

**ROMANTIC MEDIACY, SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS
AND THE IDEOLOGIES OF AUTHORSHIP**

A Dissertation

by

BUMSOO JON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2012

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Romantic Mediacy, Self-Consciousness and the Ideologies of Authorship.

(August 2012)

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How did Romantic poets react to Wordsworth's preoccupation with immateriality, an illusion of poetic experiences in which the form of poetry itself becomes ironically unnecessary? To what extent is Romantic poetry involved with a counter-tradition of self-exposure, with an awareness of literary experience and meaning as essentially inseparable from its physical form? To address these questions, my dissertation looks in three directions: first, at the evidence of contradictions in Coleridge's lyric poems and, second, at Keats's reflexive alertness to the techniques that Wordsworth often uses to achieve the lyric effects of immediacy and, third, at the changing nature of the Romantic notions of the self and the materiality of text in the wake of Charlotte Smith's experiment with paratext.

Chapter I explores the critical implications of Wordsworth's emphasis on the mind and individual subjectivity, which involves a myth of Romanticism that genuine poetry can be attained when its production and existence in the material world become paradoxically invisible. Examining the publishing history of Coleridge's poems of

poetic failure, and his conflicting motives for re-writing them, Chapter II argues that Coleridge's self-conscious poems have been considered, erroneously, in terms of a deeply private genre in which the poet describes a moment of personal crisis involved with the breakdown of his creative power. In Chapter III, I show how Keats debunks Wordsworthian notions of solitary authorship in the *Hyperion* poems via his persistent references to the act, artifice and materiality of writing. Reading *Beachy Head* as a challenge to the Romantic fiction of a unified self, Chapter IV argues that Smith's preoccupation with print apparatuses and discursive modes highlights her refusal to integrate the competing voices and styles she displays in the poem, preventing readers from easily associating the hybrid poetic persona with her earlier lyric ethos. Chapter V builds on the concept of hypermediacy, an awareness and artistic representation of mediation, in order to argue that the ways in which Coleridge, Keats and Smith represent the act, process and materiality of writing indicate a counter-tradition in Romantic literary culture that challenges the predominant Wordsworthian logic of immateriality.

DEDICATION

To my parents

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: INTIMATIONS OF IMMATERIALITY AND
WORDSWORTH'S MEDIUM

This dissertation aims to explore the complexities of Romantic-period response to William Wordsworth's Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). I intend to discuss the topic via the concept and paradoxes of modern or Romantic authorship, the Romantics' media-consciousness, and the significance of their writing as media theory. To appreciate Romantic poetry in its complexity, it is necessary to approach it with regard to what media theorists have called "the double logic of remediation."¹ In their writing, Romantic poets and their critics are preoccupied, on the one hand, with advancing an illusion of immediacy (*unmediatedness*, in other words), which is part of what Jerome McGann has called the "Romantic ideology": i.e., Romanticism's own self-representations perpetuated by artistic and critical traditions.² Since McGann and others took up the arguments Romantic poetry advanced, there has been a major reevaluation of the operation of literary and social institutions or, in Michel Foucault's terms, the "author-function" of Romantic poetry, which means the institutions and ideological mechanism of Romantic poetry that articulate the artistic and critical representation of Romantic poetry and promote a self-conscious return to the

This dissertation follows the style of the *MLA Handbook*.

discursive practice.³ Yet the poetry of the period can also be explored in terms of the Romantics' increasing disappointment in the contradictions of their own illusions, as well as in terms of their growing consciousness about the medium of their poetry and its status. This dissertation aims to explore how the predominant critical representation of Romantic poetry has indeed misrepresented the Romantics' simultaneous involvement with *hypermediacy*, their reflexive investment in envisioning their poetry as a site of contestation between differing theories of media(-tion). The problems of sincerity and authenticity, on the one hand, and of self-representation and materiality, on the other hand, increase the richness and complexity of our understanding of Romantic creativity. Also, by drawing upon critical vocabulary from textual studies and social theories of authorship, I intend to suggest that the Romantics were self-consciously engaged with the idea that particular manifestations of text and its formal discomfort affect the construction of meaning. The Romantic emphasis on the form and presentation of poetry calls for a change to the Romantic ideology of solitary authorship that literary (re)production is dependent on the activity of a mind.

In his Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) Wordsworth's view of the general situation of media in his time is unfavorable, if not bleak. His thought tends to be reductive when he characterizes "the rapid communication of intelligence" (which has been made possible then by inventions such as the semaphore telegraph and the stagecoach) as merely one of the "evil" forces that "hourly gratifies" city dwellers'

“craving for extraordinary incident” and finally “blunt[s] the discriminating powers of the mind”; Wordsworth goes on to suggest that popular literature of his time has also become prey for the “degrading” lust for excessive stimulation.⁴ Despite the glaring disapproval of the media revolution of his time, Wordsworth’s Preface is arguably the most important critical essay of the Romantic period, representing a bold cultural statement that has preoccupied the critical appraisal of the volume and British Romanticism in general. Indeed, the Preface signals a revolution in literary history, proposing a new model of poetry in which it is crucial to understand how “our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement”; the goal in Wordsworth’s model of literary composition is to surrender oneself to associations and get used to the habits of mind so that poems (which, as he acknowledges, are in fact a product of long and profound thought) may be produced at length “by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits” (745).

The famous expressive theory of poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” is contradictory, however, because, if poetry arises from what Wordsworth calls “emotion *recollected* in tranquility” (my emphasis) then the “origin” of poetry, as Andrew Bennett points out in *The Author* (2005), is at least one remove from the emotion the poet originally experienced. The emotion so “recollected” and “contemplated” in the act of composition is therefore both a copy and an original itself. And, as Bennett indicates, in Wordsworth’s model of creativity the copy finally comes in to replace the original (64). One can find a similar critical discrepancy in Percy Bysshe

Shelley's conception of writing, too. In *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) Shelley uses an "harmonizing" aeolian lyre as a metaphor for imagination, which for him is not merely subject to external and internal impressions, but can "accommodate" its own expression (i.e., poetry) to the motions of the original impressions immediately and even after the original stimulations have faded away.⁵ Indeed, this metaphor of poetry as a both responsive and re-creating instrument is a reaffirmation of Shelley's own idea, in "Mont Blanc" (1817), that the human mind both "renders and receives fast influencings" (38)—which itself is a reiteration of Wordsworth's idea of the eye and ear as half-perceiving and half-creating ("Tintern Abbey").

The Romantics' preoccupation with poetic *immediacy* can be reexamined in terms of their media-consciousness. For example, in the Preface Wordsworth announces, in a peculiarly submissive voice, that a principal purpose of the 1800 volume is to "follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind" (745). While this statement underscores the importance of the poet's responsiveness to external stimulation, it also indicates an essentially expressive and subjective model of poetic composition as an *utterance* driven by the principles of pleasure. In his 1800 Note to "The Thorn" originally published in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth attempts to vindicate poetic effects of tautology, arguing that words in poetry "ought to be weighed in the balance of feeling, and not measured by the space which they occupy upon paper" (351). It is not a shame for a speaker, he argues, to use the same words in order to satisfy a craving in his mind and communicate passion in its entirety. In other words, "the mind attaches to words, not

only as symbols of the passion, but,” as Wordsworth insists, as “*things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion” (351, original emphasis). Unlike communicative, mediatory models of language, such a formulation of poetry as a direct utterance or projection of the poet’s *mind* illustrates how the Romantic insistence on immediacy is rooted in the illusion of language’s transparency. For example, though Wordsworth admits in the Preface that the power of any art is somewhat limited, language for him is a superior medium because, as he suggests, it is “purer, more lasting, and more exquisite” in nature (760); here the supremacy of language rests ironically on the idea that the medium is untainted by physicality and hence is easier to disappear from reader’s consciousness.

The Romantic misconception about pure language is reiterated by Shelley in *Defence* in which the poet privileges language because it is “more direct” (i.e., less mediated) than other materials and instruments of art such as color, form, and motion. Language, Shelley says, is produced arbitrarily and relates to thoughts alone, while other artistic materials and instruments, he indicates, constitute an extraneous addition to the ideal relationship between conception and expression (513). As Celeste Langan and Maureen N. McLane suggest in “The Medium of Romantic Poetry,” the idea of language as a mirror superior to all other materials that Shelley denounces as “enfeebling clouds” (“Mont Blanc”) has been articulated in Abrams’s influential argument that Romanticism can be defined in terms of the eighteenth-century transformation of the idea of literary composition: from a mirror held up to nature to a lamp emitting light from a singular

source, the poet (252).⁶ In the expressive model of Romantic creativity it is, in the end, not language (whether metrical or prosaic) that matters but in fact the human mind which, with its “inherent and indestructible qualities,” functions as the only medium free of distortion (Wordsworth’s Preface 747); and here we see the grand Romantic illusion of *unmediated transmission*. The Abramsian metaphor demonstrates how Romanticism has been defined by privileging one culturally aristocratic idea of medium, mediation, and media-consciousness over another.

