of two characters—the poet’s *persona* and “Rousseau”—to read a seemingly inscrutable procession of historical figures as well as the history of their own lives. They seek the answer to those oft-repeated questions: “Whence comest thou and whiter goest thou?/ How did they course begin [...] and why?” Yet we can—in placing the poem within a larger literary history—locate these figures and their readings between two other figures, one who precedes the poem and one who comes to the poem long after

Shelley's death. Just as Dantean and de Manian understandings of allegory cross within the *Defence*, so also do their visions of history cross within "The Triumph of Life".

The poem is itself a re-reading of the presentation of history in the *Divina Commedia* and even utilizes Dante's signature *terza rima*, an intricate rhyme scheme of interlocking tercets. The *Commedia*'s world is as structured and interconnected as its rhyme scheme; within it, the particulars of history find their place—both literally and figuratively—within a sacred, circular order given shape by a divine, transcendent, and eternal presence. In Eric Auerbach's account, the space of the *Commedia* represents a singular ordering of all orders:

The location of the Inferno, of the Mount of Purgatory, and of the circles of Paradise constitute a physical as well as an ethical picture of the universe. The doctrine of souls which underlies the ethical order is at once physiological and a psychological anthropology; and there are many other ways in which the ethical and physical orders are basically connected. The same holds true for the historico-political order. [...] In the course of the poem this is constantly expressed [...] so that the three systems of order—the ethical, the physical, and the historico-political—always present and always demonstrable, appear as one single entity.⁹

The poem's language reproduces this deep connectivity; Auerbach notes that there is "no question of any parataxis in Dante's style. Within every scene there is an abundance of syntactic connectives."

In "Shelley Disfigured," by contrast, one of the most influential readings of "The Triumph of Life", de Man locates in the poem the direst consequences of a more modern, linear conception of history where historical particulars unfold on a "timeline" and chronology is the only governing order. What *Triumph* shows us, de Man claims, is 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

⁹ Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 190.

randomness of its occurrence.”¹⁰ This disconnection de Man identifies as central to the poem’s content is reflected in the syntactical elements that shape the poem, which includes an inordinate number of ellipses inserted by Shelley in the original manuscript and, in most critical editions, brackets signaling necessary omissions based on the illegibility of Shelley’s own manuscript or his cancellation of a word without producing a replacement. Thus both thematically, in its allusion to and departure from the *Divina Commedia*, and structurally, from the *terza rima* that underlies it to the ellipses and brackets that disrupt it, “The Triumph of Life” seems more “untimely” than “modern.” Like the over-trodden sand of Rousseau’s brain, these understandings overwrite rather than replace each other to form a palimpsest in which no understanding is fully legible but each survives as a trace.

“Marks on Paper”: The Triumph of Materiality

I will turn to *Triumph*’s manuscript history by way of its own acknowledgement of its place within a literary history. Tilottama Rajan has argued that the structure of repetition within the poem is central to its understanding of its own history: “By repeating itself at different points on a personal and a historical axis, by allowing these axes to intersect in different ways, the poem generates more than one perspective from which we can view it and gives to the repetition that is reading a complex and still unfinished historical dimension.”¹¹ Yet while Rajan is principally concerned with the work’s opening toward a future in which “we appropriate the poem to our own experience and make something meaningful out of it,” the appearance of a Dantean

¹⁰ de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 122.

¹¹ Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 329.

perspective also encourages us to think about the poem's openness towards a literary historical past whose persistence may also serve as a mode of resistance against attempts to "appropriate the poem to our own experience."¹²

Many critics have read Shelley's relationship to his Italian forerunner as fundamentally ironic.¹³ Vidyan Ravinthiran suggests that, even in his *terza rima* English translations of the *Commedia*, Shelley pits form against form, refusing the very order the meter suggests: "his tercets neglect Dante's provoking and balancing logic and do not manage his clinching integrity," elements Shelley "cannot or will not duplicate."¹⁴ Rajan's model of the text as both literal and figurative "palimpsest," however, allows us to move beyond a simple oppositional framework to think about both the subsistence of Dante's world and its half-erasure.¹⁵ Combining Rajan's understanding of the poem as palimpsest with Derrida's concept of "archive fever" will enable us to recognize the complex ways in which Shelley navigates his Dantean inheritance, simultaneously preserving and (half-)erasing the *Commedia* to move beyond a simple, oppositional framework.

Archive fever marks our own relationship with the material archive of Shelley's manuscript, whose very form dictates that fidelity to Shelley be purchased at the price of a

¹² Rajan, *Supplement of Reading*, 340. It is worth noting that Rajan is also interested in the ways that the poem is oriented towards the past. In its representation of the figures in the triumph, "the poem asks us to read these traces: to become the gigantic shadows that the past still casts on the present even as it is being effaced" (325). Nonetheless, the central concern of her argument is with the way in which the past of Triumph casts its "gigantic shadows" on our "present," not the poem's relationship to its literary forerunners.

¹³ See, for instance, Earl Schulze, "Allegory Against Allegory: 'The Triumph of Life,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 31-62. It is also worth noting de Man's close alignment of allegory and irony in "The Rhetoric of Temporality."

¹⁴ Vidyan Ravinthiran, "Dante and Shelley's *Terza Rima*," *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* 61, no 2 (April 2011), 161.

¹⁵ Rajan, *Supplement of Reading*, 331. While Rajan engages extensively with the poem's manuscript and editorial history as well as the ways in which the poem (pre)figures this history, she—somewhat surprisingly—does not address the influence of Dante on the poem at all in *The Supplement of Reading*.

certain infidelity to his text. Our own critical relationship to the poem thus doubles the poem's relationship to its *ur*-text. De Man famously claimed that *Triumph*'s fragmentary nature makes any reading of it largely a question of how "one disposes of Shelley's body."¹⁶ Rajan's work demonstrates the degree to which this dynamic extends beyond readings of the poem itself and to the editing of its manuscript. Shelley's *corpus* always resists a permanent monumentalization, especially one produced by the conversion of the manuscript into an "edition." As Rajan notes, Donald Reiman's editorial relationship to the manuscript exemplifies this dynamic:

Not surprisingly, there is much more in the manuscript than appears in the printed text. Indeed, the discrepancy is so severe that Reiman has recently found it necessary to call into question his entire editorial activity by going beyond the re-edited text with notes on the manuscript that he published in 1965, and providing a facsimile of the manuscript itself with a full transcription [...] If there was a phase in the poem's reception history when an editor could simply shape a work out of the manuscript and put the original behind her, that history is now a palimpsest that we must reenter every time we read the poem. The appearance of the Garland facsimile leads us to reflect on the ways in which different reading communities establish the identity of a text so as to legitimize their own philosophical or ideological positions.¹⁷

Thus even the reproduction of the (old) archive of the manuscript within a new context shows that "[t]he archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future."¹⁸

The three relationships I have highlighted—of Shelley to Dante, of us to Shelley, and of the poem to the material and editorial history of its own manuscript—meet within the one direct allusion to Dante in *Triumph*. It also figures our persistent inability to place the particular elements of the poem within any scheme that could render them fully legible. When he first

¹⁶ de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 121.

¹⁷ Rajan, *Supplement of Reading*, 341.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 68.

catches sight of the parade of “life,” Rousseau notes its Dantean quality:

“Before the chariot had begun to climb
The opposing steep of that mysterious dell,
Behold a wonder worthy of the rhyme

“Of him who from the lowest depths of Hell
Through every Paradise and through all glory
Love led serene, and who returned to tell

“In words of hate and awe the wondrous story
How all things are transfigured, except Love;
For deaf as is a sea which wrath makes hoary

“The world can hear not the sweet notes that move
The sphere whose light is melody to lovers—
A wonder worthy of his rhyme—the grove

“Grew dense with shadows to its inmost covers,
The earth was grey with phantoms, [...] (ll. 469-82)

The isolated phrase “—A wonder worthy of his rhyme—” connects Dante to the scene at hand and yet can ambiguously be read as a description of either “The sphere whose light is melody to lovers” (or even the “sweet notes” that set this “sphere” in motion) or “the grove” filled with phantoms. Of course, semantically speaking, the answer is both: the phantoms are themselves a wonder worthy of the rhyme of the poet who wrote about other wonders. Yet syntactically speaking, to make this connection we must read the phrase both ways; we must *overread* it. Thus, our crossing from the syntactic to the semantic is at the same time a crossing out of the former by the latter.

If, as Auerbach suggests, there is “no question of any parataxis in Dante’s style,” this passage—even as it acknowledges Shelley’s debt to Dante—also exemplifies one of the most marked stylistic differences between the two poets. Here, as in Shelley’s *oeuvre* as a whole, parataxis is the dominant form, with its digressions and juxtapositions forcing the reader to make connections between particular elements on his or her own even as its insistent ambiguity puts

the stability of those interpretations into question. The fact that the principal connection here is the literary-historical one between Dante and Shelley only underscores the poem's insistent refusal, or even inability, to give a certain answer to the question of influence: "How did thy [literary] course begin and why?"

A more extended close reading might claim that the movement from the literary past to the present of writing is thus not one of simple continuity or of discontinuity but rather a process of writing and reading *over*, an effacement and a return. We find this dynamic so often in Shelley's reproduction of the themes and images of the *Inferno* within "The Triumph of Life".¹⁹ This dynamic can also be demonstrated differently by recourse to a more recent literary history, which introduces an editorial-historical complication into the reading I have just performed and leads us from Shelley's reading of Dante to our own reading of Shelley.

My "overreading" of "a wonder worthy of the rhyme" largely relies on its connection to the preceding and proceeding lines by nothing beyond a dash. Notably, this is not the case in the actual manuscript, which reads

The sphere whose light is melody to lovers.—
A wonder worthy of his rhyme—the grove

or, to fully reproduce the transcription of the Bodleian manuscript:

The sphere w h o s e light is m e l o d y to l o v e r s.—	
Behold I say a wonder, for the grove	
A won der wort hy of t h a t his rhyme — the grove	
Was—as	above
200 24	25 ²⁰
Became—	3 the grove ²¹

¹⁹ Shelley's appropriation and inversion of Dantean images in "The Triumph of Life" is, for instance, central to Harold Bloom's reading of the poem in *Shelley's Mythmaking*.

²⁰ These numbers are part of the various elements of the manuscript(s) extraneous to the draft of the poem itself, which include numbers, calculations, geometric figures, and—ironically—many sketches of sailboats.

²¹ Donald H. Reiman, ed., *Peter Bell the Third: A Facsimile of the Press-Copy Transcript; And, "The Triumph of Life": a Facsimile of Shelley's Holograph Draft*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley (New York: Garland, 1986), 255.

Yet the full stop on line 479 finds its way into neither the 1824, 1839, or 1847 editions edited by Mary Shelley, nor into the text of the poem that Reiman presented first in 1965 and then in a revised version for the Norton Critical Edition, nor into the text of G.M. Matthews' 1960 edition. Matthews does, however, note that "[t]he cancellation [of 'Behold I sing a wonder, for the grove'] emphasizes that 480 is simply a resumption of 471, and the wonder referred to in both lines is not Dante's but the vision of shadows that is to follow. The pointing of the text (like that of 1847) tries to clarify this meaning, which is quite obscured in other editions."²² Ironically, the line that supposedly signals Shelley's intention is itself obscured by Shelley's own cancellation. Rather than reproducing the period or preserving the cancelled line, Matthews attempts to remain faithful to Shelley's original intentions by entirely re-punctuating the lines:

"The world can hear not the sweet notes that move
The sphere whose light is melody to lovers—
A wonder worthy of his rhyme: the grove (ll.478-80)

The colon, even more than the full stop, completely removes any ambiguity from the line by clearly indicating that "the grove" is the "wonder worthy of his rhyme."

Thus the ambiguity of Shelley's own manuscript—especially its punctuation—reproduces at the level of literary history and of language the same dilemma created by the representations of history in the poem: are these scattered particulars part of some universal, organizing whole—"History" or "The Triumph of Life"—or are they instead a series of accidents we are doomed to misread by attempting to read them, to find within them the answer to the question "What, then, is (the triumph of) life?"

Much of the critical dispute over the proper editing of Shelley's fragment is centered on

²² G.M. Matthews, "'The Triumph of Life': A New Text," *Studia Neophilologica* 32, no. 4 (October 1, 1967), 304.

about whether its punctuation serves as a substantive part of the poem with a true semantic purpose or is merely accidental and thus able to be discarded without loss. In the introduction to his 1965 edition, Reiman acknowledges this problem:

Inasmuch as Shelley's punctuation is often inconsistent with modern British or American usage, establishing Shelley's own preferred punctuation does not in itself solve all interpretive problems. The editor's duty is to provide for explicators a text that conforms as nearly as possible to the author's intention; the explicator must then compare the practice in the text with that of the author in other authoritative texts [...] to determine the significance of the orthography, punctuation, diction, and syntax.²³

Reiman endorses Thomas Hutchinson's theory that Shelley's unorthodox punctuation serves a rhythmical and "rhetorical" purpose rather than a semantic one: "Shelley's punctuation [...] is of great value as an index to his metrical or, at times, it may be, to his rhetorical intention—for, in Shelley's hands, punctuation serves rather to mark the rhythmical pause and onflow of the verse or to secure some declamatory effect, than to indicate the structure or elucidate the sense."²⁴

In his review of Reiman's edition (published five years after Matthews's own), Matthews explicitly rejects Reiman's claims to editorial objectivity and demonstrates the tenuousness of this attempted separation of "rhetoric" and "sense":

Reiman says that an editor is concerned only with marks on paper, about whose meaning it is not his job to speculate. Two fallacies are involved here. The first is that there can be any such thing as a minimum clean-up text. There can only be either *a reproduction of the manuscript* or an *edited text*. [...] The second fallacy owes much to the literary skeptics who hold that the first thing to do on finding a poem is to rule out any idea of a poem-maker. Reiman says that 'The textual editor must follow Shelley's clear intention, leaving the significance of the punctuation to judgment of the explicator' [...] 'Intention' then, must mean simply orthographic, not semantic, intention: *interpretation* of ink-marks is for other specialists (or for oneself after a change of clothes). It sounds easy: all one need do is put commas where Shelley intended commas to be, and leave them out

²³ Donald H. Reiman, *Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study Based on a Text Newly Edited from the Bodleian Manuscript* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 131.

²⁴ Thomas Hutchinson, ed., *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley: Including Materials Never before Printed in Any Edition of the Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1905), iv. Cited by Reiman, *Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study*, 131.

where he didn't.

Matthews proceeds to demonstrate that even Reiman only "sporadically applied" this rule.²⁵

After this stringent critique, Matthews emphasizes that he only means to criticize Reiman's editorial philosophy, not his "editorial *practice*," for

he is absolutely right in doing his best to elucidate the MS in these ways, which are often brilliantly resourceful. He is doing the proper duty of an editor. But he deludes himself (and is already misleading others) if he really supposes that he is not incessantly interpreting and regularizing but simply returning 'in a scholarly way to the MS.' An editor's task is not to copy text, nor to impose rigid patterns, but to notice as many details as possible, to reason from as many angles as are relevant, and to make firm judgments—which must often be inconsistent—on the basis of his total understanding of the material. One could even revise Reiman's declared principle and say that an editor's duty *consists* in interpretation—including interpretation of the total meaning of a poem. A nineteenth-century poet's "intentions" are ultimately not hieroglyphic but semantic: without meaning, not a single ink-mark in 'The Triumph of Life' exists. Reiman really knows this, or his text would not have its many excellencies."²⁶

Despite the differences between Reiman's and Matthews's explanations of their editorial practice, one dynamic remains constant between them. Reiman's recourse to the "authoritative texts" of Shelley's *oeuvre* and Matthews's to authorial intent to divine the "total meaning of a poem" reproduce at the level of editorial practice what de Man diagnosed at the level of critical interpretation: "What is the meaning of "The Triumph of Life", of Shelley, and of romanticism? What shape does it have, how did its course begin and why? [...] Such questions allow one to conclude that "The Triumph of Life" is a fragment of something whole."²⁷ And just as the "accident" of Shelley's death—and the accidentally fragmentary nature of the manuscript—trouble critical interpretation, so also does the specter of the merely accidental trouble the editing of the manuscript.

²⁵ Matthews, "'The Triumph of Life': A New Text," 599.

²⁶ Matthews, "'The Triumph of Life': A New Text," 600-601.

²⁷ de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 94.

Any return to the manuscript immediately brings us up against its own materiality. First the reader cannot but be struck by how many extraneous “ink-marks” truly do exist, with spare ink drippings covering large swaths of many manuscript pages. The heavily cancelled lines are themselves located amongst a variety of other markings: tallied figures, brief notes about appointments, and—with macabre irony—a wealth of sketchings of sailboats. Moreover, portions of the manuscript remain simply illegible or contain markings that could have conflicting meanings. For instance, “sometimes a line seems to underscore, rather than cancel, some words.”²⁸ In the midst of this thicket of “marks,” the line that Matthews attempts to draw between the “hieroglyphic” and the “semantic” is as tenuous as that which Reiman draws between “rhetoric” and sense.” Rajan notes that, with the publication of the full facsimile and transcription of the Bodleian manuscript, that manuscript’s “material force” is now inescapable, for “readings” of the poem based on “reading texts that are themselves hermeneutic constructions” must “confront those places where the poem refuses to become identical with itself.”²⁹ Rajan demonstrates this through a consideration of several cases where editors have had to choose between two options in the text, neither of which was canceled. But there is another layer of the manuscript—a more superficial one—that more fully demonstrates its “material force.” To be confronted with the manuscript is not merely to recognize that one’s reading of the poem depends on “hermeneutic constructions,” but also to confront the possibility that this interpretation revolves around a “mark” that ultimately marks nothing, that rather than deciphering “ink-marks” one has, by searching for the meaning of ink blots, been the unwitting subject of a literary Rorschach test.

²⁸ Reiman, *Facsimile*, 122.

²⁹ Rajan, *Supplement of Reading*, 331; 344.

In his notes on his transcription of the manuscript, Reiman points toward one element that helped him sift the meaningful and the intentional from the accidental and the discardable when he produced his reading edition for Norton. In the situation already mentioned above, where a line may underscore or it may cancel, “the best evidence that PBS canceled the line is that the *terza rima* rhyme scheme continues with a different rhyme, or that PBS later repeated the gist—perhaps many of the words—of the ambiguously canceled line.”³⁰ These organizing properties of the *terza rima* return us, at last, to the line that launched our discussion of *Triumph*’s manuscript history. Revisiting this line, we can now trace another way in which the punctuation of the poem exhibits a resistant materiality.

“A wonder worthy of the rhyme,” when read literally, gestures towards *Triumph*’s use of *terza rima*: the scene is worthy of being placed within Dante’s signature rhyme scheme. Alan Weinberg observes that Rousseau’s invocation of Dante “seem[s] to echo the several terse reminders to Dante by Virgil of the groundplan of his journey and Beatrice’s guidance, so that the map of the whole is always in his and the reader’s mind and neither can lose their way.” Indeed, the *terza rima* functions as a sort of map of the whole of the *Commedia*, with its intricate structure recalling the pre-modern cosmology of “the music of the spheres.” The line “the sweet notes that move/ The sphere whose light is melody to lovers—” obliquely invokes this cosmology; but, in *Triumph*, the form is used to describe something very different and, indeed, decidedly modern: history as a (literal) line, with the train of phantoms only driving home the tendency of this linear conception of time to threaten a Hegelian “bad infinity” of deathly repetition. Weinberg notes that “Shelley reinforces his own independence, allowing the sense to

³⁰ Reiman, *Facsimile*, 122.

cross over the *terzine*, in order to release Dante's composed and certain progress into the flow and texture of Shelley's own troubled vision—at this point in the narrative disturbingly redolent of Dante's Hell—within which the similitude (itself Dantean) is framed.”³¹

This tension between the rhyme and the theme of Shelley's poem may account for why ellipses and dashes so often break up its lines. The *Defence* claimed that Dante's chief fault was a “distorted notion of invisible things.” In *Triumph*, by contrast, no vision of “invisible things” seems to exist at all: no link between the particular and the universal and no eternity that can become visible once time “destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts.” Ellipses dominate the poet-narrator's description of his dream vision, appearing thirteen times in the first 199 lines, and reproduce this thematic disjunction at a syntactic level. Their preponderance in the poem's opening is further marked by their near complete absence within the 300 lines of Rousseau's narrative. While they occasionally serve a clear semantic purpose (as in the lines “the fiery band which held/ Their natures, snaps . . . the shock still may tingle—” [ll. 157-58]) more often than not they underscore the piecemeal nature of the speaker's own apprehension of the scene:

All the four faces of that charioteer
Had their eyes banded . . . little profit brings

Speed in the van and blindness in the rear,
Nor then avail the beams that quench the Sun
Or that these banded eyes could pierce the sphere

Of all that is, has been, or will be done.—
So ill was the car guided, but it past
With solemn speed majestically on . . .

The crowd gave way, and I arose aghast (ll. 99-107)

³¹ Alan Weinberg, “Shelley and the Italian Tradition.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, edited by Michael O'Neill, Anthony Howe, and Madeleine Callaghan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 458.

The speaker's fumbling attempt to apprehend the entirety of the scene repeats the ill-guided trajectory of the car. The dash in line 105 is not used, as in most other moments in the poem, to set off a parenthetical but instead to augment the full stop and more fully divides the first and second lines of the stanza from one another.

More interestingly, the ellipses disrupt the *terza rima*'s visual structure, further highlighting the breakdown of the form at line 106: "With solemn speed majestically on . . ." At best, "on" forms a slant rhyme with "done" and "Sun." Similarly, the dash and the ellipses in these tercets serve as a material remainder that resists incorporation into the poem's scheme. These pure marks, whose signifying purpose is unclear or even absent, recalls de Man's concept of the "prosaic materiality of the letter."³² The poem, in drawing our attention not simply to its language but also to its disruptive non-semantic elements, challenges both the appeals to transcendence that were central to the organization of the *Commedia* and the ultimate legibility of any organizing narrative.