However, as I shall try to indicate later, the assertion of media transparency and immediacy—a belief that a medium could “remedy” the tension between experience and representation—should be understood in parallel with the Romantics’ simultaneous involvement with “hypermediacy.” Chapters II-IV concentrate on exploring the complexities of Romantic responses to Wordsworth’s Preface, illustrating the contradictions inherent in the Romantic ideology of solitary authorship. To address these questions, I focus, on the one hand, on the Romantics’ reflexive alertness to their techniques that are often used to achieve the effect of immediacy, while on the other hand I explore Romantic projects that consciously trace, in themselves, the markings of mediation, challenging the Wordsworthian plea for poetic spontaneity.

Chapter II discusses how Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poems of poetic failure, for example, constitute a revealing meta-poetic gesture that points to rare moments when Romantic poetry foregrounds its own medium, procedures and condition of enunciation and leads us to rethink the terms in which Romantic poetry itself is conceived. I shall

indicate that the confessed absence of authentic vision involves multiple historical layers and textual instability, showing how our interpretation of the Romantic meta-poems can be enriched significantly by an awareness of the meaning of the text as inseparable from its physical form, rather than adherence to the orthodox view of the genre as a hallmark of Romantic sincerity, a product of pure lyric improvisation. Chapter III explores the ways in which John Keats debunks Wordsworthian notions of solitary authorship by means of his self-representation and the tropes of material textuality inscribed in his *Hyperion* poems. I read Keats's self-conscious presentations of the act, artifice and process of writing through his symbolizing of the mechanics of poetry-making and of the dangers of solipsistic solitude associated with a Wordsworthian image of the poet. Chapter IV explores Charlotte Smith's experiment with the reflexive roles of paratext, a textual space typically associated with masculine and imperial authority. My point in this chapter is that in *Beachy Head* Smith's preoccupation with print apparatuses and discursive modes highlights her awareness of the material *and* ideological constraints on her own literary production, furnishing a real-world anchoring of my thesis about the uncertainties attendant upon a material text of the Romantic era. I argue that Smith's materialist aesthetic contributes to a reassessment of the critical representation of Romantic poetry and the putative lyric subject.

In the Conclusion (Chapter V) I focus on the concept of hypermediacy, an awareness of mediation, as a valuable means to account for the ways in which Romantic poets react to the predominant Wordsworthian logic of immateriality, marking a

dialectical counter-voice, even a counter-history, within Romantic literary culture. I suggest that the ways in which Coleridge, Keats and Smith envision the act, artifice and process of writing indicate alternative theories of Romantic mediacy, which help us challenge critical conventions about what matters in privileged canons of Romanticism, where immediacy had been achieved by concealing signs of mediation from the text.

Notes

¹ For current discussions of a culture's contradictory imperatives for immediacy and hypermediacy, see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999); and David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins, ed., *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition* (2003).

² Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (1983). For other influential studies that question the assumptions of M. H. Abrams, Harold Bloom, and others, see Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (1981); Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (1993); James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (1998).

³ See Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?"

⁴ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), 746-47. All further references to Wordsworth's poems or critical prose appearing in (or related to) *Lyrical Ballads* are to the Cornell Wordsworth volume, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, edited by James Butler and Karen Green and are included in the text by page numbers (for prose) or line numbers (for poetry). References to Wordsworth's other works are also to the relevant volumes of the Cornell Wordsworth series.

⁵ *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* 511. All further references to Shelley's work are to this edition and are included in the text by page numbers (for prose) or line numbers (for poetry).

⁶ In *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), Abrams argues that by the mid-eighteenth century the primary purpose of literature was no longer a reflection of nature; instead, he proposes a model in which poetry is figured as the Wordsworthian "overflow, utterance or projection of the thoughts and feelings of the poet" (21-22). The mirror previously held up to nature is now imagined to be transparent, while pointing to the subject as the source of significations.

CHAPTER II

**THE POETRY OF BREAKDOWN AND THE BREAKDOWN OF POETRY:
THE ROMANTIC AUTHOR IN CRISIS
AND THE IDEOLOGY OF COLERIDGE’S SELF-CONSCIOUS POEMS**

This chapter explores Coleridge’s confessions of being unable to write poetry. Coleridge is certainly not the only one who produced poems of the sort, but he is arguably the most prolific writer of the genre, with some of his best-known poems attending to reflexivity and a vision that is not emergent but is frustratingly absent—most notably in “Dejection: An Ode,” “Frost at Midnight,” “Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement,” “The Eolian Harp” and “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison.”¹ Lyrics of this sort may at first glance seem to be a paradox by their very existence and, sometimes, by their apparent poetic power, as evidenced by Coleridge’s statement in “Dejection” that the poet’s voice, like its metaphorical counterpart in the Eolian harp’s, “better far were mute,” meaning, outrageously, that it would be better if the poem in the reader’s hand had never come into being.² Moreover, this curious genre is not unique to Romanticism; poetry about the failure of the poetic process is just one kind of metapoetry, which indeed is not a Romantic invention.³ In a sense literary language is self-reflective by its very nature. By promoting an awareness of the “palpability of signs,” the poetic function of language, dominant in literature, deepens the “fundamental

dichotomy of signs and objects” exhibiting its awareness of itself as medium, as Roman Jakobson notes (356).⁴

Yet, despite the evident paradox in the definition of the genre and the metapoetic nature of the lyric per se, the poem of poetic failure has its peculiar resonance in Romantic studies because of Romanticism’s predominant focus on the subject who makes the work rather than the literary work itself. As concepts like “imagination,” “genius,” “vision” and “spontaneity” are so central to Romantic notions of the creative process, a potentially troubling representation of the poet as being unable to generate any “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” has the effect of bringing to the fore the question of the Romantic ideology of authorship. “The grand illusion of every Romantic poet,” as McGann has argued, is the idea “that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins of history and culture” (*Romantic Ideology* 91). If the very “triumph” of Romantic poetry lies ironically in its *failure* and comes when “the pursuit [of vision] is thwarted and interrupted, and finally broken” (134), it is fair, then, to say that poems about the failure of the poetic process lucidly dramatize the very triumphant—and acutely painful—moment of Romantic poetry exhibiting the artificiality of the unachieved vision.⁵ In this respect, the dialectic between an absent vision and self-conscious perspective on that condition not merely destabilizes any definition of the elusive genre, but also leads us to rethink the terms in which Romantic poetry itself is conceived.⁶ As we shall see, the Romantics’ reflexive struggle for vision foregrounds its

own procedures, medium, and condition of enunciation, and the specular moments point to contradictions inherent in the very construction of the “Romantic” author.

Further, as Jakobson reminds us again, since the poetic function is not the only function of language in literature, we shall examine the discontinuity of the Romantics’ social circumstances inscribed in their metapoetic discourse, rather than see their works as intensely private, meditative lyrics. The poem of poetic futility is not merely a deeply private lament for dulled creative faculty but is a mark of just how deeply the Romantics themselves were concerned about cultural representations of the poet during the eighteenth century; the genre offers a violent illustration of social desire that, as Bennett has observed in *The Author* (2005), at the emergence of the Romantic—and more generally the modern—conception of literary authorship as a professional craftsman of words, indeed recollects and “takes us back before writing to a tradition of oral epic narrative” in which “the epic singer is indeed represented as a prophet or seer” retaining his/her connection with divine inspiration (36). Therefore, Romantic poems of imaginative failure should be seen both as intimate records of individuals in artistic frustration *and* as an open, if stylized, question about the transitions and contradictions involved in understandings of authorship in the period. The Romantics make changing conceptions of their role into a subject as their works invite sympathetic readerly identifications with the poetic speaker, who is often found to take a stand against a society from which the poet-prophet is radically alienated.

Reading Poems in Their “Place”: Double Alienation in “Frost at Midnight”

One of the key characteristics of Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight” (1798) is its self-referentiality, its status as a poem about the mind attending to the workings of itself. The poem delineates the way consciousness develops an observation of its own process of assimilating the objective world. As K. M. Wheeler observes in *The Creative Mind in Coleridge’s Poetry* (1981), the poem’s speaker is trying to build an atmosphere of “nowness” by giving the reader the impression of reporting what is happening to him at the moment. What contributes to the effects of this improvisatory gesture is not only “external objects observed, assimilated, and made actively present and valuable to the mind” but, as Wheeler suggests, the very procedure of “assimilation” that becomes an object of observation (95). In other words, the illusion of *inwardness* and extemporization, marked by a sense of urgency that seems to call for the rhetorical act itself, ultimately relates to an image of mind that is being developed—and threatened—from the outset of the poem. The image of mind is figured most prominently in the speaker’s meditations on Hartley’s sensitivity to natural things, and in the tropes of “frost” and the “films” of flame he watches at the moment. Both tropes, with their deeply ambivalent connotations, represent either a creative force or an idle, degenerate spirit, and thus illustrate imagination’s inherent conflict and the speaker’s skepticism about the role of “self-watching subtilizing mind.”⁷

Consequently, readers have argued that the poem’s primary concern involves lyric impulse of the poetic speaker who, by means of his baby, is finally able to

overcome the limits of time and space he confronts. For example, Wheeler claims that an illustration of the poem's arguable move to transcendence is the final stanza in which the myth of childhood, "a permanent state of imaginative play," is valuable for the adult speaker as a "metaphor for rejecting and overcoming preconditioned response, habit, and the prejudices of adulthood" (102). The idea of the ending as a prospect of resurrecting creative receptivity finds an echo in Kelvin Everest, who also sees the silence at the end as a confirmation of the unity of mind with nature, with the speaker finally overcoming the separateness shown at the beginning of the work (270). This reading is not entirely unfounded given Coleridge's apparent interest in a monologic lyric persona as he was engaged in extensively rewriting the poem, which ironically carries an air of extemporization. As Stillinger has shown us, there are at least ten extant versions of "Frost at Midnight," beginning with its 1798 published text, and what the evidence suggests is that Coleridge tended to shorten the poem, "cutting out half a dozen lines from the end" in order to conclude with the line, "silent icicles, / Quietly shining to the quiet Moon" (*Instability* 74). In consequence, readers of any versions other than the earliest one reach an ending in which the poetic speaker refers again to "the secret ministry of frost" and returns to the idea of one's communion with nature, though this time the state of mind is not to be attained by himself but is attributed to his baby. The circular structure of the revised ending may be useful for reinforcing the awareness of reciprocity, at least providing the speaker with a means to overcome the threatening

silence of the opening as he now hopes his child will retain the quiet interaction with nature.

The drama of subjectivity, however, is only part of a double alienation Coleridge's poem indicates; the Romantic emphasis on the subjectivity of an isolated individual involves a reaction against the alleged dehumanizing qualities of industrialization and dramatic changes in politics during the Revolutionary period. It appears that "Frost at Midnight" foregrounds the idea of continuity when its ending offers a seemingly descriptive account of "*all seasons*" (my emphasis) which, the speaker hopes, "shall be sweet" to his child Hartley now gently sleeping next to him (65). As we shall see, however, reflection on the poem's publishing context and intertextual relations informs us of its socio-political exigencies, and enables us to read it in terms of the uncertainty about one's own beliefs and the discontinuity of social circumstances; it is fruitful to reinsert "Frost at Midnight" into the context of its initial publication in the quarto pamphlet *Fears in Solitude* (1798) containing (in addition to "Frost at Midnight") "Fears in Solitude" and "France: An Ode," two poems that in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) and afterward Coleridge placed among "Poems Occasioned by Political Events or Feelings Connected with Them."

Coleridge, like many other Romantic poets, used poetic collections as a means of self-fashioning and self-advertisement. As commentators have noted, it is crucial to consider the meaning and importance of the decisions poets make about the presentation of their works, since an act of selecting and arranging poems into a Romantic collection

not only affects our understanding of them but inevitably informs us of how the Romantics used their poetic collections to construct their public personas.⁸ For example, the poems in *Fears in Solitude* have been positioned out of chronological sequence to set up a frame for the book:

“Fears in Solitude” (composed April 20, 1798)

“France: An Ode” (composed Mar-early April 1798; published in the *Morning Post*, April 16, 1798, under the title “The Recantation: An Ode”)

“Frost at Midnight” (composed Feb 1798)

As early in the volume as in “Fears in Solitude,” the opening piece, Coleridge’s appreciation of nature’s tranquility and the domestic comfort is already restrained by his awareness of political failure. As Roe convincingly demonstrates, the poem (and Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” too) can be read in terms of Coleridge’s and Wordsworth’s radical years (which came to an end with their removal to Germany in 1798) and their respective experiences of the repressiveness of Pitt’s government and the presence of a government spy sent to investigate their suspicious activities in the “beautiful recesses” of Alfoxden.⁹ By providing the volume’s title poem with a subtitle, “Written April 1798, During the Alarm of an Invasion,” Coleridge immediately establishes his recognition of the rumored war at home with France as an imminent sign of apocalypse. And he continues to present his British “brethren” with a dramatic plea for action in defiance of what he now calls “an impious foe” and a “light yet cruel race”

(136-37). Moreover, he uses the title poem to publicize his lifelong love of his country and the natural world, which he claims is the source of all his “sweet sensations” and “ennobling thoughts” (184). This kind of natural patriotism not only helps him justify his mistaken, former support of the French Revolution, and affirm that true liberty is found only in nature (“France: An Ode”), but also sets up his account of the events later in the volume leading to his promise to educate future generations (as represented by his son) amid the English countryside (“Frost at Midnight”).

The rhetoric that Coleridge chose for “France: An Ode,” the intermediate poem in the volume, is curiously equivocal. Written at the time of the French Revolution and its aftermath in the 1790’s, especially Napoleon’s invasion of the Cantons of Switzerland, the exigencies of the poem involve the growing discomfort in England and her allies with how the French are occupied with “inexpiable spirit / To taint the bloodless freedom of the mountaineer” (632). Napoleon army’s campaign in the Swiss Alps shocked many liberals and conservatives in England and other European countries, leading them to suspect the French’s adherence to the Revolution’s original aims or even abandon their support for France altogether. In “France: An Ode” Coleridge addresses the situation in a noticeably diplomatic manner though, as his primary concern involves not so much a disappointment over the French’s engagement in imperialistic aggression as a general disillusionment with all “forms of human pow’r”:

Alike from all, howe’er they praise thee
(Nor pray’r, nor boastful name delays thee),

Alike from priesthood's harpy minions
 And factious blasphemy's obscener slaves,
 Thou speedest on thy subtle pinions,
 To live amid the winds, and move upon the waves! (93-98)

True liberty, the speaker declares, is found neither with institutionalized religion (“priesthood’s harpy minions”) nor with the French revolutionaries (“factious blasphemy’s obscener slaves”); nature instead is recognized as genuine “temples bare” in which the individual human soul is thought to be able to commune with “all things” without restraint (633). Instead of giving an affirmative statement about the nature of those relations in nature, Coleridge seems to defend his authority by just repudiating what he deems false agents of liberty. The negative elements are referred to for emphasis, and they may be useful for making a point through implication; but the construction may in fact cause confusion about the intended meaning or even annoy the reader.

The idea of natural liberty as remote from all social institutions pertains, though, to the specifics of the political debates of the 1790’s, and “France: An Ode” in fact offers valuable clues about the political nature of the predicament the stalled imagination will soon confront in the final poem of the volume. The poem’s double targets find expression in the second stanza, in particular: it points, on the one hand, to the illusions in the British reaction to France, calling into question the increased “patriot[ic] emotion” (34) in England and the “dire array” (31) of the European monarchs England joined in

1793 to counter France. On the other hand, the stanza draws a certain line between the writer's political radicalism and the French revolutionaries as it alludes to the selfishness of the French in the Swiss Alps: "For ne'er, oh Liberty! With partial aim / I dimmed thy light, or damped thy holy flame" (39-40). "France: An Ode" thus keeps readers from identifying a clear association between the poet and any forms of political power, although his aloofness in the poem, which is placed in the middle of the *Fears in Solitude* volume, can be read as conciliatory gestures to his enemies rather than a sign of complete indifference to politics. Since the passage of the notorious "Seditious Meetings and Treasonable Practices Acts" in 1795 the British government took severe measures against what it deemed to be seditious speech and writing. Generally associated with a radical strain of British politics, Coleridge uses the quarto pamphlet as an opportunity, in part to improve his public image as an obstinate critic of government policy, in part to protect Joseph Johnson—London-based radical bookseller who published the volume—from a severe sentence for seditious libel in mid-July 1798.¹⁰

Coleridge's engagement with this kind of self-advertisement at this moment is evidenced by his growing concern about where and when to publish his work. For example, when an earlier version of "France: An Ode" was contributed in April 16, 1798 to the *Morning Post*, originally a Whig paper, purchased by Daniel Stuart (1766-1846) in 1795, who converted it into a moderate Tory organ, Stuart's brief editorial note to the poem clearly illustrates in what public context the media placed the poem:

The following excellent Ode will be in unison with the feelings of every friend to liberty and foe to oppression; of all who, admiring the French Revolution, detest and deplore the conduct of France towards Switzerland. It is very satisfactory to find so zealous and steady an advocate for freedom as Mr. Coleridge concur with us in condemning the conduct of France towards the Swiss Cantons.¹¹

Stuart's preface re-marks "France: An Ode" as a piece of propaganda aimed at drawing an emotional response from conservatives in Britain. The editor deliberately sets aside Coleridge's comment on British patriotic sentiment and the "dire array" of monarchical resistance while clearly constraining the poem's rhetorical purpose into a "very satisfactory" herald of the poet's renouncement of his former belief in the French Revolution. It must be noted though that the poet himself, too, takes part in influencing the initial reception of the work, since his choice of the particular publishing venue and the original title he selected for it—"The Recantation: An Ode"—strangely publicize a particular political cause instead of encouraging his readers to read the ode in terms of a purely subjective agenda.