As a material remainder, the ellipses demonstrate the (de)formation of the poem's meaning by its syntactic elements. In his reading of the "shape all light," de Man understands the shape's "tread" as the figuration of this type of phenomenon. The tread "is no longer melodious, but reduces music to the mere measure of repeated articulations":

The thematization of language occurs at this point, when 'measure' separates from the phenomenal aspects of signification as a specular *representation*, and stresses instead the literal and material aspects of language. In the dramatic action of the narrative, measure disrupts the symmetry of cognition as representation (the figure of the rainbow, of the eye and of the sun). But since the measure is any principal of linguistic organization, not only as rhyme and meter but as any syntactical or grammatical scansion, one can read 'feet' not just as the poetic meter that is so conspicuously evident in the *terza rima* of the poem,

³² Paul de Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant," in *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*, ed. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 144. The phrase arises specifically in relation to Kant's third critique, in which this "prosaic materiality of the letter" demonstrates a "materiality" that "no degree of obfuscation or ideology can [...] transform into the phenomenal cognition of aesthetic judgment."

but as any principal of signification. Yet it is precisely these ‘feet’ which extinguish and bury the poetic and philosophical light.” (113)

Similarly, as wayward syntactic elements, these ellipses highlight their temporal nature in addition to their material one. They mark a pause, signaling a distance of time as well as of space.

In this role, they prove most disruptive when used to separate the narrator’s speech from Rousseau’s:

[...] I cried,
“First who art thou?” . . . “Before thy memory

“I feared, loved, hated, suffered, did, and died, (ll. 198-200)

If, as de Man suggests, “the link between the present I and its antecedents is itself dramatized in the poem, most explicitly and at greatest length in the encounter between the narrator and the figure designated by the proper name Rousseau,” then the intrusion of the ellipses draws our attention to the poem’s allegorical structure, in the de Manian understanding of the term.³³ The present “I” is connected to its past manifestations not by any substantive connection but rather by temporal accident, which means that any answer to the question of “who art thou?” must not be one of discovery but rather one of reading, of allegorizing, of figuration.

But the ellipses in the poem point two ways, looking both forwards and backwards. The ellipsis straddles illegibility and legibility, mark and meaning, in its paradoxical role as a maker of absence or erasure. It refuses to be a “pure” mark even as it can do nothing other *than* mark. We might then also situate its position in *Triumph* between the poem’s past and our present; more specifically between the marked absence of pre-modern metaphysics that sustained

³³ de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 95.

Dantean allegory and the sheerly accidental mark that defines both de Man's conception of materiality and his entirely temporalized understanding of allegory.

The Absence of the Sacred (Few)

This paradoxical role of the ellipsis draws our attention to other marked absences in the poem, especially that of the "sacred few." The thematization of absence in the poem suggests that we might find, in the "marked" absence of the metaphysical coherence of premodernity, the ongoing influence of that metaphysics. While behind the chariot of life follow

[...]—all who have their age subdued,
By action or by suffering, and whose hour
Was drained to its last sand in weal or woe,
So that the trunk survived both fruit and flower;

All those whose fame or infamy must grow
Till the great winter lay the form and name
Of their green earth with them forever low—(ll. 121-27)

the narrator also remarks the absence of the

[...] sacred few who could not tame
Their spirits to the Conqueror, but as soon
As they had touched the world with living flame

Fled back like eagles to their native noon,
Or those who put aside the diadem
Of earthly thrones or gems, till the last one

Were there; for they of Athens and Jerusalem
Were neither mid the mighty captive seen
Nor mid the ribald crowd that followed them

Or fled before. . . . Swift fierce and obscene
The wild dance maddens in the van (ll. 128-38)

Recognizable only by their absence, the "sacred few" are mentioned nowhere else in the poem,

and it seems strange that the speaker, otherwise entirely confused by the scene and its meaning, should be so clearly struck by these figures' absence and so boldly proclaim the reason for it.

While, in the last version of the poem, Socrates and Jesus constitute at least a portion of the "sacred few," others—including Plato—are present in earlier versions. Both the number of this "sacred few" and the reason for their reprieve have been the subject of substantial critical disagreement. Several scholars have located a didactic aspect in their identity. Remarking on Shelley's Platonism, James A. Notopoulos argues that "[t]he sacred few, who include Plato, are characterized by Platonic qualities; their souls are at home only in the pure realms from which they came."³⁴ Notopoulos accounts for the later inclusion of Plato in the train of captives by reference to his homosexual affairs, though because it "was only physical love which conquered Plato's heart [...]" Shelley is careful to specify that only what is mortal is in the company of those enslaved."³⁵ Clifford J. Marks, meanwhile, locates in the sacred few an indictment of Rousseau and the narrator's "self-absorbed, self-destructive state," since the sacred few imply "[t]hat forces operate [...] that do not necessarily obliterate the individual's mind but transcend and connect [it] through human relationship."³⁶ Rajan, in contrast, has argued that the shifting identities of the sacred few, the ambivalence of their description, as well as the contrasting accounts of the general procession by the narrator and by Rousseau, complicate attempts to read a moral in the presence of this absence.³⁷ Hugh Roberts, in *Shelley and the Chaos of History*,

³⁴ James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley; a Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1949), 313.

³⁵ Notopoulos, *Platonism of Shelley*, 315.

³⁶ Clifford J. Marks, "Fragments and Fragility: Permeable Foundations in 'The Triumph of Life,'" *European Romantic Review* 10, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 533.

³⁷ Rajan argues that while the narrator's account of the "binary division between the multitude who are captivated by life and those who see through it is more explicitly unsettled in Rousseau's account of the procession [...] even here [in the narrator's account] it is undermined by the description of the sacred few as 'fleeing,' Thel-like, from the generative world, and by the fact that the noon of transphenomenal vision that they embrace only seems to be

similarly wonders whether the procession is actually as dark as it appears.³⁸ Reiman also challenges the “pessimism” of many readings of *Triumph*, but through an expansion of the number of the sacred few rather than a dismissal of them: “Most critics of ‘The Triumph’ have been unduly pessimistic [...] about the number of those who escape the bondage of Life [...] Some critics have been trying to prove that ‘The Triumph’ is a grimly pessimistic poem because such a view is necessary to their own biographical or philosophical theses about Shelley.” The “few,” Reiman remarks, are merely “few compared to the multitude of captives.”³⁹

If the diversity of these critical opinions demonstrates nothing else, it reveals that the exact reasons for the absence of the sacred few, as well as the question of their number, remain inscrutable within the text.⁴⁰ What seems to matter most, then, is not the identity of the absent but rather the existence of the absence itself. If *Triumph* is Shelley’s *Inferno*, then the existence

outside the temporal cycle. On the other hand, the dancers in the procession are described with an energy and vitality that belies their portrayal as part of a sad pageantry.” Later in the same chapter, she also explores ambiguities in the original manuscript that make it difficult to tell whether the sacred few refer solely to Socrates and Jesus or may constitute a larger category. Rajan, *Supplement of Reading*, 330.

³⁸ Roberts suggests that the often negative portrayal of the pageant in the poem is the result of the narrators’ inability to see its true nature: “The beauty within the ‘living storm’ does not register at the scale of Rousseau’s and the narrator’s hunt for eternal verities. The image of the ‘dance of life’ is a clue that the perspective of the ‘spectator’s—Rousseau’s and the narrator—is to be distinguished from that of the poet. The ‘maniac dance’ (110) is modeled on the maenadic fury of the followers of Dionysius. The maenad is for Shelley a positive image of the poetically inspired. The self-portrait of Shelley carrying the thyrsus in *Adonais* (291) indicates his perspective as that of an actor in, and not a spectator of, the maenad’s maniac dance.” Hugh Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 404.

³⁹ Donald H. Reiman, “Shelley’s ‘The Triumph of Life’: The Biographical Problem,” *PMLA* 78, no. 5 (December 1963), 34.

⁴⁰ As to the question of whether the pageant of life can itself be seen positively, as both Reiman and Roberts suggest, it would seem that such readings are possible, but only if one reads rather directly and violently against the main depictions of the procession itself which, insofar as it permits pleasure, is always accompanied by torment: the captive are “tortured by the agonizing pleasure [...] Of that fierce spirit” (ll. 143-44) and they are “[l]ike moths attracted and repelled,/ Oft to new bright destruction come and go” (ll. 153-4). Those who seem to experience some pleasure and freedom in the vicinity of the chariot “all like bubbles on an eddying flood/ Fell into the same track at last and were/ Borne onward” (ll. 458-60). If anything, the ecstasies of the procession only increase its horror. We are not, of course, offered a purely objective view of the procession but must instead see through the eyes of Rousseau and the narrator and so may dismiss the darkness of the depiction as a result of their own misreading of the scene. Yet to me, the mere existence of this possibility does not by itself invite a more optimistic account of the world of the poem.

of the sacred few is the closest we come to glimpsing the possibility of a *Paradiso* or even a *Purgatorio*. The ellipsis that follows the description of the sacred few further encourages us to read the ellipses within the poem as markers of a charged absence, a moment in which *Triumph* may point beyond the pure immanence of the world of the poem—beyond itself—and toward the type of transcendence that would allow for Dante’s vertical allegory. Of course, this possibility is present only by its (marked) absence and the poem gives us little encouragement to conclude that the absence here promises a presence elsewhere. De Man’s explanation of the “sacred few,” while not the only plausible reading of the passage, remains a distinct possibility and outdoes any “pessimism” Reiman located in earlier scholarship on the passage: the “sacred few” are absent because they “had no earthly destiny whatsoever, either because, by choice or destiny, they died too early or because, like Christ or Socrates, they are mere fictions in the writings of others.”⁴¹ Similarly—as de Man also reminds us—even in Rousseau’s narrative of loss “we have no assurance whatever that the forgotten ever existed.”⁴² Yet it is clear that the “sacred few” have “touched” the poem by their absence.

In the sacred few’s marking of their absence, which is itself the marking of the absence of the “native noon,” of a world beyond that of the poem, we find another trace of the Italian master, this time through the half-erased medieval metaphysics that informed the *Commedia*. If the *Commedia* was shaped—literally or figuratively—by a divine and transcendent presence, then *Triumph* is equally formed—or deformed—by the absence of this presence, literally (mis)shaped by the ellipses that disrupt its scheme.

The nature of these absences remains ambiguous. We might locate in them—particularly

⁴¹ de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 97.

⁴² de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 104.

in the absence of the “sacred few”—the possibility of a transcendent realm, albeit one entirely removed from the poem’s purely immanent world. This reading is bolstered by placing *Triumph* alongside one of Shelley’s earlier texts. *Hellas*, a play composed the year before *Triumph* and in the same year as *The Defence of Poetry*, includes a note on Shelley’s use of distinctly Christian imagery in some of the chorus’s lines. In it, Shelley asserts that he only means to indicate that “[t]he popular notions of Christianity are represented in this chorus as true in their relation to the worship they superseded.” He then insists that he does not mean to “dogmatize” on the subject of theodicy or of immortality. Nevertheless, he invokes the possibility of immortality:

as it is the province of the poet to attach himself to those ideas which exalt and ennoble humanity let him be permitted to have conjectured the condition of that futurity towards which we are all impelled by an inextinguishable thirst for immortality. Until better arguments can be made than sophisms which disgrace the cause, this desire itself must remain the strongest and the only presumption that eternity is the inheritance of every thinking being.⁴³

Of course this “desire itself” is a desire for a state whose absence guarantees neither its past nor its future presence. In his essay “On Life,” Shelley summarizes this situation succinctly by noting that man is “incapable of imagining to himself annihilation [...] Whatever may be his true and final destination, there is a spirit within him at enmity with change and extinction [...] This is the character of all life and being.”⁴⁴

Yet the full implications of this claim do not come to the fore in the earlier work, which never explicitly faces them. For instance, in the introduction to *Hellas*, Shelley claims that his “lyric pictures” have “wrought upon the curtain of futurity which falls upon the unfinished scene

⁴³ Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 462.

⁴⁴ Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 506-7. “On Life” proposes nearly the same set of questions as those that appear in *Triumph*: “What is life? [...] For what are we? Whence do we come, and whither do we go? Is birth the commencement, is death the conclusion of our being? What is birth and death?” (506)

such figures of indistinct and visionary delineation as suggest the final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of civilization and social improvement.”⁴⁵ In this sense he seems to carry out the role of the poet assigned in the *Defence*, in which he can recognize that “the future is contained within the present.”⁴⁶ But in *Triumph* it would appear that the future is contained within the present only because the future is a dead repetition of that present; moreover, the only thing truly “forgotten” about the past may be that it was as meaningless as the present world of the poem. In this world, any true futurity would not be marked by its continuity with the past but, instead, by its rupture; the closest thing the poem offers us to such a rupture—to a tear in the fabric of this world—is the absence of the “sacred few” and their presumed existence beyond the confines of the triumph of Life. Paradoxically, these traces make possible, through the (possible) memory of them and of their past, the thinking of this discontinuous future. Their absence functions not as an event in itself but instead as what Derrida defines as the “very place of spectrality,” which is a “messianic opening to what is coming [...] to the event that cannot be awaited *as such*, or recognized in advance [...] to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope,” a “condition of possibility” for the event that is, at the same time, “its condition of impossibility.”⁴⁷ The “desire itself” in the notes to *Hellas*—something like Derrida’s “memory of the hope”—is marked in *Triumph* by leaving “an empty place.”

Thus, at one level in *Triumph*, we find the absence of a pre-modern metaphysics; the

⁴⁵ Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 430.

⁴⁶ Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 511.

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006), 82.

given relationship between the transcendent and the immanent, the human and the divine that drives Dante's vision is far from being given here. Indeed if any transcendence can be located, it would be through its *lack* of relationship with the purely immanent world of the poem. At the same time, insofar as this encounter with the absence of a pre-modern metaphysics is itself still an encounter, albeit a negative one, with that metaphysics, it exerts a haunting influence on the poem, refusing to seal off hermetically its modern historical vision—with its particular, immanent events related to one another only by a temporal difference, defined by their linearity—from the pre-modern historical vision it seeks to overwrite, where the relationship of events is shaped by their relationship to a transcendent order. But as both of these historical visions—which could also be articulated as the allegorical visions of de Man and of Dante—overlap (or overwrite each other) within *Triumph*, it fails to bridge the gap between them because it fails to establish a clear gap in the first place. As neither can triumph, both become illegible.

“You are my master, and indeed my author”: Dante and Shelley, Shelly and Rousseau

This fundamental illegibility of the poem's world is illustrated by the specular structure of the narrator's and Rousseau's (self-)readings. Rather than understanding himself and “life” through Rousseau's guidance, the narrator discovers that Rousseau merely reflects his own ignorance. When asked the questions that animate the poem—“Whence camest thou and whither goest thou?/ How did thy course begin [...] and why?”—Rousseau admits that he can only give partial answer to the first part of these questions and none to the second. Rousseau exhorts the narrator:

But follow thou, and from spectator turn
Actor or victim in this wretchedness

“And what thou wouldst be taught I then may learn
From thee. (ll. 305-7)

In other words, Rousseau responds to the narrator's attempt to read him as a text by insisting that the narrator instead become a text for him. While some critics have read these lines as indicating an alternate, more optimistic possibility of responding to the scene,⁴⁸ we must still note that even though Rousseau *does* in fact turn from spectator to actor and/or victim:

[...]—I among the multitude
Was swept [...]
[...]
[...] among

“The thickest billows of the living storm
I plunged, and bared my bosom to the clime (ll. 460-67)

he seems to possess no more self-knowledge than when his brain “first became as sand.” Thus, not only does the self-reading that the narrator asks Rousseau to perform prove impossible but the ability to gain positive knowledge by reading another seems equally elusive.

This dynamic similarly manifests itself in the narrator's inability, from the first moment of their encounter, to read Rousseau. At first, the narrator does not even recognize Rousseau as a living—or once living—being. Only when Rousseau answers the narrator's supposedly rhetorical question—“is all here amiss?”—with the cryptic reply “Life” can the narrator

⁴⁸ For instance, Rajan concludes that “Rousseau's error, if we can speak of one, is to create a unitary form (a shape *all* light) [...] Thus the creative oblivion Rousseau suffers in these lines is not something done by the shape to him, but rather something that he does to himself as yields to the impossible desire to create a unity out of multitude. For the shape, as light, is not a fixed form but a moving army of particles. She is, moreover, a dancer [...] beyond the grasp of those who reject the differential flux of life for the native noon of single rather than manifold vision. Those who will survive the dance of language dance with her, as Rousseau comes to do and enjoins Shelley to do. Those who abstract a single form from the dance, as Rousseau once did, find the spark of their creativity killed” (337). Roberts, arguing that the poem is “a criticism, not of life, but of a certain way of looking at life” (399), understands Rousseau's injunction “to turn actor or victim” as “a road not taken” in the poem: “what if we follow Rousseau's advice [...] and from spectators turn actors in this dance? What if we adapt our knowledge to the finite and irreversible reality of human lives? [...] From such a scale—the scale of Pan's inclusive, multivocal ‘we,’ not Apollo's uni-perspectival ‘I’—it is the knowledge that death is the inevitable outcome of their erotic minglings that makes real the intense fragile beauty of these ‘new bright destructions.’ [...] Rousseau and the narrator are looking at life through the wrong end of the telescope, and are therefore unable to see the beauty that rises out of its constant disfigurements. Rousseau's constant efforts to find a still point of unchangeable identity from which to stand and view the world blind him to its possibilities”(402-4).

recognizes Rousseau's own presence: "the grass which methought hung so wide/ And white, was but his thin discoloured hair,/ And [...] the holes it vainly sought to hide/ Were or had been eyes" (ll. 185-88). The identity of the disfigured figure still remains inscrutable to the narrator, who must inquire after the figure's identity to discover that it is "what was once Rousseau" (l. 204).

Contrasting this scene with the corresponding one in the *Inferno* when Dante first encounters Virgil further illustrates the consequences of this failure of reading. While the nature of Virgil's existence is as ambiguous as Rousseau's, the narrator is able to immediately identify this ambiguity: "Have pity on me,/ Whatever you are, shadow or definite man" (l. 65-66). Much like Rousseau, Virgil acknowledges that he is "[n]ot a man, though I was one" (l. 67). Yet after a brief recitation of his life and accomplishments, Dante guesses his future guide's name: "Are you indeed that Virgil, are you the spring/ Which spreads abroad that wide water of speech?" (l. 79-80). Dante then explicitly frames his relationship with Virgil as one of specular reading:

'You are the honor and light of other poets;

My long study and great life give me strength
Now, as they made me pore over your book.

You are my master, and indeed my author;
It is from you alone that I have taken
The exact style for which I have been honoured (l. 82-87)

Fittingly, Virgil—as "author" of Dante—grants him the ability to read his own situation, both personal and historical, by leading him out of the "great forest" in which he had "lost the way" (l. 3-4).

In one of the most striking dissimilarities between Dante and Shelley's texts, Rousseau—Shelley's supposed guide—proposes the specular structure of knowledge in the poem, revealing his own ignorance. Virgil's role as author of Dante as "text" firmly roots Dante himself within

the classical literary tradition as he is “led” by Virgil. Moreover, Dante believed along with many of his contemporaries that portions of the *Aeneid* unknowingly predicted the coming of Christ and the rise of the Holy Roman Empire; thus Virgil’s knowledge and accomplishments extend beyond his particular time period as he “possessed knowledge transcending human reason about God’s choice of Italy and Rome as the center of human history and world dominion.”⁴⁹ In contrast, Rousseau—blind and almost literally rooted to the ground—can hardly lead anyone and seeks knowledge from the narrator rather than dispensing it to him. As de Man notes, “[t]he structure of the text is not one of question and answer, but of a question whose meaning, as question, is effaced from the moment it is asked. The answer to the question is another question.”⁵⁰ Thus the specular structure of the *Inferno*, which allows Dante to know himself through Virgil, is doubly mirrored in *Triumph* as both Rousseau and the narrator seek to know themselves through the other in a structure that only underscores their failure of self-understanding within the poem. This scene is then refracted through the poem by its repetition in Rousseau’s self-effacing encounter with the shape all light.

Rousseau’s inability to guide the narrator may be due, in part, to his near contemporaneity with Shelley; in this sense, he represents less a “tradition” than its absence. As *Triumph* in many ways takes its “exact style” from the *Inferno*, it may be more fitting to think of Dante as Shelley’s Virgil, as his “author” and as the guarantor of the poem’s place within a larger literary tradition. *The Triumph of Life* attempts to allow Dante, “the bridge thrown over the stream of time, which unites the modern and ancient world,” to render its world legible. The division between past and present worlds does not necessarily have to be disruptive. There is,

⁴⁹ Charles T. Davis “Dante’s Vision of History,” *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society* 118 (2000), 246.

⁵⁰ de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 98.

after all, a discontinuity between Virgil and Dante, since Virgil, a pagan and thus a “rebel against his [God’s] law” (I.125), is unable to guide Dante through Paradise. Literally in Limbo, the Classical poet cannot be fully incorporated into the *Commedia*’s structure. Nonetheless, the poem’s world allows Virgil to be kept on the periphery without unsettling its overall structure. Dante in *Triumph*, like Virgil in the *Commedia*, cannot be fully incorporated within the poem; but, in the case of *Triumph*, the disconnection becomes a central, organizing element that itself (de)forms the poem.

Andrew Bennett has noted that Shelley’s poetics—including *The Defence of Poetry*—“delineates a future determined by the radical absence of the poet: poetry is future-oriented and prospective because of its necessary engagement with a reception which can only occur in a time beyond the poet’s own death.”⁵¹ *Triumph* makes this “radical absence of the poet” especially palpable both through its incompletion—its absences mark, quite literally, the absence of the poet—and through the poem’s complex incorporation of Dante through consistent reminders of his absence. De Man notes that Shelley’s death is “an event which shapes the text but which is not present in its represented and articulated meaning.”⁵² While the other absences we have considered—of Shelley’s punctuation, of the sacred few, of Dante and the pre-modern spatiality and temporality that shaped his own work—are situated less radically beyond the “represented and articulated meaning” of the text than Shelley’s death, they nonetheless resist full representation and articulation within it in ways that thwart our attempts either to unite the particulars of the poem and its world into a coherent vision or to pronounce them purely accidental. For this reason, “The Triumph of Life” resists our attempts to place it in a static

⁵¹ Bennett, *Culture of Posterity*, 160.

⁵² de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 120.

position within literary history, challenging longstanding critical narratives of Romanticism as part and product of a larger social movement towards the modernization and secularization of earlier understandings of history and the self as well as more recent attempts to frame Romanticism purely as a reaction against modernity.⁵³

⁵³ Numerous older studies exemplify the first narrative, including most notably M.H. Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism* and Clifford Siskin's *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse*. The latter approach is seen in more recent scholarship including Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre's *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*.

Chapter 4

Marking Time in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*

In this final chapter, I turn from the Romantics to a Victorian poet: Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins may seem like an odd figure to include alongside Wordsworth and Shelley. His distinctive prosody separates him from Wordsworth's and Shelley's use of traditional meters while his intense, traditional religiosity stands in stark contrast to Shelley's atheism and Wordsworth's diffuse spirituality. Yet, despite these obvious differences, Hopkins's poetry and poetics exhibits some notable similarities to those of Wordsworth and Shelley.

At first glance, Hopkins's "Author's Preface" (unpublished during his lifetime) seems far less concerned with literary history or with the role of the poet in the modern world than Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. It is, on its surface, a largely technical treatise on prosody. As a result, while Wordsworth's poetics has been subject to a variety of rhetorical and close readings, critics tend to regard Hopkins's Preface more pragmatically. Depending on the critic, the Preface is seen either as an essential basis for understanding his prosody or as a frustrating example of Hopkins acting as his "own greatest obfuscator" and further evidence that his musings should be set aside so that more level-headed critical approaches to his work can prevail.¹ Yet, when read closely and rhetorically, the Preface reveals the degree to which Hopkins is concerned with situating himself and his poetry within a larger poetic tradition that he sees himself as simultaneously connected to and breaking away from. In its presentation of sprung rhythm as both ancient and new, as the "most natural of things" and as a meter that

¹ Justus George Lawler, *Hopkins Re-Constructed: Life, Poetry, and the Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 20.

requires a Preface (and numerous diacritical marks) in order to indicate how it should be properly read, the Preface shares Wordsworth's association of his poetic style with an ancient and "natural" poetic past while also marking it as something revolutionary and "experimental."

We can also find some unexpected similarities between Hopkins's presentation of history in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and Shelley's presentation of history in "The Triumph of Life". Indeed, the history Hopkins narrates is more particular and in many ways more modern than that of Shelley's triumphal march of historical figures. Not only is the central event of the poem—the loss of the SS *Deutschland* off the British coast—contemporary to Hopkins, but he gleans his information about the event from newspapers, the very medium that Benedict Anderson has described as one of the most "vivid figure[s] for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community."² Yet within this secular "imagined community," Hopkins attempts to locate the nuns who died in the wreck within the sacred "communion of saints" by re-reading the details of the wreck within the framework of a divine history. "The Triumph of Life" remains touched by a pre-modern, sacred conception of history that it can neither fully represent nor expunge. *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, while steeped within the sacred vision of history provided by Hopkins's religious tradition, cannot simply reproduce a pre-modern representation of history but must grapple with modern, linear, and secular conceptions of it. But while, in "The Triumph of Life", the overlapping of secular and sacred versions of history produces a spectacle that proves largely inscrutable both to the reader and to the characters within the poem, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* uses the temporality of the Eucharist—which claims to encompass past and future even as it is made available in the present—to frame the overlapping of sacred and secular

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 36.

versions of history as religious mystery.

Through close readings of the “Author’s Preface” and *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, this chapter will argue that these texts draw together three types of time—poetic, sacred, and (literary) historical—by locating Hopkins, as author and *persona*, in a liminal position within each of them. The first section will demonstrate how the presentation of sprung rhythm in the “Author’s Preface” exhibits a tense negotiation between presenting Hopkins’s work in distinction to poetic tradition and locating it within the heart of that tradition. The next two sections provide a reading of the *Wreck*, arguing that the first part of the *Wreck* locates Hopkins within a sacred, pre-modern temporality, while the second part of the poem locates him in a much more modern, secular one. I will then investigate how the latter portion of the poem opens up a space within the poem’s key stanza for a crossing between these pre-modern and modern temporalities. Finally, I will briefly consider the relationship between the presentation of poetic time within the Preface and the presentation of sacred time in the *Wreck*.

Sprung Rhythm and Poetic Time

The “Author’s Preface,” in its dual presentation of running rhythm (the “common English rhythm”) and sprung rhythm, presents not merely an explanation of prosody but a literary history presented through prosody. As I am principally concerned with this literary historical aspect of the Preface and with the tensions that arise in Hopkins’s presentation of it through his explanation of sprung rhythm, I will focus here principally on these rhetorical elements rather than on providing an explanation or analysis of the technical aspects of sprung rhythm itself.

The first portion of the Preface presents a relatively straightforward history of English prosody. The opening line recognizes running rhythm as the “common rhythm in English use”

and the Preface then proceeds to provide both a brief primer on scansion (albeit in rather idiosyncratic terms) and to note the history of how poets since Chaucer have introduced certain “irregularities” (reversed feet and reversed or counterpoint rhythm) into running rhythm.³ The reversal of the first foot of lines is “so natural that our poets have generally done it, from Chaucer down, without remark.” Far from representing a “formal” change in prosody, this development is part of an organic evolution of poetic language: it is “that irregularity which all natural growth and motion shews.” However, an excess of this “irregularity” (the repetition of reversal at least twice in a row), will produce a “new rhythm upon the old.” This more novel rhythm will be supplemented, in the mind of the reader or listener, by the more natural “running rhythm,” which produces an effect “answerable to counterpoint in music, which Hopkins will identify as counterpoint rhythm. Milton is identified as the “great master” of this form.⁴

In the next paragraph, Hopkins turns to a discussion of sprung rhythm. After he has provided details on its proper scansion he once again provides a sort of literary history, though this one functions as a sort of “counter-history” to the one he provided in his account of running rhythm. In some ways, it mirrors the “decline and fall” narrative of poetic language found in Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and accompanying “Appendix on Poetic Diction”; however, while Wordsworth identifies meter only as a supplemental feature of poetry that was “early superadded” and ultimately proved “the great temptation to all the corruptions which have followed,” Hopkins identifies rhythm as central not only to poetry but to speech as such:

Sprung Rhythm is the most natural of things. For (1) it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them. (2) It is the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music, so that in the words of choruses and refrains and in

³ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Major Works, including all the poems and selected prose*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 106.

⁴ Hopkins, *Major Works*, 107.

songs written closely to music it arises. (3) It is found in nursery rhymes, weather saws, and so on; because, however these may have been made in running rhythm, the terminations having dropped off by the change in language, the stresses come together and the rhythm is sprung. (4) It arises in common verse when reversed or counterpointed, for the same reason.

But nevertheless in spite of all this and though Greek and Latin *lyric* verse, which is well known, and the old English verse seen in *Pierce Ploughman* are in sprung rhythm, it has in fact ceased to be used since the Elizabethan age, Greene being the last writer who can have been said to have recognized it.⁵

Thus, for Hopkins, rhythm is in the nature of language itself, appearing naturally within speech, and early metrics is a natural outgrowth of it. It is that the early poets—as in Wordsworth’s account—speak with this language that is “the most natural of things,” though it is eventually lost to poetry. Nonetheless, it re-emerges within folk traditions, in “nursery rhymes” and “weather saws” much as, for Wordsworth, the “real language of men” re-emerges in ballads. Strangely, though, for Hopkins the reappearance of sprung rhythm within these folk forms arises from the “corruption” of more standard poetic meter, which has “dropped off” over time.

Sprung rhythm is thus in the deep past, at the origin of poetic language, and is now no longer “recognized.” Yet, it is also always present in speech, prose, and music, though here its presence is, presumably, not explicitly recognized. Finally, it subsists within folk forms which, while existing temporally alongside running rhythm, is located in “primitive” times and spaces: childhood, peasant homes and pubs. In this sense, then, sprung rhythm serves as its own “counterpoint” to present English metrics, the (often unrecognized) subsistence of the past within the present.

Hopkins’s account of the “deep past” of poetry does have some historical accuracy. Walter Ong has argued that with the appearance of Spenser, English meter gave way to

⁵ Hopkins, *Major Works*, 107-8.

“smoothness” and earlier “declamatory” meters fell into disrepute.⁶ However, Ong counters Hopkins’s suggestion that running rhythm dominated nearly all of English verse in the past couple of centuries, locating “declamatory” meter in Burns, Blake, and Southey. Moreover, Ong suggests that Hopkins’s “reviving” of this meter—while more marked in Hopkins’s poetry than in that of his contemporaries—was part of a larger trend in Victorian poetry toward “sense-stress.”⁷

However, Hopkins’s positioning of his own role in relation to sprung rhythm is more complex. While in the Preface, Hopkins describes himself merely as someone who recovers the form out of an impulse towards conservation and a desire to preserve and propagate traditional forms, elsewhere he positions himself as its inventor (that most progressive of vocations) and implicitly orients sprung rhythm towards the future. He famously writes to Richard Dixon that, when he composed the *Wreck of the Deutschland*, “I had long had haunting my ear the echo of a *new* rhythm which I now realized on paper.”⁸ These accounts are not necessarily contradictory, for the focus on “recognition” and “perception” in Hopkins’s account of sprung rhythm suggests that the “echo” of which he speaks is quite literal: he did, in fact, *hear* the rhythm in daily life. By departing from standard metrics, Hopkins’s work (at least that written in sprung rhythm) lies outside of the main tradition of English poetry that he traces from Chaucer to Milton and on to his present time. However, by seizing onto a “natural” and ancient form, he locates himself at the origin not only of the poetic tradition itself but also at the heart of human speech.

⁶ Walter J. Ong, “Sprung Rhythm and English Tradition,” in *Hopkins: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice Hall, 1966), 152; 155.

⁷ Ong, “Sprung Rhythm and English Tradition,” 158-159.

⁸ Gerard Manley Hopkins to Richard Dixon, London, 5 October 1878, in *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, ed. Claude Collier Abbott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 14. Emphasis mine.

This relationship to human speech makes sprung rhythm natural even as it departs from the regularity of standard metrics. The complex relationship between Hopkins's concepts of regularity and irregularity reproduces at the level of prosody the intertwining of discovery and invention present in his presentation of his authorial role. The feet of running rhythm, which marks "*regularly*-written English verse," are always regular in length.⁹ However, while these feet are "real and true to nature," for the sake of scansion it is easier to ignore some iterations and scan only for Trochees and Dactyls.¹⁰ Thus, regular scansion rests on an unnatural departure from the more particular "true to nature" divisions. Furthermore, despite the regularity of the length of its feet, running rhythm is given to two "irregularities": reversed feet and counterpoint rhythm. The first "irregularity," the reversed foot, is nonetheless a "thing so natural" that it "commonly passes unnoticed," since it exhibits "that irregularity which all natural growth and motion shows." Counterpoint rhythm, however, is more artificial, and arises when "the reversal is repeated in two feet running," which presses against the original rhythm that our mind still maintains: "the mind naturally supplies the natural or standard foregoing rhythm, for we do not forget the rhythm that by rights we should be hearing." (In a letter to Richard Dixon, Hopkins includes a marked version of a line from *Paradise Regained*—"Hóme to his móther's hóuse *prí*ivate retúrned"—as an example of counterpointing).¹¹ In counterpoint rhythm, then, the "irregularity" is unnatural, though we can sense this irregularity because the "mind *naturally* supplies" the original rhythm.

Yet the strangeness of the uses of "natural" and "irregular" in the Preface only fully come

⁹ Hopkins, *Major Works*, 106. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰ Hopkins, *Major Works*, 106.

¹¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins to Richard Dixon, London, 5 October 1878, *Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, 15.

to the fore with the realization that once Hopkins finally reaches his discussion of sprung rhythm, he never uses the word “irregular” though he retains the word “natural.” Irregularity would seem to be implied, however, in the first line of his description: “Sprung Rhythm, as used in this book, is measured by feet of from one to four syllables, regularly, and for particular effects any number of weak and slack syllables may be used.”¹² Sprung rhythm is also the “rhythm of all but the most monotonously *regular* music.”¹³ The marked absence of the term “irregular” from this section gives some suggestion of what Hopkins means to convey by the term. While he describes the “irregularities” of running rhythm as the result of “poets” who “brought in licences [*sic*] and departures from rules to give variety,” deviations in sprung rhythm are described as “licences [...] *natural* to Sprung Rhythm.”¹⁴ While in running rhythm the poet must assert himself against the “rule” by “irregularity,” in sprung rhythm the poet’s freedom is already present, which may explain why “strict Sprung Rhythm cannot be counterpointed.” It is thus no coincidence that sprung rhythm is the “rhythm of common speech,” for it is a form that unites itself not around (or in opposition to) metrical rules but around the poet as speaker and the reader as listener.¹⁵ Ong’s description of sprung rhythm as “interpretive rhyme” is suggestive here: as there is no hard-and-fast rule about stress placement or foot length, the unguided reader must semantically figure the line before being able to read it properly. Yet this very quality that makes reading this type of poetry aloud difficult is what allies it so strongly to speech: the speaker is the only one who knows what he is going to say before he says it and thus is the only person who could “naturally”

¹² Hopkins, *Major Works*, 106.

¹³ Hopkins, *Major Works*, 108. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴ Hopkins, *Major Works*, 106. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵ Hopkins, *Major Works*, 107-8.

accent his or her language. So, just as Wordsworth relied, in *The Prelude*, on a reader who was “placed on earth to love and understand” (a dynamic we have explored in detail in Chapter 2), Hopkins project relies on a (potentially impossible) reader who can perceive his speech. This necessity of readerly perception adds a new valence to the claim that sprung rhythm is “the rhythm of common speech [...] when rhythm is *perceived* in” it.

Hopkins’s insistence on the use of diacritical marks in the *Wreck* suggests that this perception is hardly assured. Notably, the first poem in which Hopkins employs this rhythm, which relies so heavily on a perceptive reader, is the story of two readers, the “tall nun” who perishes in the shipwreck and is able to “read the unshapeable shock night” (l. 226) and Hopkins himself who tries to perceive God’s workings in his own life and in the wreck. In the *Wreck*, as in the Preface, Hopkins both insists on the natural presence of an element (rhythm, God’s grace) and remains keenly aware of how this presence can nonetheless go unperceived. Thus the extensive use of diacritical marks throughout the poem to mark passages that might be incorrectly scanned by a reader is necessary.

The conjunction of speech and meter in sprung rhythm ties together the materiality of the body with that of writing. Geoffrey Hartman has noted the role of speech—and the body—as the ground of Hopkins’s poetry:

While Wordsworth [...] tends to represent a consciousness as the only indestructible thing in man, Hopkins, as he goes towards his purse vision, represents [...] the body itself as the finally indestructible reality [...] This should be evident on reading his poetry aloud, the final meaning of which is not [due] to any single sense, nor to the reasoning reason, but to the unclassified faculty of speech itself, its explosiveness, its sinew, its shifting accents. Speech becomes, as it were, a fruit of the body.¹⁶

and it is this rooting in speech that makes sprung rhythm “the most natural of things” and,

¹⁶ Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 134.

ironically, causes the diacritical marks to be necessary.

Beyond the irony that this “natural” rhythm requires external markings to be correctly voiced, Hopkins’s concern about his poem quite literally being misread points to the particular fragility of his prosody, which is dependent not just on the materiality of the body but also on the material marks which are threatened by erasure and which are, themselves, a threat to the poem they mark by their own “offensive” nature. When Bridges omitted most of the marks from the manuscript of Hopkins’s poems he produced and sent to Hopkins for corrections, Hopkins commented that he was “right to leave out the marks: they were not consistent for one thing and are always offensive. Still there must be some. Either I must invent a notation applied throughout as in music or else I must only mark where the reader is likely to mistake, and for the present this is what I shall do.”¹⁷

In some ways, the marks—in their complex relationship to the content of the poems they mark and through their alliance with speech—draw together dynamics we have encountered in our analyses of Wordsworth and Shelley: the accidents of reading occasioned by “accidental” non-semantic elements that we traced in “The Triumph of Life” and the Derridean dynamics of the signature discussed in relation to *The Prelude*. The precise nature of these dynamics in Hopkins’s case is best illustrated through his reactions to the possibility of fully removing the marks.

Believing that the *Wreck* was to be published in the Jesuit literary magazine *The Month*, Hopkins wrote to his mother in 1876 about his resistance to his editor’s request that he remove his accents: “I would gladly have done without them if I had thought my readers would scan

¹⁷ Hopkins to Robert Bridges, Stonyhurst, 24 October 1883, *Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, 189.

right unaided but I am afraid they will not, and if the lines are not rightly scanned they are ruined. Still I am afraid I must humour an editor, but some lines at all events will have to be marked.”¹⁸ The choice of the word “ruined” is, of course, an especially charged one considering the poem’s subject matter. The threat to Hopkins’s lines is itself a threat of an “accident,” one which can only be prevented by the lines being marked.

The request of the *Month*’s editors for the marks to be removed inaugurates a long history of editorial erasures of Hopkins’s marks, especially those that seem most eccentric. The original manuscript of the *Wreck of the Deutschland* included not only the simple accent marks that are retained in most printed editions of the poem but also “slurs,” “eliders,” and “twirls.”¹⁹ To this day, there is no edited version of Hopkins’s poems that include all of the markings, though the footnotes of the Oxford World Authors edition of his poems do often indicate markings that have been removed from the main printed text. In *Hopkins Re-Constructed*, Justus George Lawler almost gleefully charts the critical demise of:

the quasi-musical markings in which Hopkins placed great store as interpretive keys: brackets, eliders, ictuses, arses, ligatures, slurs, twirls, and a batter of diacritical notations. Their significance to the esthetic impact of the poems can be deduced from the fact that they are never totally and exactly reproduced except in virtually inaccessible photocopy. [...] Nor was there any widespread objection to the omission of Hopkins’s typographical signs in the established and esteemed “Oxford Authors Series,” under the title *Gerard*

¹⁸ Hopkins to Catherine Hopkins, June 26 1876, St. Beuno’s, 138. There appears to have been some miscommunication between Hopkins and Fr. Henry Coleridge, the editor of the *Month*, for the poem never appeared. Hopkins seems to have received a letter from Coleridge that he took to say that, while the poem had arrived too late to appear in the July edition, would be published in August if Hopkins would remove the scansion marks. However, it is unclear if *The Month* had ever intended to publish the poem. Robert Bernard Martin, in his biography of Hopkins, notes: “It is hardly surprising that Coleridge refused to publish a work of which he could make neither head nor tail. Trying to be fair to the poem, he gave it to another reader, Fr. Sydney Smith, who was clearly discontented by the odd blue pencil marks with which Hopkins had tried to make the rhythm clear. Finally, Fr. Smith said, ‘the only result was to give me a very bad headache, and to lead me to hand the poem back to Fr. Coleridge with the remark that it was indeed unreadable.’” Robert Bernard Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (New York: Putnam, 1991), 249.

¹⁹ Interestingly, though Hopkins had claimed in the Preface that sprung rhythm could not be counterpointed, in a letter to Bridges, Hopkins says that the “twirls” (which look roughly like an infinity symbol) were meant to indicate “counterpoint.” Hopkins to Robert Bridges, 8 August 1877, *Letters to Robert Bridges*, 43.

Manley Hopkins (1986), with the subhead, “A Critical Edition of the Major Works”—nor, I say, was there widespread objection when the editor of this volume, Catherine Phillips, observed casually but honestly: “Cost and editorial opinion at Oxford University Press have restricted metrical marks in the text to simple stresses.” So much for the hermeneutical symbols Hopkins thought essential to the reading of his poems.²⁰

Lawler is correct, of course, if the question is whether Hopkins’s poems remain decipherable without his marks (indeed, in some cases the marks make them *less* decipherable). If one can dispense with the author (and with his or her intentions), then one can certainly discard an author’s singularly idiosyncratic marking-up of his work. Nonetheless, the question remains of whether the marks do, in fact, make a difference.

“*It Rides Time Like Riding a River*”: The Wreck of the Deutschland and *Sacred Time*

We are confronted with the problems posed by sprung rhythm and Hopkins’s own marks from the first stanza of the *Wreck*:

Thou mastering me
God! giver of breath and bread;
World’s strand, sway of the sea;
Lord of living and dead;
Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

In *The Dragon in the Gate*, Elizabeth Schneider notes that later stanzas in Part I make it clear that “thee” at the end of the stanza must be stressed. Yet, as readers will not observe this pattern until finishing other stanzas, they have to rely on semantics to figure out the stress placement here (assuming they don’t have stress marks to guide them). Schneider comments that “one of the limitations of sprung rhythm” is “the fact that the meter cannot illuminate the meaning, and

²⁰ Lawler, *Hopkins Re-Constructed*, 21.

that in fact we often must determine the meaning before we can even guess at the rhythm.”²¹

Hopkins’s accent on “thee” in the final line *does* makes sense semantically, Schneider insists, but only if one has read Hopkins’s commentary on the *Spiritual Exercises*. She thus identifies as a flaw in the poem that the line can “be read acceptably only when illuminated by outside sources.”²² Schneider’s critique here is in line with her later accusation of a “willful, even perverse singularity” in Hopkins’s more bold syntactical experiments.²³

It is important that we would need access not merely to outside sources but to Hopkins’s *private* commentaries to understand the stress. Hopkins’s “voicing” of the poem keeps in play his own authorial self, his signature, and does so by remaining opaque. As we can safely assume that Hopkins did not expect the readers of *The Month* to be privy to his private spiritual writings, this makes his insistence to his mother that “if the lines are not rightly scanned they are ruined” even more striking. Obviously there is a need for the stress simply to maintain regularity of rhythm across stanzas, but setting that regularity through what would appear to be an irregular semantic emphasis is a strange choice. Moreover, we know that this particular stress was important to Hopkins and identified as one that readers would likely “mistake.” His original marking of the stanza was more extensive:

Thou mastering me;
God! Giver of breath and bread;
World’s stránd, swáy of the séa;
Lord of living and dead;

²¹ Elizabeth Schneider, *The Dragon in the Gate: Studies in the Poetry of G.M. Hopkins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 76.