The multiple historical layers and publishing conditions complicate our understanding of Coleridge's love of nature in "France: An Ode," and eventually enable us to contextualize the nature/civilization binary in the final poem in the volume, "Frost at Midnight," which appears at first glance to have nothing to do with politics. "Frost at Midnight" looks as if it were an "intensely subjective, meditative lyric" exploring the

isolated consciousness of its author; but, as Magnuson argues, the poem is also a “public speech act” when reinserted into the contemporary public context, and into its relationship with two other poems contained in a volume that was composed as Coleridge’s “public defense of his caricature drawn in the Tory press” (*Reading Public Romanticism* 67). Coming after two poems of recantation in the quarto volume, “Frost at Midnight” presents “a patriotic poet,” as Magnuson says, whose patriotism depends on “the love of his country and his domestic affections” (78). Further, the final poem in the collection presents nature as the antithesis of those in power at that moment, though the direct opposite of nature, which is the subject of “France: An Ode,” is now deliberately absent in it.

This reading is not negated at all by the later position of “Frost at Midnight” among “Meditative Poems in Blank Verse” in the published *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) and thereafter. Surprised at the initial mispositioning of the poem among the political poems in the proofs of the 1817 collection, Coleridge queries, “How come this Poem here? What has it to do with Poems connected with Political Events?”; he insists, “It *must*, however, be deferred till it[s] proper place among my domestic & meditative Poems,”¹² exemplifying an authorial intervention to place the poem under an optimistic vision of timelessness and transcendence, rather than his (or Johnson’s) political radicalism. Given Coleridge’s highly politicized representation of nature in the preceding two poems, the final piece seems, however, to portray a doubly alienated subject, who suffers, on the one hand, from a disillusionment with political conflicts in the post-Napoleonic context

and, on the other, from the consciousness of poetic failure represented in the duality of the frost image, which constitutes the poem's overall tone of uncertainty imbedded in a mysteriously quiet surface. If the recurring image of the "secret ministry of frost" is not merely a metaphor for natural phenomena but rather characterizes mind's self-reflexive critique (72), the real problem suggested in the poem's generalized reference to "all seasons" involves not so much natural cycles of changes as one's psychological states and, perhaps more importantly, social existence. The image of sharp, cold, "silent icicles" in the final lines of "Frost at Midnight" demonstrates that the poem's problematic images of frost, which are symptomatic of imagination's immanent anxiety, still remain unresolved. The eloquent image testifies to the crucial differences between the social existence of the stymied lyric speaker and his child, a problem to which previous readings of the poem's "universal reciprocity" pay little attention.

Poems of "Lyric Improvisation" and Conflicting Motives in Rewriting

The irony of the Romantic self-conscious poems is that far from losing him- or herself in a pure rupture of unforced emotion—in this case, an intensely subjective and meditative one at the loss of his or her creative energy—Romantic poets appear to have engaged on purpose in the demanding task of rewriting. The reality of what the Romantics actually did and how these works were actually produced suggests that the prevailing idea of Romantic spontaneity and the orthodox view of the genre as poems of pure lyric improvisation are much too simple to deal with the poems of poetic failure,

which are often interestingly diverse in their textual history and remarkably unstable in their mode of existence. The so-called pinnacles of Romantic meditative poetry frequently exist in numerous separate versions instead of a single definitive text, and they often involve divided—even conflicting—motives in revising.

Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," a fine example of Romantic meditation on the decline of the creative mood, is best known in a later edition (the printing in *Sibylline Leaves* of 1817), but the various drafts and stages of manuscript composition give us as many as fifteen versions of the poem whose text is rendered increasingly unstable in the process of revision.¹³ A quick look at the principal versions among them should suffice to prove the inconsistent character of the poem in revisions. The nature of the two earliest versions—Mary Hutchinson's transcript in fifty-eight lines and a holograph text, a line longer than the preceding version and originally titled "A Letter / April 4, 1802.—Sunday Evening"—has been characterized by Stillinger as "a hodgepodge" of passages of a broad range of quality concerned primarily with Coleridge's loneliness and his desperate love for Sara (*Instability* 96-98). The first printing of "Dejection" in Stuart's *Morning Post* of October 4, 1802 ironically commemorates Wordsworth's wedding (and the seventh anniversary of Coleridge's own unhappy marriage with Sara Fricker), and the peculiar rhetorical situation of this version is also implied in the doctrinal passage about receiving "but what we give," the idea that "[Our life] is [nature's] wedding-garment, ours her shroud," immediately followed by his spirited resistance to materialistic views of nature: "that inanimate cold world allowed / To the poor loveless

ever-anxious crowd” (47, 49, 51-52). However, even the first printed version of the poem represents a partial text, given “The sixth and seventh Stanzas omitted,” as marked in a bracketed note, implying Coleridge’s uncertainty about how to bridge the gap between the central statement about suspension of his “shaping spirit of Imagination” in stanza 5 and the “eddy of [the Lady’s] living soul” developed in a new final stanza. The authorial note that the sixth and seventh stanzas were still omitted just replaces a couple of rows of dashes that Coleridge had marked in the preceding version, in his letter to Robert Southey of 29 July 1802, presumably to indicate an ellipsis with the comment, “Here follow a dozen Lines that would give you no pleasure.”¹⁴

The multiple versions of “Dejection” differ so drastically in subject and theme from one another that recent commentators even suggested that an early and a late textual states can be considered to be two separate works in the Coleridge canon. Stephen Parrish, for example, in the preface to his study of the early manuscripts of the poem, maintains that the first printed text is “an altogether different poem” from the much longer versions copied a few months earlier in the manuscripts (*Coleridge’s “Dejection”* viii), and Gene Ruoff explores how Coleridge cut and altered the lines in successive revisions, changing both theme and tone in the process;¹⁵ Stillinger adds to Parrish’s discussion of the early manuscripts and printings, suggesting that the rest of the versions of “Dejection” have their “separate legitimacy” as well. Given the changing addressee of the poem—“Sara,” “Wordsworth,” “Edmund,” “William,” “Edmund” again, and finally the unnamed “Lady,” in order of time—and other revisions, Coleridge

changed a private, domestic poem of passion into a public, “almost academic exposition of the shaping spirit of imagination,” as Stillinger observes (92).¹⁶

I agree with these scholars and argue further that even a single, authoritative textual state still presents conflicting emotions and motives inherent in it. The text as printed in *Sibylline Leaves* of 1817, usually considered a “complete” text in print, for example, indicates Coleridge’s phenomenal work done to redress many of the thematic and stylistic discrepancies prevalent in the early versions; but even this mature version still attests to the essentially contested nature of the poem’s rhetorical goals. For example, Coleridge’s tropes for wind and weather used early in the poem are inherently ambivalent in their meaning. When Coleridge describes a moaning Eolian lute surrounded by the alluring tranquility of the night and its new moon “overspread with phantom light” (10), the lines involve the state of both natural surroundings and the imaginative spirit of the speaker. A portent, therefore, of the “coming-on of rain and squally blast,” which promises to “startle this dull pain, and make [the speaker’s soul] move and live” again, effectually indicates the nature of the poem as a lament for vision’s loss and a prayer for its return (14, 20).¹⁷ The omen of “the new moon / With the old moon in her arms” as suggested in the epigraph, where Coleridge alludes to the thirteenth stanza of *The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens*, is thus transformed into a harbinger of poetic rebirth. However, this version presents the poem not merely as a meditative one, one of healing from poetic failure (“My genial spirits fail”), but one of *political* failure and unwanted (self-)discipline as well, given his psychological representation of

nature particularly in stanzas 6-7, which offer striking allusions to the suppressive forces of “Reality’s dark dream” that “suspends” and “[steals] / From [the poet’s] own nature all the natural man” (39, 95, 85, 89-90).