²² Schneider, *Dragon in the Gate*, 77. Schneider explains the emphasis in this way: “The metrical emphasis on *thee* is heavy and essential; it closes the stanza with a strongly sprung and measured beat. But to feel this we have to know that ‘the finger of God’ translates St. Ignatius’ ‘*Digitus paternae dexteræ*,’ quoted by Hopkins and interpreted by him as ‘the works of God’s finger,’ symbolizing the exercise of His power ‘in operibus,’ ‘working in the world’ of material phenomenon, as distinguished from God’s self, God as Love; or, as he put it again, the distinction is between God’s *power* and his *essence*.”

²³ Schneider, *Dragon in the Gate*, 112.

Thou hast bóund bónes and véins in me, fástened me flésh,
And áfter it almóست únmade, what with dréad,
Thy doing: and dost Thou touch me afresh?
Óver agáin I féel thy finger and find thée.²⁴

In his corrections to the transcription of the *Wreck* sans accent marks that Bridges sent him, Hopkins only marks “Thée,” “únmade,” and “álmóست.”

The emphasis is interesting not only because it indicates a particularly personal understanding of the line, but because it appears as part of a response to a question that is effectively *about* Hopkins’s ability to read himself and his own experience—“dost thou touch me afresh?”—and what he finds or reads, “thee,” is both the result of a deeply personal experience and is the central figure who is sought throughout the remainder of the poem. If we are, from the opening of the poem, thrust into Hopkins’s private experience in a particularly disorienting way, our disorientation mirrors Hopkins’s own. The “thée” of the opening stanza functions in some ways as a cipher to the reader, simultaneously revealing and concealing Hopkins; similarly, as Hopkins seeks to more fully gain an answer to that opening question—“Dost thou touch me afresh?”—God will serve as a cipher, one who is “under the world’s splendour and wonder” but whose “mystery must be instressed, stressed” (ll. 38-39). This comparison is not as bold as it may at first appear, for it quickly becomes clear that Hopkins can only decipher God’s presence by reading his own experience, which is more often than not opaque to him. Hopkins must take himself as text. But he must conduct this self-reading through the reading of *another*: the “tall

²⁴ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Later Poetic Manuscripts of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile*, ed. Norman H. MacKenzie (New York: Garland, 1991), 32. Because we no longer have Hopkins’s original draft of the *Wreck*, but only the copy of this draft produced by Robert Bridges, it is impossible to know with absolute certainty that the accents in the manuscript are all Hopkins; however, MacKenzie insists that “I have no reason to believe that any stresses in the lines marked [...] were invented by Bridges himself rather than being transferred from the doomed original,” 18. One of the most unfortunate consequences of the loss of the original manuscript is that Bridges does not appear to have reproduced Hopkins’s more eccentric diacritical notations and thus we only have those that Hopkins insisted on in his marking up of the later manuscript that Bridges sent him (one of which is discussed below).

nun” whose reading of the “unshapeable shock night” serves as a model for Hopkins’s own reading of himself. The crossing from part one to part two of the poem is thus already foreshadowed in this opening stanza. As Paul G. Beidler has observed, the stanza has a chiasmic structure, seen most clearly in the reversal of subject and object from the opening line—“Thou mastering me”—to the last—“I feel thy finger and find thee.”²⁵ Yet the crossing is not equal. While the stanza exhibits confidence in, and even terror of, God’s authorship, Hopkins’s competence as a reader is less clear, especially in the use of the interrogative mood in line 7: “dost thou touch me afresh?” Line 8 appears to answer in the affirmative (with that curiously personal “thee”), but the remainder of part one—and of the poem as a whole—presents a much more ambiguous response.

A number of influential treatments of the *Wreck* suggest that the tall nun effectively serves as Hopkins’s double and, in recognizing her ability to “word” Christ, Hopkins is able to do the same. Thus, the crossing from part one to part two goes both ways, also allowing us to read backwards from part two to part one, from the tall nun to Hopkins. J. Hillis Miller succinctly summarizes this structure of crossings and recrossings:

‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ is about both poetic inspiration and grace. The poem is divided into two parts, the first recalling when Hopkins himself was touched by the finger of God, the second describing the wreck and the salvation of the nuns. Imagining the nuns’ death has brought back vividly to Hopkins his own parallel experience. Remembering it, he relived it again, and God’s grace has descended once more into his heart. The experience of the renewal of grace is at the same time the renewal of poetic inspiration.²⁶

But the reading of the nuns’ death requires that Hopkins himself write—“stress”—the working

²⁵ See Paul G. Beidler, “Hopkins’s Chiasmus: Stanza 2 of ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland,’” *Victorian Poetry* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 627-43.

²⁶ J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth Century Writers* (New York: Schocken, 1963), 319.

of the divine in history.

Before he turns to the topic of divine history, however, Hopkins turns to a particular moment in his own personal history:

I did say yes
O at lightning and lashed rod;
Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess
Thy terror, O Christ, O God;
Thou knowest the walls, altar and hour and night (ll.9-13)

Here (as in many other portions of Hopkins's work) there is a lack of consensus among scholars about *what* time and place is being referred to. Some hold that it refers to Hopkins's conversion, others to his "first experience of the Ignatian spiritual exercises he completed in the long retreat given shortly after he entered the novitiate."²⁷ Hopkins originally placed a circumflex over hour (according to a letter to Bridges, the circumflex was placed over some single syllable words to indicate that "they are to be made to approach two syllables"²⁸), though this is one of the "eccentric" markings that was removed from most printed texts. Considering that this passage is leading up to an extended consideration of the workings of grace within time, it makes sense that Hopkins would chose to emphasize this particular hour (even as it remains unknown to us).

Yet the critical difficulty of situating Hopkins here is not merely biographical and would appear to extend to Hopkins's own reading of his life; while Hopkins obviously understood his own reference, he nonetheless locates himself in a liminal place in the following stanza:

The frown of his face
Before me, the hurtle of hell
Behind, where, where was a where was a place?
I whirled out wings that spell
And fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host. (ll.17-21)

²⁷ Catherine Phillips, ed., *Major Works*, 336.

²⁸ Hopkins to Robert Bridges, Hampstead, 8 August 1877, *Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, 43.

In a sense, then, it is the Host itself which is the principal location. Moreover, it is to that location that he returns as he seeks to make sense of his present life. This is unsurprising considering that the Eucharist, within Hopkins's Catholic faith, represents a very unique "present." Jean-Luc Marion notes that:

The present of the Eucharistic gift is not at all temporalized starting from the *here and now* but as memorial (temporalization starting from the past), then as eschatological announcement (temporalization starting from the future), and finally, and only finally, as dailyness and viaticum (temporalization starting from the present). As opposed to the metaphysical concept of time, the present here does not order the analysis of temporality as a whole, but results from it.²⁹

By placing himself within the "heart of the Host" at the beginning of the poem (in a line that itself seems both to indicate Hopkins's present place and to serve as a reminder of his earlier approach(es) to that place), Hopkins opens up the possibility of joining together the diverse temporalities—both personal and historical—that appear in the poem.

But the centrality of the Eucharist to the *Wreck* does not merely introduce a theological framework, it also locates Hopkins and his poem within a historical moment in which religious institutions were coming to terms with the changes in thought and experience ushered in by modernity. In his retreat notes from 1888, Hopkins claimed that "my life is determined by the Incarnation down to most details of the day."³⁰ His deep attachment to the Eucharist was first sparked by the Oxford Movement, which framed itself as the combatant of a dangerous "rationalism" that had arrived with modernity and had infected both Protestant and Catholic understandings of the sacrament. John Keble argued that both represented different versions of

²⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A Carlson (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012, 172.

³⁰ Hopkins, *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Christopher Devlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 263.

the same heresy:

Observe under what a fearful penalty, in a warning parallel to that of the text, St. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, discourages every intrusion of speculative doctrine...Had this rule been faithfully kept, it would have preserved the Church just as effectively from the assertion of transubstantiation on the one hand, as from the denial of Christ's presence on the other. The two errors in the original are perhaps but rationalism in different forms; endeavours to explain away, and bring nearer to the human intellect that which had been left thoroughly mysterious both by Scripture and tradition. That would both turn the attention of men from the real life-giving miracle to mere metaphysical or grammatical subtleties, such as our fathers never knew.³¹

John Henry Newman, who would lose faith in his earlier defenses of the Church of England, remained stalwart in the need to defend Christianity against a modern rationalism that would undermine the very nature of its epistemology, claiming that when there are those

denying the power of the Sacraments on the ground of its *mysteriousness*, demanding from the very text of Scripture the fullest proof of it conceivable, and thinking little of the blessedness of 'not seeing, and yet believing,' they naturally proceed to object to the doctrine of the Trinity as obstructing and obscuring the simplicity (as they consider it) of the Gospel and but indirectly deducible from the extant documents of inspiration.³²

While Hopkins would eventually abandon the *via media* proposed by high church Anglicanism—and be received into the Catholic Church by John Henry Newman—the idea of the importance of the ineffable mystery of the Eucharist remained central to his thought. In an 1864 letter to E.H. Coleridge, he claims that “The great aid to belief and object of belief is the doctrine of Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Religion without that is sombre, dangerous, illogical, with that it is—not to speak of its grand consistency and certainty—*loveable*. Hold that and you will gain all Catholic truth.”³³ The division of “sombre, dangerous,

³¹ John Keble, *Sermons Academical and Occasional* (London: Parker, 1848), 213-14.

³² John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (London: Rivingtons, 1868), 317

³³ Gerard Manley Hopkins to E.H. Coleridge, 1964, in *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 17.

and illogical” religion and a “loveable” one is not merely a division between heresy and orthodoxy of belief; they represent entirely different registers: rationalistic and affective. That which makes religion “loveable” is precisely the “real life-giving miracle” which serves as its own, mysterious logic in which it is both source and summit of faith. Within this register, it is the rationalistic approach that becomes “illogical.”

If part of what makes the Eucharist “lovable” in Hopkins’s account is its mysteriousness, its elusiveness, then our inability to locate the precise time and place of the speaker in the opening stanza may in fact be key to understanding it. Moreover, Hopkins’s insistence in one of his letters to Bridges regarding the *Wreck* that he was “not over-desirous that the meaning of all should be quite clear,” suggests that the elusiveness of the poem as a whole may be central to its Eucharistic vision.³⁴ For, just as the Eucharist in the opening portion of the poem serves as its unlocatable place, so also will its untimely temporality characterize the poem’s presentation of the relationship of past, present, and future, of premodernity and of modernity. Moreover, the temporality of the Eucharist is central to how the poem relates the narrative of the first section of the poem—Hopkins’s struggle to discern God’s working in his life—to that of the second section—the story of the tall nun’s ability to “read the unshapeable shock night” (l. 227).

The first movement between these two narratives happens shortly after the stanza in which Hopkins fled “to the heart of the Host.” After speaking of his attempts to read God’s workings in his own life:

[...] though he is under the world’s splendour and wonder,
His mystery must be instressed, stressed;
For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand. (ll. 38-40)

³⁴ Gerard Manley Hopkins to Richard Bridges, Stonyhurst, 13 May 1878, in *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. Claude Collier Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 50.

Hopkins then turns to a consideration of the role of the divine in history. The use of “stress” in the next stanza shifts from one where Hopkins could be the potential subject (as he “stresses, instresses” God in his own writing), to one in which God is the clear author. The workings of this authorship, however, remain mysterious:

Not out of his bless
Spirits the stress felt
Nor first from heaven (and few know this)
Swings the stroke dealt—
Stroke and stress that stars and storms deliver,
That guilt is hushed by, hearts are flushed by and melt—
But it rides time like riding a river
(And here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss.) (ll.41-48)

In this stanza, which prepares the way for the next stanza’s narration of the life of Christ, the “stress” is now associated with the Grace which comes not from Christ’s bliss, nor from the transcendent nature of the divine, but rather from an incarnate presence, one that allows grace to “ride time like riding a river.” Thus this incarnation is as important for its intervention of the divine into time and history as it is for its intervention into space and materiality. Far from being part of an abstracted, atemporal eternity, the divine grace “rides” time. The exact nature of this temporal involvement—and why it might even make the “faithful waver”—is clarified in the following stanza.

It dates from day
Of his going in Galilee
Warm-laid grave of a womb-life grey;
Manger, maiden’s knee;
The dense and the driven Passion, and frightful sweat;
Thence the discharge of it, there its swelling to be
Though felt before, though in high flood yet—
What none would have known of it, only the heart, being hard at bay, (ll. 49-56)

The first lines seem relatively straightforward about the dating of this grace. It dates from the death of Christ, though his entry into the tomb doubles his entry into the womb, thus tying the

death of Christ to his entire temporal existence. Yet the following lines complicate this chronology: “Thence the discharge of it, there its swelling to be/ Though felt before, though in high flood yet” (ll. 57-58). Divine grace, while uniquely associated with the life and death of Christ, is always already present.

At one level, the permeation of the divine grace throughout history (and its concentration around the death of Christ), is strongly reminiscent of the type of “simultaneity” that Benedict Anderson associates with medieval understandings of temporality. Commenting on the “anachronism” of dress in many medieval paintings of biblical scenes—“[t]he Virgin Mary is figured as a Tuscan merchant's daughter. In many paintings the commissioning patron, in full burgher or noble costume, appears kneeling in adoration alongside the shepherds”—Anderson asserts that “what seems incongruous today obviously appeared wholly natural to the eyes of medieval worshipers. [...] Figuring the Virgin Mary with 'Semitic' features or 'first-century' costumes in the restoring spirit of the modern museum was unimaginable because the mediaeval Christian mind had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separations between past and present.”³⁵ Anderson associates this visual expression of “simultaneity” with Erich Auerbach’s account in *Mimesis* of medieval understandings of history, in which Auerbach argues that:

If an occurrence like the sacrifice of Isaac is interpreted as prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ, so that in the former the latter is as it were announced and promised and the latter ‘fulfills’ [...] the former, then a connection is established between two events which are linked neither temporally nor causally—a connection which it is impossible to establish by reason in the historical dimension [...] It can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding [...] the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal,

³⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 23.

something omnitemporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event.³⁶

Unsurprisingly, considering not only his religious faith but his association with traditionalist movements, Hopkins's account of the workings of divine grace in history expresses a pre-modern conception of history.

Yet, what appears in Hopkins's account of history is not simply a repetition of a pre-modern vision that enters unchanged into the world of the poem. For, while it is clear why Hopkins's account of grace would be "missed" by the faithless, how could it possibly cause the faithful to "waver"? And why, if a simple repetition of Catholic doctrine, would it be something that "few know"? These peculiar aspects of the poem may be due in part to the heavy influence of the late-medieval theologian Duns Scotus, who was himself, both temporally and philosophically, on the borderline between the pre-modern and the modern.

While completing his studies in preparation to become a Jesuit, Hopkins found himself increasingly attracted to the thought of Scotus, who "of all men most sways my spirits to peace."³⁷ Scotus was generally marginalized in Catholic thought during Hopkins's lifetime, as its paradigm remained largely Thomistic.³⁸ In contemporary scholarship on secularization, Scotus is often identified as an unwitting forerunner of the Enlightenment whose thought began the slow dismantling of the analogical framework that had defined most medieval thought (and, as I suggest in my previous chapter, much of its literature as well). Scotus is thus often presented as the last of the premoderns and the first of the moderns.

³⁶ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 73-74.

³⁷ Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Duns Scotus's Oxford," line 11.

³⁸ One notable exception to this trend was the dogmatization at the first Vatican Council of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which had been argued for by Scotus, but which Aquinas had argued against.

The principle reason for this placement is Scotus's theory of the univocity of being. John Milbank succinctly summarizes the idea:

Being [...] could be either finite or infinite, and possessed the same simple meaning of existence when applied to either. 'Exists', in the sentence God 'exists', has therefore the same fundamental meaning (at both a logical and a metaphysical level) as in the sentence, 'this woman exists'. The same thing applies to the usage of transcendental terms convertible with Being; for example, 'God is good' means that he is good in the same *sense* that we are said to be good, however much more of the quality of goodness he may be thought to possess. Scotus wants to find a place, in theology, for an analogical attribution of words like 'good' to God in an eminent sense, but his metaphysics appears to restrict the scope of eminence to a mere greater quantity, or else unknown exercise of a quality whose sense and definition is fully understood by us. And just as being or goodness are attributed in the same sense to both infinite and finite, so they are attributed in the same sense to finite genera, species, and individuals. [...] Scotus, therefore, invented a separation between ontology and theology, which depends upon our having a fixed and stable — almost, one is tempted to say, an *a priori*—sense of the meaning of 'Being', 'goodness' and so forth.³⁹

Even if Milbank's ultimate conclusion—that one can draw a more or less straight line from Scotus to Deleuze and Derrida—is, at the least, overstated, the consequences of moving from a conception of the divine based on a difference in kind to a conception based on a difference of degree were foundation-shattering for much of medieval thought and laid the foundation—perhaps unwittingly—for the appearance of what Charles Taylor designates as the “immanent frame.”⁴⁰ This shift towards a difference of degree also underlay Scotus's understanding of two separate incarnations of Christ, which was Hopkins's principal interest in his work.

In the *Oxoniense*, Scotus cautiously advances the idea: “I say then, but without insisting on it, that before the Incarnation and ‘before Abraham was,’ in the beginning of the world, Christ

³⁹ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 302-3.

⁴⁰ In *A Secular Age*, Taylor notes the “importance of studies” like Milbank's, which show “how [the concept of the human] subject was changed through a series of steps involving late Scholasticism, Duns Scotus, nominalism, ‘possibilism,’ Occam, Cajetan, and Suarez, Descartes, where each stage appeared to be addressing the same issues as the predecessors it criticized, while in fact the whole framework slid away and came to be replaced by another” (295).

could have had a true temporal existence in a sacramental manner. And if this is true, it follows that before the conception and formation of the Body of Christ from the most pure blood of the Glorious Virgin there could have been the Eucharist.”⁴¹ One of the principal implications of Scotus’s theory is that it makes the incarnation much more central to Christian cosmology; no longer simply a response to man’s sin, the incarnation becomes part of God’s original intention for creation. Hopkins embraced Scotus’s idea with far less apprehension than Scotus himself.

According to Christopher Devlin:

It is a conclusion which he [Hopkins] wholly accepts. He distinguishes quite definitely between Christ’s real entry as a creature into the angelic world and his conception on our earth in historic time; and he conjures up two Greek terms to emphasize the distinction. *Ensarkosis*, ‘the taking of flesh’, was the former. *Enanthropesis*, ‘the becoming man’, was the latter. It is like distinguishing two events in the great sentence of St. John: ‘The Word was made flesh—and came to dwell among us.’ This is Hopkins’s most startling and original theological innovation.⁴²

In his commentary on the second week of Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*, Hopkins proposes that the first Incarnation (*Ensarkosis*) preceded creation and, as a result, the creation of the world immediately involved the presence of the divine in the material realm. It is this incarnation-before-the-incarnation, this original gracing of the world, that explains why the “stress felt” does not come “first from heaven,” and why it may cause even “the faithful” to “waver”:

out of the same world or stead of things in which Christ lived before he became man I suppose to have been the earthly paradise planted by God from the beginning, that is perhaps / when the angelic world was brought into being, so that spirit and flesh started together, flesh being the name for a condition of matter. About this no doubt light may be had from the book of Genesis. In this Christ *deambulabat ad auram post meridiem*, which seems to describe a ranging in the spirit through a world of his own. So that man lived at first rather in Christ and his mother, who came afterwards to live among men.⁴³

⁴¹ Duns Scotus, *Oxonese*, quoted and translated by Christopher Devlin in “Introduction: Part Two—Spiritual Writings,” *Sermons and Devotional Writings*, 114.

⁴² Devlin, ed., *Sermons and Devotional Writings*, 114.

⁴³ Hopkins, *Sermons and Devotional Writings*, 171.

Hopkins's radically sacramental view of nature, in which from the beginning the world was "charged with the grandeur of God" in a material way, certainly repeats at the level of theology what the univocity of being achieves at the level of metaphysics: an increasingly immanent understanding of the divine.

This radical view of incarnation both increases God's proximity to the world and makes his presence harder to recognize. The value and the limitation of the traditional Catholic understanding of the incarnation is that it makes the divine recognizable, present historically in the figure of Jesus and spatially in the Eucharist. Yet, if the incarnation of Christ pervades creation from its very origins, then his presence is more dispersed and, as such, is dependent on correctly reading the details of the world. As Philip A. Ballinger notes, "Hopkins' incarnational metaphysic and theology, adapted from Scotus, thus becomes a kind of aesthetic principle."⁴⁴ And thus, even more so than in traditional understandings, God's "mystery must be instressed, stressed." The particulars of the world must be read in such a way that their manifestation of Christ becomes clear. Many critics, including Taylor himself, have noted how Hopkins's interest in Scotus is tied to his special interest in the particular. However, little attention has been paid to the *type* of particulars that find their way into *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. In the next section, I will explore Hopkins's integration of newspaper accounts of the facts of the wreck into the second part of the poem in a way that unites "secular, clocked time" to the Eucharistic temporality on display in the first part of the poem.

⁴⁴ Philip A. Ballinger, *The Poem as Sacrament: The Theological Aesthetic of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 124.

Hopkins's *Wreck of the Deutschland* has endured so much longer than memory of the actual wreck that it is often forgotten that the accident was of great public concern for reasons quite other than Hopkins's concerns about the salvation of souls. Updates on the details of the wreck and the proceedings of the official inquest appeared almost daily within the London papers for the latter half of December of 1875. Hopkins's own knowledge of the wreck came entirely from newspaper reports, some of which he specifically requested from his mother.