For “The Eolian Harp,” usually considered the first of Coleridge’s “conversation poems,” at least sixteen separate manuscript and printed versions survive, ranging from fifty-one to sixty-four lines in length, titled differently: “Effusion XXXV,” “Composed at Clevedon, Somersetshire,” or “The Eolian Harp.” As Stillinger has convincingly demonstrated, these versions comprise substantial changes in the formal structure, the tone, and the subject matter, too, with the first published version focusing on domestic happiness associated with an incident of early married life of Coleridge, while the latest version conveys a philosophical meditation on serious topics (28); nonetheless, as Stillinger affirms, the version of the poem taken most often by critics is “almost always that of 1828-1834,” and the canonical one in particular is that in Coleridge’s *Poetical Works* of 1834 (*Instability* 35). Yet the poem was first published in 1796, entitled “Effusion XXXV,” as part of *Poems on Various Subjects* collection, indicating Coleridge’s original plan to number his poems as “effusions,” inspired outpourings of strong emotions.¹⁸ The poem, however, was not published under that title again. Instead, the latest and now-standard title—“The Eolian Harp”—lays greater stress on the metapoetic nature of the poem, with the instrument associated with the Greek god of wind working as a trope for the mind celebrating its own redemptive potential.

The final lifetime edition of 1834 contains Coleridge's famous celebration of the pantheist "one life within us and abroad" in lines 26-33 which, first published in the errata to *Sybilline Leaves* (1817), constitute the most substantial addition to this version. This change demonstrates the general direction of revision that Coleridge continues in the volume; still, the 1834 text displays varieties of tone and motives in rewriting, defying the conventional reading of it as a purely meditative Romantic lyric. Coleridge's celebration of the pantheist beliefs in lines 26-33 in particular embody an increasingly Wordsworthian understanding of human relations to nature,¹⁹ which, interestingly, is to be renounced later in the poem in his own self-reproof of "such shapings of the unregenerate mind," his "vain philosophy's aye-babbling spring" (55, 57), indicating how ambivalent Coleridge's language remains in the latest revision yet.

In fact, the passion for the sensibility of human mind and for nature's formative effects on it does not dictate the shape of the earliest extant version of the complete poem, either. The 1796 text, which as Stillinger notes is otherwise "very close to the wording of 1834," varies substantively though in its heading, "Effusion XXXV. / Composed August 20th, 1795, at Clevedon, Somersetshire," and in a lack of Coleridge's major pantheist statement in lines 26-33. Another striking detail appears at the back of the 1796 volume; *Poems on Various Subjects* features a note to line 60 where Coleridge refers to his wife Sara's criticism that his pantheist beliefs ("vain philosophy") are lacking in the Christian faith that "inly feels." In the note Coleridge quotes a long

sentence from Madame Roland's *Appel à l'impartiale postérité* (1795), which in a popular English translation of the same year reads as follows:

The Atheist is not, in my eyes, a man of ill faith: I can live with him as well, nay, better than with the devotee; for he reasons more; but he is deficient in a certain sense, and his soul does not keep pace with mine; he is unmoved at a spectacle the most ravishing, and he hunts for a syllogism, where I am impressed with awe and admiration.²⁰

The implications of the quote are twofold. First, by referring to Madame Roland—an influential member of French revolutionary politics well-known for her strong influence on her husband's political achievements—Coleridge's note partly contributes to the early version's apparent emphasis on married life and domestic happiness which, as Stillinger points out, is contained in conventional gender relations: “the husband's crazy ideas are chastised by the superior common sense and piety of his wife” (*Instability* 37).²¹ This is indeed the way Charles and Mary Lamb read the poem in its original setting. On 31 May 1796 Lamb, Coleridge's oldest friend, told the author of the poem that his sister and he found the final paragraph of the poem “most exquisite” and delightful, “as conveying a pleasing picture of Mrs. C. checquing your wild wandrings [*sic*]” (*Letters* 1:12).

Coleridge's entertaining image of his wife giving “a mild reproof” (49) of his mental fantasies may contain domestic overtones and have comic effects on the reader, but the poet's endnote to “Faith that inly feels” could also be read in different, public

contexts as well.²² In England, the popularity of French copies of Madame Roland's memoirs led to the above English translation published in 1795 by Johnson, who would also publish later in 1798 Coleridge's *Frost at Midnight* which, as I discussed above, has a significant bearing on the way the Romantic poet uses the trauma of visionary failure as a means to publicize his public persona. Interestingly, the quote from Madame Roland—who was later accused of having Royalist sympathies and thus guillotined during the Reign of Terror—emphasizes sensibility as more important than pure reason. And this rhetoric evokes Edmund Burke's widely-known defense of sympathy and sensibility over reason as a means of moral and political agency. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) Burke commits himself to a rhetorical project that establishes sentiments and passions as a foundation of “the moral order of things,” of relationships based on inheritance, landed interests, and the chivalric ideals of “proud submission,” while at the same time he warns the reader against the “sentiments” espoused in Richard Price and other radical Dissenters' discourse during the Revolution debate in England (47, 44).²³ Given its parallel to Burke's emotional rhetoric urging one's sentimental attachment to awe and admiration, Madame Roland's passage, quoted in the 1796 text of Coleridge's poem, can be read as indicating the poet's growing ambivalence toward both the Revolution and the beliefs of his fellow English radicals; by making reference to Madame Roland's description of the atheist as one who reasons but is deficient in feeling, Coleridge is not only launching an oblique attack on Godwin's thought—which he criticized (perhaps most sharply in his *Conciones ad Populum* a year

earlier) for its atheism and selfish moral degeneracy—but also suggests his growing disillusionment, too, with French Revolutionary politics, which in this poem is contained in a deceptively peaceful domestic setting and conversational tone coupled with a Burkean rhetorical masking.

Coleridge introduces the new heading, “Composed at Clevedon, Somersetshire,” as he reprints the poem in *Poems of 1797*, his next volume of verse published in collaboration with Charles Lloyd and Lamb. In that version, he not only removes “Effusion” from the heading, but drops the category of effusions altogether in the collection and repositions “Composed at Clevedon” among his predominantly domestic pieces such as “Ode to Sara, Written at Shurton Bars,” “Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement,” “Sonnet: Composed on a Journey Homeward, the Author Having Received Intelligence of the Birth of a Son,” and “Sonnet: To a Friend Who Asked, How I Felt, When the Nurse First Presented my Infant to Me,” among others. The dropping of “Effusion” as a category in 1797 suggests a waning role of Coleridge’s improvisational ethos in the poem, and, as Stillinger sees, the placing of “Composed at Clevedon” in the volume now gives it a “totally new context of surrounding selections” (32). Further, Coleridge repositions the note (the quotation of Roland’s *Appel*) more prominently this time at the foot of the page rather than at the back of the volume, and yet he curiously drops it altogether after 1803. Nevertheless, the shifting role of the note in the poem, I should say, informs us of the poem’s political subtext that Coleridge’s later revisions effectually suppress as they become increasingly engaged in intensifying

Coleridge's public persona speaking with an eccentric lyric voice and domestic overtones.

The *Place* of Lyric Failure: Representation, Discontinuities and Ideologies

Another project on poetic futility that went through a similar course of rewriting is a poem called "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." Many commentators have read the poem—mostly in its standard version—in terms of the way in which it is structured around some principal oppositions, with the sense, for example, of loss and depression at the beginning getting displaced by beauty and harmony the speaker rediscovers later in an attractive arbor scene;²⁴ however, the poem's inherent conflicts can be explained in terms of its thematic focus shifting over time in revisions as it was first drafted in the summer of 1797 in the form of a public letter addressed to Lamb, but survives in a series of revisions spanning over nearly four decades with the last major alterations made sometime between 1817 and 1828.²⁵ In a copy of *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) that seems to be "Coleridge's own copy with his corrections & some notes by HNC [Henry Nelson Coleridge, Coleridge's nephew, son-in-law, and editor]"²⁶ Coleridge introduces substantive alterations in 40 ("wide" for "wild") and drops most of the remainder of the paragraph describing "a living thing / Which acts upon the mind—and with such hues / As cloath the Almighty Spirit, when he makes / Spirits perceive his presence," suppressing the pantheistic overtones of the "wide landscape" and its effects on the mind. Nonetheless, the emendations in the annotated copy constitute an erratic revision as

Coleridge interestingly cancels the removal of the lines when he republishes the poem later in *The Poetical Works* (1828), in effect reinstating the text of *Sibylline Leaves* (but incorporating other substantive corrections in the errata of the 1817 volume into the printed text).²⁷