Anderson figures newspapers—alongside novels—as the most representative examples of the type of “simultaneity” that defines the temporality of modernity. What unites the radically disparate stories in a newspaper is “not sheer caprice”:

The arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition [...] shows that the linkage between them is imagined. This imagined linkage derives from two obliquely related sources. The first is simple calendrical coincidence. The date at the top of the newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection—the steady onward clocking of homogenous, empty time. [...] The second source of imagined linkage lies in the relationship between the newspaper, as a form of book, and the market. [...] Might we say: one-day best-sellers? The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing [...] creates this extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption (‘imagining’) of the newspaper-as-fiction. We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that. [...] The significance of this mass ceremony—Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers—is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. [...] What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?⁴⁵

Hopkins's incorporation of the facts gleaned from a newspaper into his poem disrupts this “secular, historically clocked” temporality in two ways: first, it transforms the experience of reading the newspaper—“a substitute for morning prayers”—into a sacred experience by placing

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 33-35.

its details within a poem whose structure (especially its opening and closing stanzas) clearly mark it as a prayer. Secondly, it replaces the ephemeral quality of the newspaper as a “one-day bestseller” with the attempted immortality of verse. However, Hopkins’s reappropriation of the particulars of the newspaper for sacred and poetic ends does not simply transform the modern, secular temporality of the newspaper—the integration of this secular temporality similarly reshapes the sacred, Eucharistic temporality that dominates the first part of the poem.

If Hopkins’s Scotian understanding of the Eucharist especially privileges the necessity of perceiving or reading God in the world, the modes of reading that become typical of modernity—of which the newspaper is perhaps the paradigmatic example—threaten the legibility of the divine. While, as Anderson suggests, the page of an individual newspaper represents the simultaneity particular to modernity, the proliferation of newspapers and reviews—each with their own stance toward stories of the day—demonstrate the plurality of narrative within modernity. The experience of secularism is largely one of being able to read correctly a complex religio-social society, even as the reality of pluralism makes it all but impossible for these readings to be performed with certainty.⁴⁶ Moreover, this plurality of narratives affects not only religious belief but all areas of social life. Indeed, the proliferation of newspapers and reviews in the nineteenth-century—with their often competing accounts of current day events—illustrates the degree to which it became necessary for a certain class of English readers to be able to “read” an increasingly fragmented social world in order to establish both their own place and a larger communal cohesion.

The newspaper coverage of the loss of the Deutschland is particularly instructive in this

⁴⁶ See the introduction for an extended discussion of Charles Taylor’s treatment of the necessary relationship between pluralism and secularism.

regard, as varied narrative accounts of the tragedy proliferated. Moreover, the need to decide between competing accounts, to correctly read the “signs” of the Wreck, existed not merely on the part of readers of the dailies but also formed the basis for the much-covered official inquest into the wreck. Indeed, much of the initial concern with the wreck—as well as the push for a full inquest—was due to the existence of competing, and often lurid, accounts of it. Thus, the depictions of the death of the nuns that formed the basis for Hopkins’s poem arose within this sensationalized media environment; the *Wreck* evidences the degree to which Hopkins himself picked and chose from these accounts and their concerns and also figures this reading process within its own narrative.

To demonstrate fully the complex plurality of narratives within which the *Wreck* arose, a brief review of newspaper and review articles from the time is necessary. These reports—some of which we know with certainty Hopkins read—illustrate the degree to which public interest in the wreck was motivated by a desire to decipher its meaning. The initial reports of the wreck suggested that the loss of life might have been entirely prevented or at least greatly reduced. While the wreck occurred twenty-five miles off the shore of Harwich (some early accounts said it was a mere four miles), no help was sent for a full 30 hours. Rumors circulated, especially in Germany, that when the inhabitants of Harwich realized that the ship was German, they had allowed it to sink. On December 14, 1875 *The Times* reported on a debate among the German parliament as to whether an inquest into the accident could even be fairly conducted in England. However, the German government, acknowledging a previously existent agreement between Germany and England that any German shipwrecks in British waters should be investigated by British courts, consented to the inquest being held in London.

Nonetheless, rumors of misbehavior on the part of the population of Harwich only grew

and became a regular subject of conversation in the British and German press. On December 18th, *The Times* reproduced an editorial from the *Magdeburger Zeitung* that insisted that the doomed ship had been besieged by “wreckers,” those who loot shipwrecks: “In the case of the Deutschland, these professional thieves only waited for the last of the crew to leave the remains of the vessel before they fell upon chests, cases, and corpses. Where they can escape notice, they help themselves, making wreck of still seaworthy ships, and bodies of living men.”⁴⁷

The Saturday Review responded to these allegations by suggesting that the wreck was entirely the fault of the captain: “It was simple suicide to run before a north-east gale into the Thames; and if the Deutschland could not find her way through the Straits of Dover, she ought to have remained at Bremen.” The charges of “wrecking” were reframed as evidence for the attentiveness of those on the coast of Harwich: “The avidity of plunder said to have been displayed would at any rate show that a bright look-out was likely to be kept [...] They can never know except by trying whether a prize may not await them. Even the rather barren honour of saving life is better than nothing, and they always hope for opportunities of salving, or let us say stealing, property.”⁴⁸

Yet the most sensational representation of “wrecking” came in the *The Illustrated London News*, which published a series of drawings of the wreck including a two page spread illustrating the “Rescue of the Survivors of the Wreck by the Harwich Steam-Tug Liverpool” and a full page drawing of “Wreckers at Work in the Saloon of the Deutschland,” which depicted a crowd of wreckers digging through items, hoisting their loot to compatriots above deck, and eagerly gulping down bottles of alcohol that remained in the saloon. The accompanying article—which

⁴⁷ “The Deutschland,” *The Times*, December 18, 1875.

⁴⁸ “The Loss of the Deutshland,” *The Saturday Review*, December 18, 1875, 771-772.

Hopkins specifically requested (and received) a clipping of from his mother—is equally lurid:

It was stated by Captain Brickenstein, in his evidence at the inquest on Friday, that many deaths occurred by the persons who had climbed into the rigging, as their strength failed or they were chilled by the cold wind, falling upon the deck, where they were washed off by the waves, and some were washed down the hatchways into the hold. One corpse was seen by our own Artist sticking in the ventilating shaft, head downwards, the feet protruding at the top. Our Artist, who went out from Harwich in the steam-tug Liverpool, of that port, says that the men of that tug deserve great praise for their efforts to recover the dead bodies, to which they gave their entire attention; but they were not at all assisted in this by the boatmen of the shore, who would not leave their more gainful occupation of stripping the furniture and searching for clothes or valuables, while dead bodies lay beside them. It is even stated, by the Times' correspondent, that rings were taken from the fingers of the dead, and that their pockets and belt-pouches were rifled. The boats, luggers, and smacks, whose men are charged with such misconduct, do not belong to Harwich; there were about fourteen of them surrounding the wreck.⁴⁹

Ultimately, the inquest concluded that nearly all of the shocking details of the wreck were false.

While many reports had originally suggested that the weather was fine at the point that those from Harwich could have reached the scene of the accident, in fact the weather was severe enough that any tugboat would have almost certainly been lost had it ventured out. Further, it appears that there could have been no way that the nationality of the boat could have been determined, so the idea that the wrecked were left unaided because they were German proved specious. Meanwhile, the rumors of “wrecking” seem to have been born from witnesses to legitimate salvaging and none of the stories of stealing from corpses were ever substantiated. The representative of the German government at the inquest specifically indicted the press for furthering this sensational accusation: “The suggestion of plunder probably came from some one who knew nothing about the matter sitting down to draw a picture of it. He [the representative] thought it very unfortunate that a picture had actually been printed in one of our illustrated papers, because all the stories of mutilation and robbery had arisen from that imaginative

⁴⁹ “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” *The Illustrated London News*, December 18, 1875.

source.”⁵⁰

The Illustrated Times issued an apology that read more as a defense: “For the sake of the honest and brave part of our coast population, we must express our regret that the charge of ‘wrecking’ on board the *Deutschland* was not thoroughly sifted.” Though the editors then proceeded to double-down on their depiction: “The sketch we published of the scene in the saloon represents what he [the Artist] actually saw, and is *literally true in all its details*” (emphasis in original). As further evidence, an “unsolicited” letter is printed whose author asserts that he “accompanied your artist to the wreck on the 9th, as correspondent of the *New York Herald*, and can testify to the absolute accuracy of the drawings.”⁵¹

The notion, proposed at the inquest, of the newspaper as an “imaginative source” of lurid details that meddled with more official attempts to sort out the facts of the wreck, suggests that the thin line between “wrecking” and “salvaging” may well be applicable to the various social discourses surrounding the *Wreck*. The wreck of the *Deutschland* (as well as many other shipwrecks) became, quite literally, a source of profit for the media. While the inquest may have been more disinterested, it was touched by the public fascination with the wreck and the inquest was the subject of regular reports in the papers for several weeks. Hopkins is also trying to “salvage” something from the wreck but, perhaps more notably, from the papers themselves: to locate in this form that constructs an “imagined community” an experience of the “communion of saints.” For he is linked to the nuns both by the modern simultaneity of the newspaper and the simultaneity of Eucharistic temporality.

Clearly, the depictions of the nuns themselves are key to Hopkins’s project. They are not

⁵⁰ “The *Deutschland*,” *The Times*, December 31, 1875.

⁵¹ “The Wreck of the *Deutschland*,” *The Illustrated London News*, January 8, 1876.

a pronounced feature of most of the newspaper accounts, though they often appear briefly. More often than not, they are used to demonstrate the surreality of the scene. *The London Daily News* noted that

Then happened horrible scenes which the pen refuses to portray in their fullness. One woman, driven mad with fear and despair, deliberately hung herself from the roof of the saloon. A man, taking out his pen-knife, dug it into his wrist and worked it about as long as he had strength, dying where he fell. Another man, incoherently calling on the wife and child he had left in Germany, rushed about with a bottle in his hand, frantically shouting for paper and pencil. Somebody gave him both, and, scribbling a note, he corked it down in a bottle and threw it overboard, following it himself a moment later, as a great wave came and swept him overboard.

There were five nuns on board who, by their terror stricken conduct, seem to have added greatly to the weirdness of the scene. They were deaf to all entreaties to leave the saloon, and when, almost by main force, the stewardess (whose conduct throughout was plucky to the extreme) managed to get them on the companion ladder, they sank down onto the steps and stubbornly refused to go another step. They seemed to have returned to the saloon again shortly, for somewhere in the dead of night, when the greater part of the crew and passengers were in the rigging, one was seen with her body half through the skylight, crying aloud in a voice heard above the storm “O, my God, make it quick, make it quick.” At daylight yesterday morning, when the tide had ebbed, and leaving the deck clear, some on the rigging went down, and looking into the cabin saw the nuns floating about face downward, all dead.⁵²

The account of the nun’s cry that finds its way into Hopkins’s poem comes from the *Times*, which references “Five German nuns, whose bodies are now in the dead-house here” who had “clasped hands and were drowned together, the chief sister, a gaunt woman 6 ft. high, calling out loudly and often ‘O Christ, come quickly!’”⁵³ Beyond these accounts there was also the eulogy for the nuns delivered by Cardinal Manning, which deviates wildly from all the news reports. He noted that “these holy souls were so resigned in the tranquility of their confidence in God, that

⁵² As cited in “The Deutschland Wreck: Full Details of the Disaster. A Summary of Passengers’ Narratives—Remarkable Coolness of the Victims of the Wreck—Terrible Scenes,” *New York Times*, December 22, 1875.

⁵³ “The Loss of the Deutschland,” *Time Times*, December 11, 1875. On December 13, *The Times* would print a story in which the nun is reported to cry “My God, my God, make haste, make haste.” Considering that the nun’s actual cry would have been in German, it is possible that the variation is simply due to differences in translation.

they showed not the slightest sign of agitation or fear. They remained quietly in their cabins.”⁵⁴

In choosing to draw on the *Times*’ report of the tall nun crying out “O Christ, come quickly!”—versus some of the darker possibilities or the pious narrative privileged by Cardinal Manning—Hopkins is already beginning the process of sifting through the varied accounts of the *Wreck*. He begins to participate in his own sort of inquest into the wreck. However, he seeks answers to different questions from those of the inquest. He does not seek to find who was responsible for the wreck (this responsibility is assigned to God several times in the poem without hesitation or debate), but what the wreck meant.

While the first part of the poem opens with Hopkins’s inquiry “Dost thou touch me afresh?” The animating question of the second half of the *Wreck* occurs after a stanza that highlights the modern simultaneity that dominates the second portion of the poem:

Away in the loveable west,
On a pastoral forehead of Wales,
I was under a roof here, I was at rest,
And they were the prey of the gales;
She to the black-about air, to the breaker, the thickly
Falling flakes, to the throng that catches and quails
Was calling ‘O Christ, Christ, come quickly’:
The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best.

The majesty! what did she mean (ll. 185-93).

While the stanza underscores the separation between Hopkins and the tall nun—a separation of both place and experience—the question “what did she mean?” already begins to draw the connection between Hopkins and the nun that deepens as the poem advances. “Dost thou touch me afresh?” has been reframed so that deciphering the nun’s own reading would, by extension,

⁵⁴ Lesley Higgins, “Reckoning up the Ellipses in Hopkins’s Poetry,” *Hopkins Quarterly* 40, no. 3-4 (Summer 2013-Fall 2014), 78.

make Hopkins himself legible as text.

Yet these questions exhibit important differences and gesture towards the distinct temporalities of their respective sections. The original question makes an appeal to a transcendent source beyond the self in order to gain understanding of the self, while the other concerns itself with deciphering the meaning of another reader who is herself on the same immanent plane. This fact is underscored by the acknowledgement of physical distance and temporal simultaneity. While in earlier stanzas, Hopkins constructed his relationship with the nun through their shared relationship with Christ (“Sister, a sister calling/ A master, her master and mine!” (ll. 145-46)), in this later stanza their relationship is not conceived of in terms of the sacred temporality and spatiality of the “the communion of saints” but rather in the terms of simultaneity that are the governing temporality of the newspaper. The movement from “I was under a roof here, I was at rest” to “And they were the prey of the gales” implies the “meanwhile” that Benedict Anderson has associated with our modern conception of an imagined community.⁵⁵ Yet, as the narrative unfolds it becomes clear that Hopkins hopes to work from this immanent relationality towards an apprehension of the transcendent.

While several early stanzas of part two (12-14) come close to mimicking the rhetoric of “just the facts” reportage in some of its lines (“On Saturday sailed from Bremen, American-outward-bound/ [...] Two hundred souls in the round” (ll.89-92); “She drove in the dark to leeward,/ She struck—not a reef or a rock/ But the combs of a smother of sand: night drew her/ Dead to the Kentish Knock” (ll.105-8)), the stanzas that follow Hopkins’s meditation on his own position reproduce the structure (if not always the content) of the multitudinous accounts of the

⁵⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 22.

wreck that attempted to make sense of the sundry facts and rumors surrounding it. A variety of explanations for the nun's cry are possible and Hopkins begins, rather systematically, to consider each of them.

Stanza 25 proposes two interpretations:

Is it love in her of the being as her lover had been?
Breathe, body of lovely Death.
They were else-minded then, altogether, the men
Woke thee with a *We are perishing* in the weather of Gennésaréth.
Or is it that she cried for the crown then,
The keener to come at the comfort for feeling the combating keen? (ll.193-200)

First, the possibility is introduced that the nun might simply have identified herself with the suffering Christ: "love in her of the being as her lover had been." Then, a second explanation is offered that correlates more closely to the one offered by newspaper accounts: she could be calling for the hastening of her own death.

Yet, two stanzas later, Hopkins rejects both of these possibilities:

Nó, but it was nó these.
The jading and jar of the cart,
Time's tásking, it is fathers that asking for ease
Of the sodden-with-its-sorrowing heart,
Not danger, electrical horror; then further it finds
The appealing of the Passion is tenderer in prayer apart;
Other, I gather, in measure her mind's
Burden, in wind's burly and beat of endragonèd seas. (ll.209-216)

The request for a quick and easy death is not, Hopkins concludes, the kind of desire born out of "danger, electrical horror" which, presumably, would desire survival above all else (though the newspaper reports allude to a number of desperate suicides). Meanwhile, the experience of meditative union with Christ is more suited to "prayer apart" than to the madness of the wreck.

Thus far, Hopkins's consideration of the possibilities have been analytic and largely in keeping with the structure of conjecture and interpretation that surrounded reports of and

commentary on the wreck. Yet, in the next stanza, this detached tone disappears. Indeed, it becomes increasingly difficult to even separate the nun's reading from Hopkins's:

But how shall I . . . make me room there:
Reach me a . . . Fancy, come faster—
Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there,
Thing that she . . . There then! the Master,
*Ips*e, the only one, Christ, King, Head:
He was to cure the extremity where he had cast her;
Do, deal, lord it with living and dead;
Let him ride, her pride, in his triumph, dispatch and have done with
his doom there. (ll. 217-25)

While the most obvious interpretation of the opening lines of the stanza is that Hopkins is himself straining at the meaning of the nun's exclamation, when read in relation to the previous stanzas' description of the chaotic scene on deck—"The jading and jar of the cart" (l. 210) and "the throng that catches and quails" (l. 190)—it is easy to read lines like "make room there" as the words of the nun herself, straining to see "the sight of it" in the midst of the chaos. Indeed, it is not until the third line of the stanza with the reference to the nun as "she" that we can be certain that we are still operating from Hopkins's perspective and have not been imaginatively placed on the deck of the sinking ship.

The appearance of Christ in the poem seems almost as shocking and sudden as his possible appearance to the nun. He is dramatically announced and re-announced: "There then! the Master,/ *Ips*e, the only one, Christ, King, Head." The lines are affecting in large part because their bold certainty so sharply contrasts with the groping in the dark implied by the opening four lines, as though the *ipse* itself was able to substitute for the ellipses. The next stanza, then, would seem to express not only the glory of the nun's own reading but Hopkins's recovery of it:

Ah! There was a heart right!
There was a single eye!
Read the unshapeable shock night
And knew the who and the why; (ll. 225-228)

At first glance, the tall nun's ability to "know the who and the why" stands in stark contrast to the world of "The Triumph of Life" in which no one knew "whither he went, or whence he came, or why/ He made one of the multitude" (ll. 47-49). However, I will argue that the *Wreck of the Deutschland*, much like *Triumph*, demonstrates the limits of reading within the "immanent frame" of modernity in which "the idea of an immanent order could be understood on its own, without reference to interventions from outside."⁵⁶ However, unlike in *Triumph*, allowing the timeless time of Eucharistic temporality and the linearity of modern temporality to collide within the poem makes the mystery of the wreck, with "mystery" understood as a problem to be solved by inquests, formal and informal, into the mystery of the *Wreck*, with "mystery" understood in its theological context.

"The Mark is of Man's Make": Marking the Wreck

If, as I have argued above, stanzas 28 and 29 appear to represent a triumphant moment of reading, both on the part of Hopkins and the tall nun, their shift in register from the earlier stanzas—which followed the rhetoric of reportage and inquest central to Hopkins's newspaper sources— suggests that whatever reading is occurring here is of a very different type from that of the reader perusing the morning newspaper as "a substitute for morning prayer". Ironically, it is at the moment in which the *Wreck* appears to declare its legibility most clearly that it becomes most opaque to critical readers.

The ellipsis-ridden stanza 28 has by far invited more critical disagreement over its meaning than any other portion of the poem; in this way, it notably parallels the role of the

⁵⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542.

“sacred few” in “The Triumph of Life”. The disagreement centers around the question of what, precisely, the stanza means to indicate. Christ appears in some fashion, but how? In her notes to the Oxford World Classic’s edition of the poem, Catherine Phillips concludes that the next stanza, with its concern with reading the “unshapeable shock night,” excludes the possibility of the nun having an actual vision; rather “[s]he perceived that the storm occurred for a divine purpose.”⁵⁷ Elizabeth Schneider, by contrast, has argued that Hopkins means to proclaim an actual, miraculous event at the scene—a true apparition of Christ—and is ambiguous largely to be politic: “[i]n Hopkins’s circumstances, and for more than one reason, it would not have been proper for him to proclaim a miraculous event explicitly, but there was nothing to prevent him suggesting it as he did, clearly though not quite explicitly, in a poem he would publish, if at all, only with the approval and under the auspices of his order.” She goes on to suggest that the lack of critical attention to this interpretation is due more to an embarrassment among critics that even Schneider confesses to:

It seems likely that many readers may have been aware of these implications in the central stanzas [...] Most have avoided the subject, perhaps because the meaning is distasteful or because it opens up Hopkins to the charge of credulity [...] or because it was desired to save the poem from controversy or skeptical contempt. To ignore the literal meaning of the central stanza would be my own preference if it were not for the fact that this is the pivot upon which the main thought of the poem turns.⁵⁸

Schneider’s claim that stanza 28 involves Hopkins’s asserting “clearly, but not explicitly” a miraculous appearance of Christ is difficult to sustain if we take our standard of “clarity” from the preceding stanzas, which are unambiguous. Moreover, the difficulty of separating Hopkins’s vision from the nun’s makes it difficult to determine *who* is seeing Christ, if indeed a vision of

⁵⁷ Phillips, *Major Works*, 340.

⁵⁸ Schneider, *Dragon in the Gate*, 30-1.

him is what the stanza means to indicate. Nonetheless, it is hard to argue with Schneider's claim that this stanza is indeed "the pivot upon which the main thought of the poem turns," which means that the *crux* of the poem falls precisely at the point where it is most illegible.

Indeed, a key phrase from the stanza adds yet another possible interpretation rather than putting any to rest: "Fancy, come faster." It is only after the invocation to fancy that the poet first begins to formulate the possibility of a vision: "Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there," as though inviting the reader to construct the scene alongside him. Christ does not so much appear in the scene as he is read into it. If we assume it is Hopkins who is exclaiming "Fancy, come faster," it becomes much more difficult to find a correlation between him and the nun whose reading and "wording" of the "unshapeable shock night" is divinely inspired: "Wording it how but by him that present and past,/ Heaven and earth are word of, worded by?" (ll. 229-30). Even if we exclude the valences of fancy that would imply an actual hallucination, the regular association of the term with fantasy suggests that we have left behind the analytic pursuits of the previous stanzas—which at least purport to report and sift through the facts—and moved into a purely imaginative reconstruction of the event. But does this movement away from reporting and analyzing and towards the imaginative and visionary imply a corresponding movement from the immanent to the transcendent? In many ways, we never seem to move beyond the poet's own mind and the ellipses—as indicative of imaginative leap—mark an uncertain (if not simply missed) crossing between ignorance and knowledge, grasping and finding. Yet these crossings are not the sole *crux* of the poem; the other *crux* is the cross itself, the figure of the crucified Christ. The role of the "marked" crossings in stanza 28 only emerges in the double crossing of these *cruces*, which—among other things—represent the crossing of two temporalities and of the transcendent and the immanent.