Other alterations to the heading and the opening lines of the poem represent an interesting shift in the implications of “this lime-tree bower” as a site of creative failure and remedy, rather than that of isolation and kinship. The earliest extant text of “This Lime-Tree Bower” can be found in Coleridge’s letter of July 1797 to Robert Southey, who would publish the poem later in his *Annual Anthology* (1800) under the title, “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison, A Poem Addressed to Charles Lamb, of the India-House, London.” In August 6 and 14, 1800 Lamb wrote Coleridge that he felt uneasy about the way he was identified in the subheading and was called “gentle-hearted Charles” in the text (*Letters* 1:217-18, 224). A simple but clever idea for Coleridge to get what he wanted without having to give cause for his friend’s concern was dropping the identification of Lamb in the poem’s heading in all versions after 1800; he kept the epithet instead, addressing “gentle-hearted Charles” as merely an unknown friend, while retaining an original feature of the poem, i.e., the basic structure of what George McLean Harper called “Conversation Poems” in 1928: a group of Coleridge’s blank verse poems written in the mid 1790s through 1807, all addressed to a close friend, “[beginning] with a quiet description of the surrounding scene and, after a superb flight of imagination, [bringing] the mind back to the starting-point.”²⁸

Understanding *where* the mind starts this self-observation, and what kind of early encounter—or loss—“This Lime-Tree Bower” illustrates, is open to debate though, as the beginning of the poem is textually unstable, with its primary focus changing over time. This shift in the poem’s central idea can be illustrated by a comparison of the different beginnings in the earliest text and the canonical one—which is, like “The Eolian Harp,” that in Coleridge’s *Poetical Works* of 1834:

Well, they are gone; and here must I remain,

Lamed by the scathe of fire, lonely and faint,

This lime-tree bower my prison. (The 1797 text, ll. 1-3, my emphasis)²⁹

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,

This lime-tree bower my prison! I have *lost*

Beauties and feelings, such as would have been

Most sweet to my remembrance even when age

Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness! (The 1834 text, ll. 1-5, my emphasis)

In the mid-July 1797 letter containing the earliest extant text of the poem, Coleridge writes Southey that Wordsworth and his sister have moved into Alfoxden House, only four miles away from Coleridge’s place at Nether Stowey, Somerset. Due to his injury caused by boiling milk his wife Sara spilled by accident on his foot (thus “Lamed by the scathe of fire” in the 1797 text) Coleridge was largely confined then, and wrote the lines in his neighbor’s garden-bower while Wordsworth, his sister and Lamb, who joined them on the 7th and stayed a week, were out one evening for a few hours to climb the

hill behind his cottage (*Collected Letters*, 1:334-36). The beginning of the earlier 1797 text thus presents the poem mainly as an occasional piece, a product of moods at the loss of his friends and their companionship, while in the 1834 version—with no printed subheading identifying Lamb—the decline of poetic vision (“lost / Beauties and feelings”), which has no direct bearing on age or injury, now constitutes a major source of the problem the speaker confronts.

In the early manuscript texts—those in Coleridge’s letters to Southey and Lloyd—the famous description of the roaring dell in the printed texts (10-20) is mostly missing, and the magnificent prospect of the surrounding countryside described in the standard text (20-26) is absent entirely, too.³⁰ By contrast, later versions gradually shift away from the poem’s earlier branding of itself as largely a product of moods and whims, but instead are characterized by growing emphasis on picturesque account of surrounding landscape and its domestic counterparts, representing an increasing influence of Wordsworth on the project with its shift of attention from somber pensiveness to consolation in natural beauty, an element new to Coleridge and his poems alike at this time.³¹ His topographical metaphors in the later alterations have an important bearing on the internal logic of this “Conversation” poem, with landscape description playing a key role in stimulating the process of meditation, and effectually dramatizing the speaker’s growing awareness of the spiritual significance of nature. The poem begins, for instance, with an engaging description of “This little lime-tree bower” that subsequently evokes an intervening meditation, culminating in an arrival at new

knowledge (“Henceforth I shall know / That nature ne’er deserts the wise and pure” 60-61), which clearly echoes Wordsworth’s idea that “Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her” (“Tintern Abbey” 126-27). The realization of nature’s spiritual power is followed by a resolution of an emotional problem and the final return of the renewed mind to the starting-point, and a quiet celebration of harmony and “Life” in the concluding line.³²

The picturesque appreciation of the site of imaginative breakdown is a trend that one can find in “Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement,” too, which Coleridge first drafted in the spring of 1796 and then published in *Poems* in 1797, the same year he was working on the earliest draft of “This Lime-Tree Bower.” In “Reflections” Coleridge writes, “[T]he whole World / Seem’d *imag’d* in its vast circumference” (39-40, my emphasis) describing the magnificent view from the top of the “stony mount” near his cottage in Clevedon, Somerset, where he honeymooned with Sara Fricker. This scene is important not only because it is the first instance either Coleridge or Wordsworth presents the summit of a mountain as a place of meeting with divine forces, but also because it demonstrates Coleridge’s engagement in the eighteenth-century practice of contemplating nature as if it were a composed landscape painting or at least a view mirrored in a Claude glass—a tinted portable mirror indispensable to a new generation of British tourists as they frame and darken the scenes they visited in rural Britain.³³

Readers have noted how the framed view reflected in a Claude glass abstracts the subject from its surroundings and removes details, simplifying the color and tonal range of scenes;³⁴ and Coleridge's "Reflections," too, demonstrates this discontinuity between aestheticized rural scenes and social circumstances of the time, complex though that may be. With his lush language—rhetorical flourishes and vivid evocations of places, in particular—Coleridge faithfully follows lyric rules, on the one hand, constructing an imaginary world that transcends reality and the self alike, while the setting of the narrative—the speaker's appreciation of "the Valley of Seclusion"—can be taken within the particular context of the writer's uncertain relation to the radical politics in the 1790s from which he is radically isolated at this moment. The mid-1790s mark a period of intense activity for Coleridge. In February 1795 he delivered a series of political lectures in Bristol expounding his ideas on pantisocracy and the slave trade. Coleridge's Bristol lectures formed the basis of *Conciones ad Populum* (1795) and his essays later published in *The Watchman*, his own political journal he would shortly be editing during the spring of 1796. "Reflections," then, can be read in terms of Coleridge facing a brief hiatus in his work due to his marriage with Sara Fricker in October 1795, followed by a six-week honeymoon in Clevedon, Somerset; when first published this poem was entitled "Reflections on entering into active life. A poem which affects not to be poetry."

Furthermore, the poem indicates an important duality of Romantic lyric tropes, too, which I suggest is integral to poetic subversions. "Reflections" is a particularly appealing example of this self-reflective trend that was widely practiced even by

“mainstream” Romantics: the “naturalness” and sincerity of the plain-spoken voice in Coleridge’s scenic poems was often belied by his crafted speakers whose language, I argue, demonstrates discontinuities in consciousness, as evidenced by the desire behind narratives for neat coincidence, order, lessons, unity, or other signs of closure. In “Reflections,” for example, upon confessing his awe of the sublime vision from the mountaintop suggesting that any materialistic ambitions at such a moment would be a kind of profanity, Coleridge immediately contradicts himself by asking: “Ah, quiet dell, dear cot, and mount sublime! / I was constrained to quit you. Was it right, / While my unnumbered brethren toiled and bled, / That I should dream away the trusted hours / On rose-leaf beds, pamp’ring the coward heart / With feelings all too delicate for use?” (43-48). The rough, abrupt, often overlooked, transition from the distinctly picturesque view of “the whole World . . . imag’d in its vast circumference” to an admission of conflicting “feelings all too delicate for use” shows signs of instability, in both textual and psychological terms, leading us to meditate on the ambivalence of the lyric tropes for the Romantics. One can find a case of narrative disruption in “The Eolian Harp,” too, where Coleridge’s growing disillusionment with French Revolutionary politics is contained in a memorable celebration of the pantheist One Life, which, as I discuss above, is soon to be renounced in the final paragraph, though, in his wife’s criticisms (and, to a certain degree, his own self-reproof) of his “vain philosophy’s aye-babbling spring” (57). Characterized by an account of the lyric speaker meditating in the picturesque environs of his embowered cottage, these poems demonstrate how Coleridge uses tropes of plants

and places as a means to reflect self-consciously on discontinuities in his own writing process and social circumstances, while at the same time his reflexivity and sudden deflations of poetic artifice highlight, if not necessarily challenge, the mystifications of the scenic mode.