If Hopkins as reader is set up, earlier in the poem, to be doubled by the nun as reader, then Hopkins as author is doubled by God, who is figured as author at the beginning of the poem and is also associated with the nun's ability to speak: "Wording it how but by him" (l. 229). Yet the passage in the poem in which human writing and divine writing are most clearly linked is an image of crucifixion: the site of a complete *misrecognition* of the divine on the part of humankind. After noting that there were five Franciscan nuns who drowned on the *Deutschland*, Hopkins ties the number to the five wounds of Christ and invokes the order's namesake:

Five! the finding and sake
And cipher of suffering Christ.
Mark, the mark is of man's make
And the word of it Sacrificed.
But he scores it scarlet himself on his own bespoken.
Before-time-taken, dearest prizèd and priced—
Stigma, signal, cinquefoil token
For lettering of the lamb's fleece, rudding of the rose-flake.

Joy fall to thee, father Francis,
Drawn to the Life that died;
With the gnarls of the nails in thee, niche of the lance, his
Lovescape crucified
And seal of his seraph-arrival! [...] (ll. 169-76)

In the reference to Francis's stigmata, we find a scene of reading and writing in which reader and text have been united as Francis's marked body allows him to read God's influence in his life. In its meditation, the stanza suggests that both Francis and the Franciscan nuns have been conformed to the wounds of Christ, by which they have been "sealed" (l. 183). Francis's reception of the stigmata, "Lovescape crucified/ And seal of his seraph arrival!", recalls the image from the beginning of the poem of Hopkins being touched by the "finger" of God but also being "almost únmade" by him. Francis, however, is unmistakably marked—"sealed"—whereas it falls to Hopkins to try to (re)mark the influence of the divine in his life.

Notably, it is directly after the image of the crucifixion and Francis's stigmata that

Hopkins notes his temporal simultaneity with the nuns: “I was under a roof here, I was at rest,/ And they were prey of the gales” (ll. 187-88). Returning to this passage in terms of the dual *cruces* that it is positioned between—the cross of stanza 22 and the attempted “crossings” of the ellipses in stanza 28—we might re-read it not as a scene of doubling between Hopkins and the nun that is meant to reveal their shared character but, instead, as a parallel that is most important for the difference it shows. While the martyrdom of the tall nun suggests a true apprehension of Christ in the world, Hopkins is reluctant to claim such awareness for himself. This uncertainty is dramatized most clearly in the marked hesitation in his attempts, in stanza 28, to grasp what the nun has grasped, a division illustrated visually by the ellipses and semantically by what they leave unsaid. More than a century’s worth of readers and critics still cannot agree on the answer to the central question of the second half of the poem: “The majesty! What did she mean?” Hopkins does give us an answer—“*Ips*e, the only one, Christ, King, Head”—but this is itself a cipher that only invites and repels interpretations of the mystery.⁵⁹ Perhaps the ellipses are themselves an answer, the marks of an illegibility that is both a result of Hopkins’s modernity and a resistance to it.

This change in register appears to abandon the structure of “inquest” that has shaped the earlier portions of part two, since what is found is not another narrative that tries to account for all of the data or a recounting of each lurid detail but, instead, a marking of the limits of either approach. This turn indicates at one level, the increasing inability to speak about God in what J.

⁵⁹ James Cotter argues that a similar religious mystery is suggested by the ambiguous use of the pronoun “it” both in this stanza and elsewhere in the poem. “The mystery of the impersonal ‘it’ is the person of Jesus himself, in creation and beyond human life” and “we can only refer to the mystery as ‘it,’ something passing our comprehension and expression; the word ‘it’ is the best we can do [...] There is really no word that can convey for us the mystery of what transcends our everyday experience. Perhaps an ordinary pronoun that substitutes for the reality is the best we can do.” James Cotter, “The Mystery of ‘It,’” *The Hopkins Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (January 1991), 137; 133.

Hillis Miller has dubbed the age of his “disappearance.” Yet, at the same moment, it preserves as “cipher” that which escapes the discourse of the newspaper altogether. In the “here and now” that defines the “news” we find a pause that both places us directly within the moment and which eludes it, which writes the mystery even as it cannot “word” it.

This mystery pervades the remaining stanzas of the poem, which once again pose a question—one quite aware of its historical circumstances. The possibility of a mass conversion is introduced, as the cry of the nun might “Startle the poor sheep back” (l. 248) but it ultimately only exists as possibility, as question: “is the shipwreck then a harvest,/ does tempest carry the grain for thee?” (ll. 248-49). If we take the question in earnest, rather than being merely a rhetorical presentation of what Hopkins has already discovered in the ruins of the wreck, then we find a repetition of a question that appears in one of the early stanzas in part two:

O Father, not under thy feathers nor ever as guessing
The goal was a shoal, of a fourth the doom to be drowned;
Yet did the dark side of the bay of thy blessing
Not vault them, the million of rounds of thy mercy not reeve even them in? (ll. 93-96)

Far from moving from question to answer, the poem does not even appear to have moved from one question to another. Instead, what is found is the continued cipher of the “past all/ Grasp God, throned behind/ Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides, bodes but abides” (ll. 254-57).

Thus, in the final stanza, that which the poet had previously tried and failed to read—the conversion of the shipwrecked—is transposed into the space of prayer and the futurity of the event:

Dame, at our door
Drówned, and among óur shóals,
Remember us in the roads, the heaven-haven of the reward:
Our Kíng back, Oh, upon Énglish sóuls!
Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a

crimson-cresseted east,
More brightening her, rare-dear Britain, as his reign rolls (ll. 274-78)

England, then, is itself placed between its Catholic past and its possible religious future, its secular present crossed on both sides by the hauntings of that past and the prophecies of a redemptive future. Thus the country finds itself in a liminal position not dissimilar to Hopkins himself at the beginning of the first section.

The Other Dragon in the Gate

In my opening discussion of Hopkins's diacritical markings, I tied their role (stressing an already present rhythm) to the *Wreck*'s insistence that God's omnipresent "mystery" must be "instressed, stressed." In my comments on the ellipses in stanza 28, I suggested that as this stressing is a stressing *of mystery*, the ellipses were able to fulfill this role insofar as they resisted incorporation into the discourse they appeared in and retained their quality as "cipher." Similarly, the diacritical marks (such as the one over "thee" in the first stanza) were most crucial to the perception of the poem when they were at their most inscrutable.

In this conclusion, I would like to go a step further by suggesting that the text that opened this chapter—Hopkins's Preface—exhibits a similar dynamic in its relationship to *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. We have already briefly touched upon the longstanding critical debate that persists about the nature—and even the existence—of sprung rhythm. Jeanne LeVasseur has gone so far as to suggest that Hopkins may have been unable to abstract the details of his own system: "There is abundant evidence that Hopkins had a remarkable ear for the music in language. It is possible that his theoretical observations, however sophisticated, did not match the

intricacies of his verse.”⁶⁰ And then there is Walter Ong’s previously discussed thesis that sprung rhythm is merely part of a larger movement of Victorian poetics towards “interpretive rhyme.” Hopkins’s own seemingly contradictory explanations of the form and the method of its scansion, both in his “Author’s Preface” and in various letters, have only furthered confusion about the topic. One element of this contradiction lies in the tension between invention and discovery in Hopkins’s development of the form. Hopkins wrote to Bridges that “I do not claim to have invented sprung rhythms but sprung rhythm. [...] I mean that single lines and single instances of it are not uncommon in English and I have pointed them out in lecturing [...] what I did do in the *Deutschland* etc is to enfranchise them as a regular and permanent principal of scansion.”⁶¹ While the “Author’s Preface” more or less completely denied inventive power on Hopkins’s part, in the letter to Bridges, Hopkins does claim that he has “enfranchised” this old-new “scansion” in a way not previously done. The comments to Bridges demonstrate that Hopkins was, in fact, aware of the degree to which “recognizing” sprung rhythm was akin to making it and, for that matter, the degree to which it was as much about a method of reading and perceiving rhythm as it was about composition.

In this sense, then, the “Author’s Preface”—that is to say, the (au-)theorization of the form—*creates* the form and its experience in a way that is inconceivable for traditional meter: it allows sprung rhythm to be felt, or at least searched for, even within other rhythms. It functions as a (counter-)time within poetic time. It is this unique dynamic which causes something of the experience of sprung rhythm to be lost when its *praxis* is separated from Hopkins’s own theorization of his language—however bizarre, contradictory, and counterintuitive that

⁶⁰ Jeanne LeVasseur, “Sprung Rhythm: Purged of Dross like Gold,” *Victorian Poetry* 36, no. 4 (Winter 1998), 438.

⁶¹ Hopkins to Robert Bridges, 21 August 1877, Hampstead, *Letters to Robert Bridges*, 45.

theorization may be. Indeed, it is perhaps not only the *Wreck* that stands as a “dragon in the gate” but the Preface itself, which—in its supposed “guidance” in the reading of the poem—actually ensures that the poem “forbids entrance.” And, indeed, it is this experience of being “forbidden entrance” that we must be guided towards in order to at last perceive the “mystery” which must be “stressed.”

Coda

The Obsolete, the Accidental, and the Undead: The Mysterious Survival of the Humanities

Think about this: Everything you know could already be wrong.

-2013 Commencement Speech at the University of Southern California by Jimmy Iovine¹

Obsolescence is not extinction, it's superabundance.

-Marshall McLuhan²

In her criticism of the present academic publishing model in *Planned Obsolescence*, Kathleen Fitzpatrick insists that “[t]he scholarly press book is [...] in a curious state, one that might usefully trouble our associations of obsolescence with the ‘death’ of this or that cultural form, for while it is no longer a *viable* mode of communication, it is, in many fields, still required in order to get tenure. If anything the scholarly monograph isn’t dead; it is *undead*.”³ Considering that such pronouncements have a relatively direct bearing on the future aspirations of this very document, it seems fitting to close my considerations of the “untimely” nature of the nineteenth century with a consideration of how that anachronistic temporality continues to subsist within humanities departments. While Fitzpatrick refers specifically to issues within scholarly publishing, the humanities as a whole can often appear “undead.” One could borrow Fitzpatrick’s formula and say that while the humanities are no longer perceived as a viable mode of education because of their poor “return on investment” in the contemporary economy, they

¹ Jimmy Iovine, “Iovine delivers 2013 commencement address,” *USC News*, May 17, 2013, <https://news.usc.edu/51153/commencement-address-by-jimmy-iovine/>

² A. Norman Jeffares, “Theatre and the Visual Arts: A Panel Discussion with W.H. Auden, Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, and Jack MacGowran,” *Yeats Studies* 2 (1972), p 135.

³ Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 4.

still remain a present part of higher education, not only through degree programs but through their inclusion in general education requirements.

Faced with these claims, the temptation is to demonstrate the continued impact of the humanities by framing them as some sort of disruptive force. Yet locating the value and importance of the humanities in their ability to “disrupt” something already takes for granted the inherent value and necessity of rupture. From leading tech conferences to newly fashioned degree programs, from Über to AirBNB, “disruption” has come to signal the great virtue of the technological age, in which socio-economic revolutions are achieved through the demonstration of the obsolescence of older, institutional forms. The resulting ideology—laissez-faire capitalism married to the rhetoric of social progressivism—embraces the practice implied by its Latin root, *dis-ruptio*, to break apart, and repeats the gesture that Habermas has identified as central to modernity’s conception of itself as radically “epochal”:

The division still usual today [...] into the Modern Period, the Middle Ages, and Antiquity (or modern, medieval, and ancient history) could take shape only after the expression “new” or “modern” age (“new” or “modern” world) lost its merely chronological meaning and took on the oppositional significance of an emphatically “new” age. Whereas in the Christian West the “new world” had meant the still-to-come age of the world of the future, which was to dawn only on the last day [...] the secular concept of modernity expresses the conviction that the future has already begun: It is the epoch that lives for the future, that opens itself up to the novelty of the future. [...] A present that understands itself from the horizon of the modern age as the actuality of the most recent period has to recapitulate the break brought about with the past as a *continuous renewal*.⁴

The rhetoric of disruption has proven especially prominent in critiques of traditional academic structures by major figures in the tech industry. It was at the influential annual TechCrunch *Disrupt* conference that Peter Thiel, the founder of PayPal and president of the investment

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 5-7.

management and hedge fund company Clarium Capital, made headlines in 2010 when he announced the foundation of his “Thiel Fellowship,” which would offer two-year, \$100,000 grants for talented students in STEM fields to “stop out of school” and develop start-ups.⁵ Traditional higher education, in Thiel’s account, had become a “bubble” in which an “extremely overpriced” commodity continued to appear viable because “it is something that is incredibly intensively believed.”⁶ More recently, Jimmy Iovine, co-founder of Interscope records, and Andre Young, the producer and artist better known by his hip-hop moniker “Dr. Dre,” funded the Jimmy Iovine and Andre Young Academy at the University of Southern California, a program inclusive of business, computer science, and art and design courses, whose homepage declares that “the degree is in disruption.”⁷ Other approaches to changing traditional educational structures similarly draw on a language of innovation and tend to frame educational institutions as mired in the past. For instance, Anant Agarwal, the president of EdX, a MOOC (massive online open course) provider originally founded by Harvard and MIT, responded to a question about whether “online learning is a threat to teachers and brick-and-mortar institutions” by saying “I think online learning will augment teachers, by giving them a new tool. What tools have we given teachers since the textbook? I think the only example is in 1862—a piece of chalk. [...] Education needs to transform. Those who don’t and stick to the same old ways, without adapting to new technologies, will be in trouble.”⁸

⁵ “Peter Thiel Has New Initiative to Pay Kids to ‘Stop out of School,’” TechCrunch, accessed June 24, 2015, <http://techcrunch.com/2010/09/27/peter-thiel-drop-out-of-school/>.

⁶ Matthew Shaffer, “Back to the Future with Peter Thiel,” *National Review*, January 20, 2011, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/257531/back-future-peter-thiel-interview?page=5>.

⁷ “USC Iovine and Young Academy,” University of Southern California, accessed June 15, 2015, <http://iovine-young.usc.edu/>.

⁸ Matthew Caines, “Interview with Anant Agarwal, president of edX,” *The Guardian* October 24, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2013/oct/24/anant-agarwal-edx-online-learning>.

As Ted Underwood has demonstrated, the disciplinary structure of literary studies was largely the result of the growing emphasis placed on historical discontinuity in the nineteenth century, an emphasis that undermined aristocratic authority and created a space for middle-class readers. Ironically, though, this valuation of rupture ultimately displaces the academic structure it helped create and relocates authority within a technocracy whose “confident presentism [...] reduces the past to retro style.”⁹ In both the contemporary impulse to preserve the past solely as citable aesthetic and in older forms of intellectual inquiry that predicated their value on a conservative, even reactionary, nostalgic vision, the past is placed at a comfortable distance from the present in order to keep one period pure and untainted by the other.

While older understandings of historical discontinuity may have helped establish the prestige of the humanities, humanists should avoid the temptation to try and rescue themselves from their present disciplinary “crisis” by embracing a new cultural fetish for discontinuity that inherently values rupture, remains critical of any robust concept of tradition, and is closely akin to the language of the “end of history” that is characteristic of a type of late-capitalist determinism. The alternative is not, however, to adopt a differently conservative vision of the humanities in which they represent a simple, unproblematic continuity of tradition. Rather, I will argue that we should see the humanities as representing neither a simple continuity nor discontinuity between past and present but instead an overlap of the two that refuses to purchase the future at the cost of foreclosing the past or vice-versa. While lacking the coherence of pre-modern simultaneity, the present humanities nonetheless depart from the “epochal” temporality of modernity.

⁹ Ted Underwood, *Why Literary Periods Mattered: Historical Contrast and the Prestige of English Studies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 15.

As discussed in the previous chapter, while pre-modern simultaneity involved not merely the overlap of different time periods but also the assumption that the relationship between these periods was inherently meaningful, the modern simultaneity that Anderson locates in newspapers is the result of mere “temporal coincidence.” Our present, digital experience of the simultaneity of texts, events, and domains of knowledge, while similar to the simultaneity located by Anderson, also has its own particular qualities. In *radiant textuality: literature after the world wide web*, Jerome McGann’s description of the textual simultaneity enabled by digitization unites the transcendence of premodern simultaneity with the accidental qualities of Anderson’s modern simultaneity:

When a book is translated into electronic form, the book’s (heretofore distributed) semantic and visual features can be made simultaneously present to each other. A book thus translated need not be read within the time-and-space frames established by the material characteristics of the book. If the hardcopy to be translated comprises a large set of books and documents, the power of the translational work appears even more dramatically, since all those separate books and documents can also be made simultaneously present to each other, as well as all the parts of the documents.¹⁰

Transcending “time-and-space frames,” the electronic book that McGann describes recalls the larger cultural sense that the internet has become the repository of all knowledge, past and present, which no longer needs to be searched for within particular texts that date from particular time periods since information can be “simultaneously present” at the moment of a Google search. This textual experience of past knowledge bears some similarity to Marshall McLuhan’s description of the relationship of the Early Modern period to the Medieval: “The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw more of the Middle Ages than had ever been available to anybody in the Middle Ages. Then it had been scattered and inaccessible and slow to read. Now it became

¹⁰ Jerome McGann, *radiant textuality: literature after the world wide web* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 68.

privately portable and quick to read.”¹¹ This increased accessibility of the Middle Ages, however, hardly replicated medieval culture:

The new homogeneity of the printed page seemed to inspire a subliminal faith in the validity of the printed Bible as bypassing the traditional oral authority of the church, on one hand, and the need for rational critical scholarship on the other. It was as if print, uniform and repeatable commodity that it was, had the power of creating a new hypnotic superstition of the book as independent of and uncontaminated by human agency.¹²

Similarly, in our own time more information has become storable, accessible, and searchable than ever before and the result of this massive archiving of the past has been, instead of the development of a “thicker” historical sense, an understanding of “information” that separates it from any sense of the *épistème* that first produced it as “knowledge.”

Some of the methods prominent in the digital humanities, especially “distant reading,” appear to embrace a similar approach, one where the reduction of the past to a “big data” corpus reinforces the split between present inquiry and past knowledge while also rendering the past as a knowable object. Yet I will argue that certain practices associated with the digital humanities can actually draw attention to the type of “untimely” overlap of past and present that I have traced throughout my project. In the first section of this coda, I will investigate the paradoxical ways in which the “invisibility” of technology appears to make it more legible; it creates a vision of the world that can—if not now than in the future—be fully “read” just as surely as it can be fully encoded, a world that has completely given way to a “disenchanted” modernity. The next section will challenge this fully modern vision by using William Gibson’s influential electronic poem/performance art, *Agrippa (a book of the dead)*, to suggest ways in which computerized

¹¹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 162.

¹² McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 164.

data processing is still capable of producing and sustaining a social imaginary of “mystery.” Moving from Gibson’s deliberate attempts to obscure digital information in ways that ensure the preservation of this “mystery” to the ways in which older digital data is inadvertently obscured by the obsolescence of the software designed to read it, I will argue that Gibson’s text gives us a model for conceptualizing our relationship to the material history of digital archives, one which embraces Alan Liu’s vision of a “humanities education” that “truly does *re*-search: it recovers as much as discovers archaic history in quest of remembrance, reflection, and judgment. It calls for critical timeouts from a world of the ‘known’ that pales in significance to what is unknown *within* the known.”¹³

I will demonstrate how this experience of the “unknown within the known,” as well as the process of recovering that which has been deemed “accidental,” emerges in a different manner through some of the most common forms of computerized reading practices used in the digital humanities, including “distance reading,” the text encoding initiative (TEI) markup language, and algorithms developed for digitizing print texts and for using computers to formally analyze texts. The abilities and limitations of these varied practices demonstrate how the search for literary knowledge, even when aided by computers, remains distinct from the more positivistic epistemologies that are often taken for granted in discussions of information technology. Finally, I will explore the implications of my argument for our conception of the nature and role of the humanities in the present, suggesting that we may wish to embrace the idea of the “undead” humanities.

¹³ Liu, *The Laws of Cool*, 306.

“This Secret with No Mystery”

Commenting on his own personal computer, Derrida referred to it as a “secret with no mystery”:

With pens and typewriters, you know *how* it works, how “it responds.” Whereas with computers, even if people know how to use them up to a point, they rarely know, intuitively and without thinking—at any rate, *I don’t know—how* the internal demon of the apparatus operates. What rules it obeys. This secret with no mystery frequently marks our dependence in relation to many instruments of modern technology. We know how to use them, what they are for, without knowing what goes on with them, in them, on their side; and this might give us plenty to think about with regard to our relationship with technology *today*—to the historical newness of this experience.¹⁴

Digital devices are without mystery not simply due to the fact that they allow us to forget their technological inner-workings; if we love our handheld devices, it is not because they are “magical” but because they let *us* do magic with the swipe of a finger, even though few of us could even begin to describe how a touchscreen actually functions. They are also without mystery because we know that, as opaque as their operations may be to us, they nonetheless must be fundamentally comprehensible since human beings designed and built them. So, for instance, users can be confident that they *could* understand the concept of an integrated circuit while still feeling no need to attain this knowledge. This confident “knowability” of technology arises, paradoxically, through its effective “invisibility.” Lisa Gitelman notes that “technology and all its supporting protocols [...] have become self-evident as the result of social processes [...] as critics have long noted, the success of all media depends at some level on inattention or ‘blindness’ to the media technologies themselves (and all of their supporting protocols) in favor of attention to the phenomena, ‘the content’ that they represent for users’ edification or enjoyment.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, translated by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 23.

¹⁵ Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 6.

And there is a further sense in which the computer represents a “secret with no mystery” that proceeds from this relationship to technical knowledge. The “invisibility” of the computer is not merely a result of its internal components being hidden from sight, or the result of the fact that most users would be hard-pressed to make heads or tails of what was uncovered should they be shown an interior view, or even the result of the absence of attention to the “supporting [social] protocols” that enable the technology. Rather, with the advent of nanotechnology, the governing technology of our time has become, in a very real way, invisible. Without an electron microscope, much of the inner workings of a modern microprocessor would be invisible to even the best computer scientist. Very large-scale computer programs, like operating systems, have coding that is so complex that, while programmers understand quite well the portion of the code that they work on, it can legitimately be said that no programmer fully grasps the details of how the entire program operates.¹⁶

Nonetheless, in a world that is increasingly encoded, we have confidence that everything is ultimately decodable. Nothing is accidental, all is cipher. It is more than mere coincidence that the human genome project must rely heavily on computational analysis for understanding the immense sequences of DNA it uncovers. If the discovery of DNA led us to understand the whole of the biological world as “encoded,” then the development of computing technology alongside biotechnology has held out the promise of also being able to decode that world. It is, in some ways, this confidence in decoding that is responsible for the lack of “mystery” in the “secret”; the ways of God may be unknown to man, but the ways of microprocessors are known to their

¹⁶ Writing in 1999, when operating systems had not yet achieved the complexity they have today, computer scientist W. Daniel Hills observed that “designing something as complicated as a computer or an operating system can require thousands of people. If the system is sufficiently complicated, no one person can have a complete view of the system.” W. Daniel Hillis, *The Pattern on the Stone: The Simple Ideas That Make Computers Work*, 2nd ed., (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 144.

human designers, which lets all of us—regardless of our own expertise—experience them as “knowable” objects. By extension, our ability to generate computing machines and decipher complex sequences assures us that our brains and our DNA, while in many ways still secret to even those who devote their lives to their study, are nonetheless fundamentally knowable.

Yet, in this world with the presumed potential to be fully legible, one of the earliest and most important works of digital literature—William Gibson’s *Agrippa (a book of the dead)*, a poem in scrolling electronic text contained on a 3.5” floppy that was designed to “destroy” itself after it was first run—dubbed itself as the “first digital myth” in part because of its ability to produce *illegibility*:

The publishing of *Agrippa* marks the creation of the first Digital Myth. If the Collector/Reader elects to access the disc, it is an action which ejects the Gibson text into cyberspace. And, there it will remain, perhaps looking like a trace of graffiti, mutating or idling in the Information Net, at least until some super-bright Hacker cracks the original virus, penetrates the form and retrieves the text. The Collector/Reader is a participant in the making of the *Agrippa* myth.¹⁷

The figure of the “super-bright Hacker” who “retrieves” the text would seem to embody perfectly the idea of the digital world as one that is ultimately completely legible, even if only to a small elite. However, as the press release implies—and the history of the poem demonstrates—the Hacker is as much a part of the “Digital Myth” as the locked poem.

Despite the suggestion of a virus, the poem was actually “erased” by almost literally locking the door and throwing away the key. Disk encryption is performed by “overwriting” previous data with code which can then be re-translated into the original message by a user with

¹⁷ “Publisher’s Press Release for *Agrippa* (23 March 1992),” *the agrippa files: an online archive of Agrippa (a book of the dead)*, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://agrippa.english.ucsb.edu/post/documents-subcategories/press-releases-docs/publishers-press-release-for-agrippa>.

the appropriate key.¹⁸ For *Agrippa*, encryption was created but the key was destroyed, not only locking the text but excluding the possibility of any “authorized” reader. While it had no real relationship to what was happening to the data on the disk, the program also ended by superimposing an “encryption-like” sequence on top of the final screen of text. As Michael Kirschenbaum has noted, despite this theatrical performance of “security,” the poem is actually one of “the most available objects on the web.”¹⁹ This irony may be—if one pardons the pun—a feature and not a bug.

While not actually infected with a virus, the leaked text of *Agrippa* nonetheless went “viral” long before the term had gained its more recent, positive connotations. It was the performance of illegibility (which is a *true* illegibility in terms of the actual, original discs), that gave the text its enduring mystique, its “mythical” quality, even after the information it kept secret and secure was entirely exposed to public view. *Agrippa* turns Derrida’s pronouncement on its head: the disc becomes a “mystery with no secret”; the fact that the *original* discs will be inaccessible after being run allows them, through their own illegibility, to secure the “aura” of a work of art that was specifically designed to operate within a world of digital reproduction.

While *Agrippa*’s “unreadability” was intentionally produced, there are increasingly large amounts of data that were meant to remain “readable” that have, in fact, been rendered illegible through the obsolescence of the programs originally meant to run them. This is, of course, one way in which information is influenced by the material history of its medium. As Gitelman puts

¹⁸ Interestingly, secure data erasure is achieved in a not dissimilar fashion: deleted files are overwritten with random data.

¹⁹ Kirschenbaum notes “As an electronic work designed to efface itself, yet paradoxically one of the most available objects on the Web, “Agrippa” reminds us that preservation is ultimately a social domain, where actions of an agency can serve to trump purely technical considerations.” Michael G. Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 218.

it:

Because they are at some level material, one important quality that all inscriptions share is a relationship with the past [...] Our sense of history—of facticity in relation to the past—is inextricable from our experience of inscription, of writing, print, photography, sound recording, cinema, and now (one must wonder) digital media that save text, image, and sound.²⁰

What is especially interesting about digital media is that it is both surprisingly resilient and non-ephemeral (as Kirschenbaum has amply demonstrated) and yet also especially prone to illegibility because of its severing of the site of inscription and the technology of reading (which are united, for instance, in print). While analog technology shares this second quality—records require phonographs to be played, for instance—they do not exhibit the material resilience of much digital data. Digital data is especially subject to remaining both materially present and illegible.

Format obsolescence has proven an especially serious problem for archiving early works of digital literature and art, which often were written to run on obsolete programs or hardware. The disk of *Agrippa* would be unreadable to most computer users now not because of its encryption algorithm but because few of us have access to a floppy drive.²¹ Increased attention is being paid to producing software that recognizes legacy formats and to having similar types of programs (for instance, word processors) utilize a shared format, so that a specification will become so widespread that its disappearance in the near future is unlikely. This is already the case with Unicode and ASCII, forms of text-encoding that have been in use for decades. Despite more recent actions taken to slow the pace of format obsolescence, the encounter with data that

²⁰ Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 21.

²¹ Though, in this case, archiving has occurred through the creation of a video showing the program running on an old Macintosh desktop. Nonetheless, considering the degree to which the material disk was central to *Agrippa*'s mystique, the changing status of that disk within our present technological environment still seems worth noting.

is intact but unreadable has proven a defining experience in the history of digital inscription. Nearly all individuals who have been computing since the 1990s (or earlier) have at some point had the frustrating experience of dealing with an “ancient” file that remains inaccessible on one’s present devices. It is a peculiar encounter with the past, one that returns our awareness to a materiality that we may have been barely conscious of before.²²

There is also a symbolic persistence of this past, as we continue to represent the function of recent technology in terms of past technology. The floppy disk may have long been confined to the dustbin of media history, but its image still serves as the near universal sign of the “save” function on varied applications despite the fact that many younger users may have never handled the material object. Utilizing images and metaphors of older technologies to familiarize newer ones—a concept known as “skeuomorphic design”—has remained a central feature of personal computers since the appearance of the earliest graphical user interfaces. In some cases, however, these visual metaphors—intended to teach users how to interact with new technologies—have themselves become obsolete and debate persists about whether it makes sense to retain objects, like the ubiquitous save icon, when one “would be really hard-pressed to find a new customer today that has ever used a floppy disk like we understood in the traditional sense for saving your files.”²³ The save icon has, in visual design parlance, transformed from a “resemblance icon” to a “reference icon” and, for many younger users, into an “arbitrary icon.”²⁴ Yet, while the semiotic

²² Lisa Gittelman notes how much “like old art, old media remain meaningful. Think of medieval manuscripts, eight-track tapes, and rotary phones, or semaphores, stereoscopes, and punchcard programming: only antiquarians use them, but they are all recognizable as media.” Gittelman, *Always Already New*, 2.

²³ Audie Cornish, interview with Austin Carr. “When A Floppy Disk Icon No Longer Signals ‘Save,’” *NPR*, November 1, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/11/01/164129889/when-a-floppy-disc-icon-no-longer-signals-save>.

²⁴ Jakob Nielsen, “Icon Classification: Resemblance, Reference, and Arbitrary Icons,” *Nielson Norman Group*, accessed July 16, 2015, <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/classifying-icons>.

status of the image has shifted drastically over the past decades, it remains a sort of visual etymology, a piece of media history hiding in plain sight.

In the next section, I will argue that certain approaches in the digital humanities to studying literary texts can produce a similar encounter with the past, one which brings to conscious awareness the material nature of the literary object and its resistance to full incorporation into the interpretive processes of the present.

Decoding the Past: Detection at a Distance

A recent text on natural language processing that was specifically concerned with how it might aid literary study was called *Literary Detective Work on the Computer*. The metaphor of the detective worked well for the types of questions that the algorithms in the text sought to answer: Was this text written by Shakespeare? Are Biblical scholars correct in their hypothesis that the synoptic gospels had a shared, lost source? These well-defined yes or no questions make it clear what mystery is to be solved and the solution could, at least in theory, be externally validated. For instance, one could verify the correctness of the answer to the latter question if the lost “Q” text was in fact discovered.

Of course, while literary scholarship still engages with questions of authorship and sources, the majority of work in the field is concerned with hermeneutic questions that require more extensive answers: What was the influence of the French Revolution on the poetry of Wordsworth? Does Coleridge provide an accurate representation of Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in his *Biographia Literaria*? Moreover, there is a limit to how verifiable any answer could be. Computerized reading may help in answering these questions since it can sort through large amounts of data and identify patterns. Nonetheless, the results of these practices

still require interpretation if they are to help us answer hermeneutic questions about a text and they can never conclusively “prove” any reading, though they can help support it. In his book *Algorithmic Criticism*, Stephen Ramsay notes that it is precisely because of this dynamic that analogues between “humanities computing” and the scientific method significantly part ways. In algorithmic criticism, he argues, “we channel the heightened objectivity made possible by the machine into the cultivation of those heightened subjectivities necessary for critical work.”²⁵

Yet in his seminal study *Graphs Maps Trees*, Franco Moretti is more inclined to emphasize the objectivity of large data analysis, which will in its turn lead to “a more rational literary history.”²⁶ Nonetheless he acknowledges the limits of quantitative study: “Quantitative research provides a type of data which is ideally independent of interpretation. [...] Quantitative data can tell us when Britain produced one new novel per month, or week, or day, or hour for that matter, but where the significant turning points lie along the continuum—and why—is something that must be decided on a different basis.”²⁷ In short, the data must still be read.

One question that occupies Moretti’s research in the book revolves around the development of the detective novel as genre. Considering the earlier metaphor of stylistic analysis as “detective work” and Moretti’s own engagement with the problem of interpretation, this seems a striking choice. Of special interest to his analysis is the development of the “clue” as a feature of the genre. Moretti’s analysis relies on a clear knowledge of a clue’s place within a particular narrative and, as a result, much of the analysis had to be done to by humans (indeed, Moretti does not appear to have utilized a computer at all in the course of this analysis).

²⁵ Stephen Ramsey, *Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011), x.

²⁶ Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2007), 4.

²⁷ Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, 9.

Nonetheless, the standards for evaluating the nature of a clue were clear enough that the human researcher's classification of elements was effectively algorithmic and mechanical. The resulting "tree" that sorts texts according to whether clues are present, necessary, visible (to the reader), and decodable (by the reader) could easily be computed provided that the data for each story was provided as an input. A further analysis of the data, in which the presence of clues in stories is correlated with the date of publication, could certainly be computer generated.

Each of these representations of clues itself represents a clue about the emergence of the detective story as genre. Yet, if Sherlock Holmes has created a "science of deduction" in which "when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth," the interpretation of Moretti's trees can never claim such certainty. At the same time, the diagrams throughout the text, just as those generated by other visual representations of textual data—from word clouds to Google N-grams—create a certain hyper-legibility insofar as their pattern finding is able to find something systematic within a data set that would otherwise be incomprehensible. And, as Moretti rightly emphasizes, it can bring into focus aspects of a *corpus* that would otherwise be invisible to human readers. The "clue" of the visual representation of textual data, then, is—to draw on Moretti's own categories—visible to us and yet never fully decodable. Though, unlike the standard clue hiding in plain sight from a Sherlock Holmes story, in which a stain on a shirt that goes unnoticed by the less observant suddenly becomes the key that unlocks the mystery, the visual representation is clearly present *as* clue even as it proves resistant to interpretation. In this sense, then, it has some kinship with the performative encryption of *Agrippa*, which makes us conscious that something has been locked away.

Particularly when applied to archives from a past beyond living memory, the creation and

consumption of these types of representations, if performed critically, can bring to consciousness the dynamics of our historical relationship to the past. Liu explains them this way:

To remember, witness, testify, or mourn some event of history is not just to refer to that event with the aim of having an effect on an audience. It is to construct that event (or agent, action, object, victim) as significantly ‘real’ in the first place amid all the myriad other formulations of events and participants that make a claim for real significance. Moreover, it is to assert that such past events have a reciprocal influence on the construction of present and future reality. ‘Construction,’ in other words, looks both ways in time: we construct the past that we believe constructs us. What do speech acts of history “perform,” then? They do not perform the “present indicative action”; they perform/construct the historical reality that grounds the very leverage point of the present and indicative in which speech *can* act upon the future.²⁸

To begin to interpret large *corpus* representations is, then, to be consciously aware of the degree to which our relationship to the past is dependent upon constructions that then come to define our present. For instance, in choosing one’s point of focus in many of the types of visual representations of large literary *corpora* provided by the Stanford Literary Lab, such as scatter plots, and then offering an interpretation through that focus, one is immediately aware of what one is excluding as it, quite literally, stares one in the face through the visual presence of outliers.

“Distance reading” also has a close alliance to “surface reading,” in that it draws attention to the superficial elements that are discarded by a “symptomatic” reading that is driven by an impulse to decode: “[w]hen symptomatic readers focus on elements present in the text, they construe them as symbolic of something latent or concealed [...] The surface is associated with the superficial and deceptive, with what can be perceived without close examination and, implicitly, would turn out to be false upon closer scrutiny.”²⁹ In contrast, “surface reading”

²⁸ Liu, *Laws of Cool*, 379.

²⁹ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations* 108, no. 1 (Fall 2009), 3-4.

recognizes in the surface something that “is neither hidden nor hiding,” in which “[a] surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*.”³⁰ At one level, the representations of “distance readings” do not demand interpretation; rather, they represent a fundamentally different relationship to texts, one which values their *presence* as such. In this way, then, the visual representation functions as its own version of the “mystery with no secret,” one which is compelling not simply because it invites interpretation or makes us aware of the process of interpretation but also because it allows us to encounter texts in a non-hermeneutic way, to encounter the text as an independent object.

Encoding the Past

Unlike “distance” approaches to textual analysis, text encoding can force a subjective interpretation of the text while it is in the process of being prepared for an objective, computerized analysis. The challenge of rendering text computer readable has been a part of personal computing almost since its inception, when Unicode was developed as the industry standard for converting individual letters and symbols to binary. Since that time, programmers have continued to try and develop ways that computers can not merely “read” letters but can meaningfully engage with the semantics of a text. Natural language processing is the principal site for such study, but an earlier attempt to encourage computer interaction with texts relied less on developing the machine’s capabilities—through machine learning or otherwise—and more on the abilities of scholars themselves to designate and communicate the most important aspects of a text. In 1994, the Text Encoding Initiative developed “a set of Guidelines which specify

³⁰ Best and Marcus, “Surface Reading,” 9.

encoding methods for machine-readable texts, chiefly in the humanities, social sciences and linguistics.”³¹ Using a markup system similar to HTML, TEI allows scholars to mark elements of a text relevant to their research, including designating rhyme, meter, sentence, clauses, phrases, words, and morphemes. TEI-encoded texts can be read by a variety of textual analysis tools, including Juxta, “an open-source tool for comparing and collating multiple witnesses to a single textual work.”³²

While TEI guidelines are “standard” and “objective” in the sense that there are set forms for designating individual elements (for instance, text found between the symbols <l> and </l> will be recognized as a line of poetry) and that the items designated by these forms are generally unambiguous (lines, rhymes, etc.), the selection process nonetheless involves an intervention into the text that fundamentally (and literally) shapes it. Moreover, there are some situations in which the particular encoding of a text does involve making a critical judgment. For instance, take many of Hopkins’s lines written in sprung rhythm, whose uncertain stress pattern has already been addressed in the previous chapter. There is, of course, the option to encode the text without any designation of rhythm:

```
<l>Thou mastering me</l><l>God! giver of breath and bread;</l>
```

However, further intervention can be employed. For instance, we could divide these lines into feet:

```
<l>
<seg type="foot">
  <seg type="stress">Thou</seg>
</seg>
<seg type="foot">
  <seg type="stress">mas</seg>
  <seg type="none">ter</seg>
</seg>
```

³¹ “TEI: Text Encoding Initiative,” *Text Encoding Initiative*, accessed June 25, 2015, <http://www.tei-c.org/index.xml>.

³² “About,” *Juxta*, accessed June 25, 2015, <http://www.juxtasoftware.org/about/>.

```

        <seg type="none">ing</seg>
        <seg type="none">me</seg>
    </seg>
</l>

<l>
    <seg type="foot">
        <seg type="stress">God!</seg>
        <seg type="none">giv</seg>
        <seg type="none">er</seg>
        <seg type="none">of</seg>
    </seg>
    <seg type="foot">
        <seg type="stress">breath</seg>
        <seg type="none">and</seg>
    </seg>
    <seg type="foot">
        <seg type="stress">bread;</seg>
    </seg>
</l>33

```

In this representation, the <seg> feature, which can be “used to identify any subcomponent of a line which has content,” has been employed to first divide the line into feet and then, within each foot, to designate which syllable should be stressed.³⁴ Obviously, I’ve made specific—and controversial—choices in how I have chosen to encode this line.³⁵ Notably, one thing that such encoding schemes cannot express is ambiguity and so, while I could do any manner of metrical analysis of the text after I’d encoded it, this “objective” analysis will necessarily be dependent on my subjective intervention.³⁶

This example is not a purely theoretical one. Several of Hopkins’s poems that utilize

³³ Line breaks in TEI are often interpreted by programs as signaling line breaks in text. Thus, the following example would likely, in practice, contain all syllables for a word on a single line. Each syllable has been placed on a separate line in this example to increase readability.

³⁴ The TEI Consortium, “TEI P5: Guidelines for Electronic Text Encoding and Interchange,” April 2015, 210.

³⁵ I include this line in particular since Elizabeth Schneider (whose scansion has been encoded in the example) provides her reading of the line in *The Dragon in the Gate* against an alternate one proposed by W.H. Gardner (75).

³⁶ It is possible to construct a TEI document that allows “multiple witnesses” to a single text (*Juxta* is able to both interpret and generate these types of files). However, the type of metrical encoding I’ve demonstrated here would be far more likely to be used in computerized linguistic analysis, in which having multiple readings of the same line would prove counter to effective analysis.

sprung rhythm (though not *The Wreck of the Deutschland* itself) are used in *For Better For Verse*, an online application for teaching scansion developed by Herbert Tucker, a University of Virginia English professor.³⁷ The application allows users to designate feet and stresses by clicking within the lines of poems. The users can then submit their answers and the program will indicate whether or not they have scanned the line correctly. The poems used in the application are TEI-encoded and the application is based on the assumption that there is only one correct reading of each line.³⁸ The editorial choices made in regard to Hopkins's "The Windhover" are interesting. For the third line, "Of the rolling level underneath him steady air and striding," the program identifies the correct scansion and foot division as "Of the ról | ling level undernéath | him stéa | dy áir | and stríding." Hopkins's original manuscript marks the line as "Of the rólling level úndernéath him steady áir and stríding" with small loops under the -ing in "rolling" and "him" to indicate an outriding foot (the Oxford World Classics edition of the poem maintains Hopkins's accent marks but eliminates these other markings).³⁹

The site's explanation of the history of scansion education is telling:

When you learn to scan, you are learning something that anglophone poets from the 14th into the 20th century learned before you. To some extent they learned it by analogy to the classical Latin and Greek versification drilled into nearly all of them at school; in every wider and finer sense, however, they learned it by osmosis, through a process of total immersion in poetry they loved. The poet absorbed their English metrics right off the page, the way a tap dancer picks up a lick on a street corner or a fiddler fingers a riff at a harvest supper. Because, being poets, they had an extraordinary ear for word music, they learned its unwritten rules fast; having mastered them they took the art in new directions that blazed trails in literary history.

This description helps place the student within a larger historical continuum of metrical

³⁷The application can be found at <http://prosody.lib.virginia.edu>.

³⁸ More complete details about the application can be found at <http://scholarslab.org/research/for-better-for-verse/>.

³⁹ Notably, the "outriding foot" marks that Hopkins includes also conflict with the foot divisions of "For Better or Verse," which consistently places outriders in the following foot.

education, suggesting that while the pedagogical methods have changed the central process remains the same. Yet what happens in the application is not merely that these “unwritten rules” have become “written” (there are plenty of books on metrics that have already done that), but a *particular*—and, in some cases, at least partially arbitrary—reading has become *encoded* into the text. The underlying code (see Fig. 1) of the website presents not merely a reproduction of Hopkins’s text (though on the site it does appear as the “bare text” of the poem), it also codifies a reading of it.⁴⁰ Moreover, the user is encouraged to more or less “decode” this “encoded” text of the poem.⁴¹ In a sense, then, this type of encoding puts the literary scholar in an even more fraught position than that of a standard editor. As I suggested in Chapter 3, the interpretive role of the editor becomes inescapable when dealing with texts like the *Triumph of Life*, where the incompleteness of the manuscript forces editorial choices if one is to create anything resembling a “reading text.” Encoding a text like *The Wreck of the Deutschland* in TEI demonstrates how, when editing a text for computerized reading, texts that may not immediately present the same type of challenges as producing a text for human readers can nonetheless necessitate interpretive editorial choices. While text encoding, with its careful attention to an individual text at a minute level is, in many ways, the polar opposite of “distance reading,” it also makes us aware of the process of interpretation. Moreover, it reveals how the limitations of text digitization may paradoxically lie within its capability for seemingly limitless annotation of texts.