The aesthetic of landscape takes on a new aspect in Coleridge's poems of visionary failure in which the speaker not only deals with the "vast circumference" of a "wide" landscape, which was indubitably associated with the latest craze for great parks, but often reveals a disposition toward a "little" landscape, too. In "Reflections," for example, Coleridge writes: "Low was our pretty Cot: our tallest rose / Peeped at the chamber-window. . . . / . . . In the open air / Our myrtles blossomed; and across the porch / Thick jasmines twined: the little landscape round / Was green and woody, and refreshed the eye" (1-7). Unlike Mellor, who is inclined to read the poem in terms of Coleridge's interaction with the eighteenth-century, academic "categories" of landscape (the picturesque, the beautiful and the sublime),³⁵ one can see the poet's affinity for a confined, private space, rather than an open prospect, as he continues to describe the garden attached to Thomas Poole's house, which adjoins that of Coleridge's Cottage at Nether Stowey where he wrote the poem: "And that walnut tree / Was richly tinged, and a deep radiance lay / Full on the ancient ivy which *usurps* / Those fronting elms, and now with blackest mass / Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue / . . . [as] the solitary humble-bee / Sings in the bean-flower!" (51-60). Coleridge's richly detailed description of this spot captures the relatively new English appetite for small, decorative

gardens enclosed within borders of evergreens and flowering shrubs. The passion for these contained, vernacular sites might not be seen as influential in embodying England's national agenda as an obsession with an unbounded view in the Enlightenment aesthetic treatises to which Mellor pays much attention; however, as Rachel Crawford reminds us in *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700-1830* (2002), the passion for the private spaces involves “a more muted conversation conducted among a thriftier audience” at the end of the eighteenth-century and the beginning of the nineteenth-century (4). The tanner with taste in literature, who brought Coleridge to Nether Stowey, and the owner of the garden the poet describes in the poem, Tom Poole shows his share of the enthusiasm for the aesthetics for enclosed spaces, as indicated in “Reflections.”

The revived enthusiasm for rural cottages and residential gardens drew at least in part upon a thriving practice of urban gardening. As Crawford demonstrates, the landscape aesthetic that Stephen Switzer—one of those who popularized the open prospect—found so suitable for revealing prospects from great parks also provided him and other writers of garden manuals with a taxonomy of fruit trees and vegetables.³⁶ In consequence, preoccupation with the open prospect in well-known landscaping treatises in this period conceals the presence of the confined spaces, which were designed with use, rather than beauty, in mind. For example, by 1762 Henry Home Kames could confidently declare that the art of laying out small places in rural scenery “is now improved into a fine art”; for the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher and agricultural

improver, “[t]he garden of Alcinoous [*sic*],” king of the Phaeacians noted for their hedonism in Homer’s *Odyssey*, was nothing but “a kitchen-garden” (*Elements of Criticism* 2: 425).

Although the aesthetic of containment has been obscured to modern readers by the explosion of treatises on the picturesque in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the convergence of the fashion for vast lawns and small gardens existed throughout the century, as evidenced by Coleridge’s taste for different ideals of the English landscape. In “The Eolian Harp,” for example, the idea of unity is useful at least in part in articulating an aspect of the intrinsic relations between the “wide” and “little” landscapes that meet in the poem; Mellor, for instance, explains the converging representations of land in Coleridge’s scenic mode in terms of how the poet breaks down the eighteenth-century ideas of the picturesque, the beautiful and the sublime into a Romantic merging, a “consciousness that,” she claims, “perceives . . . an underlying and unifying divine power energizing nature and humanity alike” (“Categories of English Landscape” 270). What contributes, then, to a distinctly Coleridgean amalgam of different scenic conventions is, first, his use of various tropes of amity throughout the poem—the image of the speaker and his beloved “[reclining] . . . on [his] arm” (1-2), as well as the Eolian harp receiving the breeze, and “all of animated nature” as “but organic harps diversely framed,” played on by “one intellectual breeze” suggesting God’s spiritual influence (44-45). The speaker conveys images of intersecting landscapes, too, in a pleasingly harmonious tone, with Coleridge’s scenic description gradually widening out into an

imposing viewpoint overlooking the elements of the open prospect: “our cot o’ergrown / With white flowered jasmin, and the broad-leaved myrtle,” a slightly distant view of “yon bean-field” and “the clouds . . . rich with light / Slow saddening round,” and finally the “stilly murmur of the distant sea” (3-12). Similar to Gilpin who used to achieve the effects of time by prematurely aging (even “deforming”) the objects through the “*strong harmonizing tints*” of the sky,³⁷ Coleridge captures a moment of nature’s landscape when it is most expressive of changes: the clouds richly variegated by “light, / Slow saddening round” evoke a feeling of melancholy (6-7), incorporating both the larger and the domestic landscapes into a consistent whole.

Still, when Coleridge adopted the relatively new English appetite for vegetables and fruit as a means to codify the flight of imagination, the landscapes intersecting in his poems do not represent a peaceful resolution of conflict or the stasis of self-consciousness; instead, his literary pictorialism simultaneously evokes, I suggest, the potential mutability of the relations between those competing views of land as he echoes a particular *division* of social status figured in the cultural representation of vernacular gardens in popular garden manuals of the period, in which the small space was not designed simply as a miniature of the large park; rather, beauty and productivity are eventually met together in the enthusiasm for embowered gardens.³⁸ Whether a garden was designed by a professional or an amateur, the plants and the layout of hard landscape were carefully chosen to meet the needs, goals—beauty and/or profit—and desires of the owners of the gardens, followed closely by the desired stylistic genres.³⁹

For example, in his agricultural advice given in his popular garden manual, *The Practical Fruit-Gardener* (1724), Switzer characterizes his garden as a site in which labor is associated with both pleasure and utility:

Indeed a well contriv'd Fruit-Garden is an Epitomy of Paradise it self [*sic*], where the Mind of Man is in its highest Raptures, and where the Souls of the Virtuous enjoy the utmost Pleasures they are susceptible of in this sublunary State. For there the happy Planter is cooling and refreshing himself with *Scooping the brimming Stream* of those nectarous Juices, and the philosophizing thereon, as Mr. Milton has it in that excellent Description, Book iv. l. 327. of *Paradise Lost*; also Mr. *Philips* very rapturously describes it in his Poem on *Cyder*. (4)

Not only does Switzer's ideal garden combine delight and productivity, but also traditions of poetry and garden manuals as he compares the fruit garden to a Miltonic paradise.

The innate sensuality and productivity of Switzer's fruit garden, which combines lyric tropes into the framework of didactic prose, closely resembles the key attributes of Coleridge's embowered "cot" in "The Eolian Harp." In this poem of imaginative breakdown the green space deals with a disposition toward the intersection of lyric principles and productivity. This connection is characterized, first, in terms of a charming cottage garden, where the stymied poet keeps a private, romantic rendezvous with his lover in the hope of attaining his creative renewal.⁴⁰ The poem shows that with

her sensibility and calm practicality the female inhabitant of Coleridge's garden—his “pensive Sara”—plays a key role in this terrain by saving her frustrated lover from his “vain philosophy” and the wild “shapings of the unregenerate mind” (57, 55). Second, “The Eolian Harp” illustrates another interesting parallel between a Coleridgean locus of lyric failure and those practical recommendations given in popular style manuals on the architectural embellishments of kitchen- and cottage-gardens in rural Britain.

Rhetorically, the effect of this interconnection is generated predominantly by the evocation of odor (“exquisite . . . scents / Snatched from yon bean-field”), and images of profuse growth and productive power within a sharply defined area—as in “honey-dropping flowers,” as well as “white-flowered jasmin, and the broad-leaved myrtle” represented as embracing the “clasping casement” where an Eolian harp is placed (9-10, 23, 4, 13). Alluding to the “blissful bower” of Milton's Eden, which also contains jasmine and myrtle serving as a symbol of “innocence and love,” Coleridge is presenting the contained space of his cottage as partly a lyrical and sublime place in which the effects of the fall of imagination could be reversed.⁴¹ Yet, another meaningful source of these vegetative, architectural analogies is garden manuals and calendars, whose rhetoric is inseparable from conjuring images of the Garden of Eden, an emblem of extravagant beauty *and* vast productivity.⁴²

By figuring what is often thought to be largely a site of lyric failure as a feminized locus of use and productivity, Coleridge thus makes explicit the complex and contested nature of his tropes of plants and places as frameworks for not merely

aesthetic, metaphysical concerns, but also pragmatic, social ones. And his negotiation of these competing impulses, as we have seen, is intrinsic to “This Lime-Tree Bower,” “Reflections” and “The Eolilan Harp,” which dramatize the continuing appeal of lyrical tropes while also demonstrating how a self-conscious language may indicate, without altering, the assumptions underlying the mainstream Romantic meditative lyrics and their horticultural interest.