⁴⁰ In the process of my research, I was driven to access the code not, in the first place, to discuss it here but because, despite multiple attempts, I proved utterly incapable of “correctly” scanning the line under discussion and was forced to “cheat.”

⁴¹ I don’t mean to disparage this particular application in my analysis here and obviously any educational tool is going to rely on some degree of simplification. The application does attempt to correct for some of these issues by providing a pop-up message once a line is scanned correctly if there is more than one “plausible scansion” of a poem. The application also will occasionally offer a “yellow light” for lines that are “technically correct” but could be scanned with greater nuance. Neither of these options, however, appears in the program in relationship to the line I discuss here.

Exception Handling

Thus far we've focused on our role as readers in the process of digital analyses and text digitization. In this section, I turn to a brief consideration of the computer *as* reader. Exception handlers are used in programs both to protect them from fatal errors and to provide programmers or users with information about what caused the error. In short, they become a “catchall” way for the machine to deal with illegible inputs and illogical instructions. This could include anything from an algorithm being asked to perform an operation on a type of data it is not equipped to deal with to a program being asked to look up a value keyed to a “dictionary” entry that does not exist. The exception handler saves the program from crashing by allowing it to execute an alternate piece of code.

In textual analysis a somewhat different type of “exception handling” can occur.⁴² In this case, the program itself is not threatened by certain inputs—it can run smoothly with them— but these inputs can limit the legibility or use value of the program's output for human users. If text encoding locates the literary scholar in the somewhat tyrannical position of an editor controlling his or her reader's every experience of the text, then the alternative computerized approach to reading puts the scholar largely at the mercy of a particularly naïve reader. If the forms of reading that we have explored thus far all illustrate the degree to which human reading is dependent on exclusion of aspects of, or possibilities in, a text or a corpus of texts, then the forms of reading we will turn to now illustrate how this dynamic appears in its own way through certain forms of computerized textual analysis.⁴³

⁴² I'm deploying the term metaphorically here. Obviously, none of the processes I describe below are actual examples of exception handlers.

⁴³ I have chosen to not treat more recent forms of computerized reading that rely on machine learning techniques in this section. Machine learning is utilized in stylistic analysis, briefly discussed in the section labeled “Decoding the Past,” and explained in substantial detail in Chapter 3 of Michael P. Oakes's *Literary Detective Work on the*

One of the great challenges of having computers process texts is indicating to the machine what parts of a text are meaningful and what parts are accidental. Such sorting of information is more or less natural to the ways that humans process information but machines will (generally) regard all input as meaningful just as they will read all code literally; there is no way to address a machine ironically. A failure to communicate properly to the machine what is accidental and what is meaningful will produce its own sort of “accident”: namely, useless outputs.

If, as Benjamin suggests, mechanical reproduction of art divests it of its aura, its historical and social situatedness, then mechanical reading of print texts moves somewhat in the opposite direction. While the goal of technology like OCR (optical character recognition) is to reproduce print texts in digital form, to transform the print text back into an infinitely-reproducible and transmittable form, the literal-mindedness of computerized reading often ends up introducing, through reproduction, traces of the material nature of the text in ways that hamper its semantic quality. A simple example is the way in which supplementary textual information from a print page—things like the repetition of chapter and book titles and page numbers in the header or footer of individual pages—can easily find its way into an OCRed document and, as a result, can confound attempts to generate a meaningful data set for textual analysis. The more “irregular” a text, the more difficult it is to accurately convert it. Handwritten texts, texts with varied layouts, older texts, and texts with stains, fading, or other material flaws tend to be so poorly read by machines that they often must be rekeyed by a human.

Computer. Machine learning techniques have also been used in formalistic analyses, see for instance Hoyt Long’s work in progress “Literary Pattern Recognition: Modernism between Close Reading and Machine Learning.” Machine learning, because it relies less on human input, does not appear to exemplify the same type of dynamics that I am interested in here and doing justice to the topic would require more space and technical competency than I have.

In a clean, regular print text, however, many problems can be controlled. To take a simple example, if one were to look for occurrences of the term “Mansfield Park” in *Mansfield Park*, having the header within the data set would completely skew the results. Yet such problems can easily be dealt with. The program can be told to ignore the top 1” of every page, for instance. Such exclusions ensure that the text generated is meaningful, but these exclusions also become a (literally) marked part of the process. A similar result occurs when using algorithms to “clean up” a text before subjecting it to OCR through binarization and denoising; such techniques are often employed on historical texts in less-than-perfect material condition.⁴⁴ Here also the algorithms serve as an archive of the exclusions that were employed to make the document “readable.”

A related technique is employed when generating simple visualizations like word clouds. As a general rule, such algorithms exclude articles, forms of “to be,” pronouns and other commonly occurring words that would almost certainly dominate the representation and, importantly, would tend to make most word clouds look much more similar than they otherwise would (see Figs. 2 and 3). The words that are excluded are grammatically essential but, it is assumed, meaningless in themselves, accidental to the true content of the text. But, as with OCR, the computer must be told that these elements are accidental; they remain present (in the code of the process) in order to be excluded from the final product.

Such dynamics may seem unrelated to the question of how the humanities relate to the present; there is nothing inherently historical about this type of analysis (though the materiality of older documents is much more likely to hamper OCR). It does, however, relate to one of the

⁴⁴ For a detailed technical discussion of the use of these algorithms on historical documents, see Maya R. Gupta, Nathaniel P. Jacobson, and Eric K. Garcia, “OCR binarization and image pre-processing for searching historical documents,” *Pattern Recognition* 40 (2007): 389-397.

principle concerns about the present *of* the humanities; namely, the anxiety that literature will be reduced to “raw data” in the course of computerized analysis. It is assumed that treating a literary text as data will strip it of its integrity, that it will reduce literature to the sum of its parts. If Wordsworth’s concern was that literature would lose its universal power by becoming too particular, the concern here is that literature will lose its singularity through its reduction to mere particulars. However, with the simple examples I’ve provided above, I would like to suggest that regarding a piece of literature as a data set may, in its own way, resist the process of literature’s “datafication” by making legible the exclusions that render such a process possible. These “accidents” shape, at the level of code, the process of computerized knowledge production. In the final section, I will consider the humanities’ own “accidental” status in relation to contemporary modes of knowledge and value production.

The Undead Humanities

The rhetoric surrounding the humanities is not merely one of obsolescence but carries with it the assumption that their obsolescent nature also makes them accidental and discardable. In the textual analysis tools I have briefly touched on here, I have suggested that one of the most important things that these practices demonstrate is the curious subsistence of the accidental, of that which cannot be incorporated into a particular system and thus must be excluded. By being “behind the times,” the humanities perpetually demonstrate that they do not belong to the present. At the same time, as cultural conservatives still occasionally note, they no longer belong to a coherent past tradition. Thus, schemes to “save” the humanities generally involve them either “catching up with the times” or serving as the last bastion of a past model of culture and education.

The continued existence of humanities departments despite their refusal—or inability—to heed either course of action has granted them a certain monstrosity; it is thus unsurprising that one of the principal gothic metaphors that digital humanists often reach for in describing their work is that of Frankenstein's creature, the living embodiment of *pastiche* and herald of growing interdisciplinary possibilities. The fragmentation of traditions and disciplines are granted new life through re-mixing. It is a metaphor that necessarily directs itself to the future; the dead past brought to life in a creature of the future, the creation of a human being, the child of science, who needs only a more caring and humane father than Victor to thrive. I would suggest, however, that we might also draw on another gothic, nineteenth-century figure to describe the curious place of the humanities: the vampire.

Moving among the living, the vampire always gives himself away by his archaism: an obsolete turn of phrase, the wrong cut of a shirt collar, questionable interior design choices. He is a relic of the past and a dangerous one. Unlike the ghost, who merely haunts the present, the vampire actively dwells within it, living off of it. And, unlike the brainless zombie—the other “undead” metaphor we often reach for in describing unnatural persistence—he is a cunning, seductive character fully capable of concocting devious schemes. His chief asset is that the better part of the population have ceased to believe he exists and the old ways of putting meddlesome corpses to rest—wooden stakes, holy water, and crucifixes—have been all but forgotten and must be searched for in the mouldering pages of ancient books long ago dismissed as exercises in superstition.

The vampire is a more embarrassing figure than Frankenstein's creature. Even if he has not always been campy, he's never had a place in the highbrow (and only rarely in the middlebrow); *Dracula* lacks the searching philosophical qualities of *Frankenstein* and remains

only slightly more respectable than its present day young adult progenies. Dracula was himself only the resurrected form of old folktales repackaged in the modern form of the epistolary novel. He's an almost comically discordant figure, ever trying and failing to ape the present age, betraying himself by hundreds of gestures that his victims may miss but readers immediately recognize. Once one drags him into the light of day the gig is up and he disappears forever, leaving the present to itself. It is understandable, then, why he is a less culturally attractive image for the humanities. I confess myself to a certain degree of embarrassment about leaving the last word of this dissertation—which has otherwise stayed comfortably within the canon—to such a blatantly ridiculous figure. Nonetheless, I think this embarrassment is itself instructive.

The text that began this study—Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*—much as it aimed to separate the work of the poet from that of the “man of science,” was still eager to demonstrate that literature constituted a legitimate form of knowledge even within a scientific age; thus, it sought to disavow any affinity between Wordsworth's poems and the “sensationalistic” and “sickly” popular fiction of the day. As Mary Jacobus has amply demonstrated, this distancing largely involved Wordsworth consciously leaving behind the gothic, supernatural, and superstitious elements of the ballad revival when he composed his contributions to *Lyrical Ballads*. In many ways, our present model of the humanities repeats several of the rhetorical gestures of Wordsworth's Preface. As Wordsworth attempted to find commonalities between the “Man of Science” and the Poet, we have largely structured research in the humanities on the same model as that of the sciences. In both cases, the results have been, at best, mixed. Both attempt to demonstrate the continued relevance of humanistic inquiry to modern life but neither have been able to fully escape the older *epistémès* in which the value of these inquiries was taken as self-evident even as shifting social and cultural forms have

destroyed the *habitus* necessary for a more traditional humanistic approach. Put more bluntly, there is no widely recognized good reason for the continued presence of the humanities nor are we likely to find one. Yet their “archaism” does unite them to a larger experience of popular consciousness.

Arguably, the most pervasive cultural influence of nineteenth-century literature is the continued embrace, in popular culture, of the “sensationalistic” themes that Wordsworth worked to avoid. Indeed, if any vision of the past has come close to matching Silicon Valley’s rhetoric of “obsolescence,” it is the perverse intermixing of past and present in the gothic, “undead” creatures that increasingly inhabit mass-consumed books, television shows, and films. The ties between the rise of zombie films and anxieties about scientific development and the experience of the late-capitalist subject have been extensively documented; however, the rise in superstition (both as fictional theme and social practice) may also be read as the unwitting progeny of progressivist narratives that seek to leave behind the cultural memory of the past.

Dracula’s self-presentation in its opening epigraph suggests some of the important features of this phenomenon:

How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief may stand forth as simple fact. There is throughout no statement of past things wherein memory may err, for all the records chosen are exactly contemporary, given from the standpoints and within the range of knowledge of those who made them.⁴⁵

The vampire, representative of a dark and superstitious past, must be rearticulated as “simple fact” through the discourses of the present in order to render viable a “history at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief.” This attempt to render the impossible past in the rationalistic

⁴⁵ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003), 5.

language of the present remains a regular feature throughout the narrative, yet the inherent and almost insurmountable conflict between that past and the present remains as the vampire necessarily falls outside the true “range of knowledge” of any human character in the text and, even when the vampire reveals himself, his existence remains nonetheless “at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief.” Like Dracula himself, *Dracula* represents not the synthesis of past and present but their perverse coexistence, the past in the present as death-in-life.

Like the vampire whose very existence seems impossible, a devil who should have been exorcised when it was proven that he never existed in the first place but who nonetheless stubbornly and destructively persists into the present, the humanities’ potential for having a continuing cultural impact—which is not the same thing as their “relevance”—lies in their status as an obsolescent object which, despite its archaism, persists in its life-in-death. Or, to borrow another metaphor, their inarticulacy and increased inscrutability—it is sometimes difficult even for those of us in the discipline to explain what exactly it is that we do—may make them nonsense or may make them a mystery in and to a “demystified” world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, M.H. *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. New York: Norton, 1971.
- Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Edited by David H. Higgins and translated by C.H. Sisson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991.
- Aristotle. *Poetics*, translated by Joe Sachs. Newport: Focus Publishing, 2006.
- Ascoli, Albert R. "Dante and Allegory." In *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*. Edited by Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, 128–35. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.
- Attridge, Derek. *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce*. London: Methuen, 1988.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Balfour, Ian. *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Ballinger, Philip A. *The Poem as Sacrament: The Theological Aesthetic of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Leuven: Peeters, 2000.
- Bennett, Andrew. *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus. "Surface Reading: An Introduction." *Representations* 108, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 1-21.

- Bloom, Harold. *Shelley's Mythmaking*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.
- Boyson, Rowan. *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment Idea of Pleasure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Bundock, Christopher. "A Feeling that I was not for that hour/ Nor for that place': Wordsworth's Modernity." *European Romantic Review* 21, no. 3 (2010): 383-89.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*. Edited by David Womersley. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.
- Caruth, Cathy and Geoffrey Hartman. "An Interview with Geoffrey Hartman." *Studies in Romanticism* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 631-52.
- Caesar, Michael. *Dante: The Critical Heritage, 1314(?) - 1870*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Notebooks*. Vol 1. Edited by Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christensen. New York: Pantheon Books, 1957.
- Collings, David. *Wordsworthian Errancies: The Poetics of Cultural Dismemberment*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.
- . "After the Covenant: Romanticism, Secularization, and Disastrous Transcendence." *European Romantic Review* 21 no. 3 (2010): 345-361.
- Cotter, James. "The Mystery of 'It.'" *The Hopkins Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (January 1991): 131-38.
- Culler, Jonathan. *Theory of the Lyric*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Davis, Charles T. "Dante's Vision of History." *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society* 118 (2000): 243-59.
- De Man, Paul. *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

- . “The Rhetoric of Temporality.” In *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983. 187-228.
- . “Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant.” In *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*. Edited by Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984. 121-144.
- Derrida, Jacques. “Signature Event Context,” translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. In *Margins of Philosophy*. Edited by Alan Bass, 307–30. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- . *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- . *Paper Machine*, translated by Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- . *Specters of Marx*, translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- . “No Apocalypse, Not Now: Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives.” Translated by Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis. In *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. Edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, 1:387–409. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Eilenberg, Susan. “Mortal Pages: Wordsworth and the Reform of Copyright.” *ELH* 56, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 351–74.
- Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy*. New York: NYU Press, 2011.
- Gatrell, V.A.C. *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868*. Oxford:

- Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.
- Guest, Gerald B. "Narrative Cartographies: Mapping the Sacred in Gothic Stained Glass." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 53/54 (April 1, 2008): 121–42.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990.
- Hamilton, Ross. *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Hartman, Geoffrey. *The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954.
- . *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964.
- . *The Fateful Question of Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- . "Reading: The Wordsworthian Enlightenment." In *The Wordsworthian Enlightenment: Romantic Poetry and the Ecology of Reading*. Edited by Helen Regueiro Elam and Frances Ferguson, 31–44. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005.
- Higgins, Lesley. "Reckoning up the Ellipses in Hopkins's Poetry." *Hopkins Quarterly* 40, no. 3-4 (Summer 2013-Fall 2014): 69-94.
- Hillis, W. Daniel W. *The Pattern on the Stone: The Simple Ideas That Make Computers Work*. 2nd ed. New York: Basic Books, 2015.
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *The Major Works, including all the poems and selected prose*. Edited by Catherine Phillips. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- . *The Later Poetic Manuscripts of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimilie*. Edited by

- Norman H. MacKenzie. New York: Garland, 1991.
- . *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Edited by Christopher Devlin. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- . *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. London: Oxford University Press, 1956.
- . *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*. Edited by Claude Collier Abbot. London: Oxford University Press, 1955.
- . *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*. Edited by Claude Collier Abbott. London: Oxford University Press, 1955.
- Jacobus, Mary. *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.
- Jarvis, Simon. *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Jay, Paul. *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- Jeffares, A. Norman. "Theatre and the Visual Arts: A Panel Discussion with W.H. Auden, Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, and Jack MacGowran." *Yeats Studies* 2 (1972): 127-38.
- Johnson, Barbara. "Strange Fits: Poe and Wordsworth on the Nature of Poetic Language." In *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*. Edited by Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Johnston, Kenneth R. *Wordsworth and The Recluse*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Keble, John. *Sermons Academical and Occasional*. London: Parker, 1848.
- Kirschenbaum, Michael. *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012.

- Klancher, Jon. *The Making of English Reading Audiences 1790-1832*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.
- Kneale, J. Douglas. *Monumental Writing: Aspects of Rhetoric in Wordsworth's Poetry*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.
- Larkin, Peter. "Wordsworth's Maculate Exception: Achieving the 'Spots of Time.'" In *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Promising Losses*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Lawler, Justus George. *Hopkins Re-Constructed: Life, Poetry, and the Tradition*. Continuum: New York, 1998.
- LeVasseur, Jeanne. "Sprung Rhythm: Purged of Dross like Gold." *Victorian Poetry* 36, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 431-42.
- Liu, Alan. *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. *God Without Being*, translated by Thomas A Carlson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Marks, Clifford J. "Fragments and Fragility: Permeable Foundations in 'The Triumph of Life.'" *European Romantic Review* 10, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 515-41.
- Martin, Robert Bernard. *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life*. New York: Putnam, 1991.
- Matthews, G.M. "'The Triumph of Life': A New Text." *Studia Neophilologica* 32, no. 2 (January 1, 1960): 271-309.

———. “Review.” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 66, no. 4 (October 1, 1967):

597–605.

McGann, Jerome. *radiant textuality: literature after the world wide web*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Miller, J. Hillis. *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth Century Writers*. New York: Schocken, 1963.

Milton, John. *The Poetical Works of John Milton*. Ed. Helen Darbishire. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*. London: Verso, 2007.

Newman, John Henry. *Parochial and Plain Sermons*. London: Rivingtons, 1868.

Notopoulos, James A. *The Platonism of Shelley; a Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1949.

Oakes, Michael P. *Literary Detective Work on the Computer*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2014.

Ong, Walter J. “Sprung Rhythm and English Tradition,” in *Hopkins: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Edited by Geoffrey Hartman. Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice Hall, 1966. 151-

O'Rourke, James. *Sex, Lies, and Autobiography: The Ethics of Confession*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006.

Pfau, Thomas. "'Elementary Feelings' and 'Distorted Language': The Pragmatics of Culture in Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads." *New Literary History* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 125-146.

———. *Wordsworth's Profession: Form, Class, and the Logic of Early Romantic Cultural Production*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

———. *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Rajan, Tilletama. *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Ramsay, Stephen. *Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011.

Ravinthiran, Vidyan. "Dante and Shelley's Terza Rima." *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* 61, no. 2 (April 2011): 155-72.

Reiman, Donald H. "Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life': The Biographical Problem." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 78, no. 5 (December 1963): 536-50.

———. *Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study Based on a Text Newly Edited from the Bodleian Manuscript*. Illinois Studies in Language and Literature: 55. Urbana:

- University of Illinois Press, 1965.
- , ed. *Peter Bell the Third: A Facsimile of the Press-Copy Transcript; And, the Triumph of Life: a Facsimile of Shelley's Holograph Draft*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley. New York: Garland, 1986.
- Roberts, Hugh. *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry*. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.
- Rollinson, Philip. *Classical Theories of Allegory and Christian Culture*. Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne University Press, 1981.
- Rosen, David. *Power, Plain English, and the Rise of Modern Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Rosenberg, Daniel and Anthony Grafton. *Cartographies of Time: A History of the Timeline*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010. .
- Schneider, Elizabeth. *The Dragon in the Gate: Studies in the Poetry of G.M. Hopkins*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. Edited by Donald H. Remain and Neil Fraistat. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Siskin, Clifford. *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Smyser, Jane Worthington. "Wordsworth's Dream of Poetry and Science: The Prelude, V." *PMLA* 71, no. 1 (March 1956): 269–75.
- Stelzig, Eugene L. "Coleridge in The Prelude: Wordsworth's Fiction of Alterity." *The Wordsworth Circle* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 23–27.

- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Taylor, Diana and Sarah J. Townsend, editors. *Stages of Conflict: A Critical Anthology of Latin American Theater and Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.
- Underwood, Ted. *Why Literary Periods Mattered: Historical Contrast and the Prestige of English Studies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Warminski, Andrzej. "Missed Crossing: Wordsworth's Apocalypses." *MLN* 99, no. 5 (December 1984): 983–1006.
- . *Material Inscriptions: Rhetorical Reading in Practice and Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.
- Weinberg, Alan. "Shelley and the Italian Tradition." In *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Edited by Michael O'Neill, Anthony Howe, and Madeleine Callaghan, 444–59. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Weiskel, Thomas. *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- White, Deborah Elise. *Romantic Returns: Superstition, Imagination, History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Wordsworth, William and Dorothy Wordsworth. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*. Edited by Chester L. Shaver, Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill. 2nd ed. 8 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967-93.
- Wordsworth, William. *Complete Poetical Works*. Edited by Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936.
- . *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*. Vol. 2. Edited by W.J.B. Owen and Jane

Worthington Smyser. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.

- . *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*. Edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H Abrams, and Stephen Gill. New York: Norton, 1979.
- . *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*. Edited by Nicholas Halmi. New York: Norton, 2014.