Notes

¹ Other major Romantic poets who contributed to this type of lyrics include Wordsworth (“Ode on the Intimations of Immortality”), Shelley (“Ode to the West Wind”), and Keats (“Ode to a Nightingale”). There is a significant body of literary criticism on how Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” engages with self-conscious commentary on the mechanics and theory of the visionary process, dramatizing the dialectic between the vision proper and a metapoetic framework, as in the important readings by Cleanth Brooks, Helen Vendler and Nicholas Roe. In *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) Brooks focuses on Keatsian irony that “the world of imagination offers a release from the painful world of actuality, yet at the same time it renders the world of actuality more painful by contrast” (31). In *The Odes of John Keats* (1983) Vendler reads the poem in terms of the inescapable gap between “the solipsistic immortal world and our social and mortal one,” and argues that Keats’s ode embodies the message that “there can be no commerce [between the two worlds] except by the viewless wings of sensation in Poesy-Fancy, which cannot bear us long aloft” (95). Roe’s *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1997) explores Keats’s “Nightingale” ode as a politically suggestive poem, arguing that the perception of the ideal and the harsh realities of the present are inextricably intertwined in it because “the ‘immortal Bird’—which sings beyond the boundaries of human life—brings an intimation of the unescapable facts of existence,” heightening our awareness of those realities (200). Recent textual criticism, as in Jack Stillinger’s reading, focuses on Keats’s practices of composition and revision. In *Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems* (1994) Stillinger compares Keats to Coleridge as a reviser, suggesting that, despite the fact that these poets have much in common in terms of the subject of interest, form and styles, they are essentially different in their “attitudes toward—and consequent practices of—revision”; the former, as he claims, is an “epitomizing example of the poet who, for both theoretical and practical reasons, does not revise,” with nearly all of the poems he produced in his short career including “Ode to a Nightingale” written “on the spur of the moment,” while the latter is an example of the poet who does (101).

Wordsworth’s “Intimations” ode has received a deluge of critical attention, and historical and political approaches have been particularly evident since McGann’s *The Romantic Ideology*—especially the chapter on “Wordsworth and the ideology of Romantic Poems”—which reviewed the ode as an “escapist” or “reactionary” move in which “the immediate and concrete experience has disappeared into the mists of consciousness and memory”; the disappearance of such “particulars” is part of what McGann calls a Romantic strategy of “displacement,” and the “Intimations Ode,” he claims, is “a study of its character and, finally, a justification and embodiment of its operations” (90). Wordsworth’s involvement with the ideologies of self-consciousness has recently been discussed in Bennett’s *Wordsworth Writing* (2007) in which the commentator reexamines prevailing assumptions about Wordsworth and his poetic

practice, challenging the ways in which standard literary history describes Coleridge's "Dejection" ode as a response to Wordsworth's "Intimations" ode, given their mutual involvement with the working and nonworking of an emergent, spontaneous vision. Bennett argues that, despite Wordsworth's efforts to publicize his written poetry as a kind of speech and fashion himself as a spontaneous poet of nature who disengages writing from oral composition, the meaning of Wordsworth's canonical poems (including the "Intimations Ode") cannot be explored fully without reconfiguring him as a working and often frustrated writer, whose concern with the city and the process of writing and revision marks his poetic identity.

Shelley's self-consciousness, in "Ode to the West Wind," about the poem's words and figures has been discussed noticeably by Chandler. In his *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (1998) Chandler suggests that the poem's vitality and political nature depend on the complexities of the topos of the leaf as the page of text which, together with the figures of fire, wind and ashes used in the ode, suggests "the possibility of writing the leaves into a very differently conceived model of change" and social regeneration (552); see also Michael O'Neill, *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (1997) 119-79.

Romantic-era women writers' contribution, if not in lyric forms, to the theme of poetic crisis is notable, too, and has received attention of late. See Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (1993); Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner, eds., *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837* (1994); Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelly, eds., *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices* (1995); and McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (1996).

² Coleridge, "Dejection: An Ode," line 8. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Coleridge's poetry are taken from the reading texts in the relevant Bollingen volumes of *Poetical Works*, edited by J. C. C. Mays. All further references to Coleridge's work are included in the text by line numbers.

³ For works on reflexivity in literature of other periods, see Lucien Dällenbach's *The Mirror in the Text* (1989) and O'Neill's *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (1997).

⁴ See also Federici Corrado who suggests that "[t]he poetic text exhibits this self-reflectiveness covertly through its tropological dependency—that is, the deployment of rhetorical devices that draw attention to the poetic utterance's function as semiotic sign, rather than as mimetic reproduction or 'realist transparency' of material reality" (441).

⁵ In *Coleridge's Poetics* (1983) Paul Hamilton, too, alludes to the paradox of Romantic poetics that "the failure of poetic vision [is] a necessary part of the vision itself" (166).

⁶ While Dwight Eddins does examine the distinguishing features of the poem of poetic failure, what is of utmost concern to him is how poems of that sort deny any conventional explanations of the lyric, rather than the theoretical importance that the theme bears on Romantic studies. See “Darkness Audible: The Poem of Poetic Failure” (2000).

⁷ Coleridge, “Frost at Midnight,” line 27, as included in *Fears in Solitude* of 1798 published by Joseph Johnson in London.

⁸ In *The Poem and the Book: Interpreting Collections of Romantic Poetry* (1985) Neil Fraistat argues, for example, that the “chance to build a poetic whole from disparate ‘fragments’” has “special significance to Romantics,” suggesting the poetry book itself as an object of interpretation (20). In *The Texts of Keats’s Poems* (1974) Stillinger reasons similarly by considering the process of arranging pieces in a volume another meaningful “stage of composition”; individual poems acquire, he suggests, additional meanings according to their relations with other poems in the volume (284). Both critics extend the classic argument for multiple interpretations of a work to the level of a book, privileging “texture” over a rigidly articulated “architecture,” if not entirely of the same opinion on the relations between all the internal economies of meaning of a collection. Regarding how individual Romantic poets use their poetic collections as a means of self-fashioning, see also McGann’s *Inflections* 15-66 and 255-93, Stillinger’s *Hoodwinking* 1-13 and 116-17, and Stuart Curran’s essays on Wordsworth and Robinson.

⁹ See *Wordsworth and Coleridge* 257-75. For an excellent discussion of how Coleridge’s language of nature and domesticity in the poem embeds a public tone involved with the current political anxieties surrounding war and invasion, see also Paul Magnuson’s *Reading Public Romanticism* (1998) 91-92.

¹⁰ For the public debate that the quarto volume entered and Johnson’s situation as a radical publisher in the 1790’s, see Magnuson’s *Reading Public Romanticism* 70-78, Roe’s *Wordsworth and Coleridge* 257-68, Stillinger’s *Instability* 56-57.

¹¹ Qtd. in Wu., ed. 630 n.1.

¹² Qtd. in Stillinger, *Instability* 55.

¹³ See Stillinger, *Instability* 91-96 for an account of the textual history of all the fifteen versions of “Dejection.”

¹⁴ See Stillinger, *Instability* 94.

¹⁵ Ruoff, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Making of the Major Lyrics, 1802-1804* (1989); see especially 59-103.

¹⁶ When Coleridge was composing an early version of the poem titled “A Letter to Sara Hutchinson, 4 April 1802.—Sunday Evening,” he was at odds with his wife and hopelessly in love with Sara Hutchinson (who would become Wordsworth’s sister-in-law).

¹⁷ Stillinger convincingly demonstrates that, although the metapoetic subject was fully—and consistently—developed in the text of *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817, it had already begun to stand out in “Version 3,” the extracts in a letter Coleridge sent to William Sotheby in a letter of July 19, 1802. The text, here addressed to Wordsworth rather than to Sara, introduces major changes to the poem: “Here the domestic theme is dropped, the complaints of isolation and hopeless love have disappeared, and the poem has become primarily epistemological—more clearly an answer . . . to Wordsworth’s question at the end of the fourth stanza of his own ode in progress [“Intimations of Immortality”]: ‘Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?’” (*Instability* 99).

¹⁸ For the poem’s original context of publication, see Magnuson’s 1985 essay “‘The Eolian Harp’ in Context” and *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* 142-50.

¹⁹ Coleridge’s hymn to the pantheist One Life echoes Wordsworth, *The Pedlar*, in particular: “for in all things / He saw one life, and felt that it was joy” (217-18).

²⁰ Marie-Jeanne Phlipon Roland de la Platière, *An Appeal to Impartial Posterity by Citizenness Roland, Wife of the Minister of the Home Department* (London: J. Johnson, 1795), part 3, p.112. The original French text is available in Stillinger’s *Instability* 147.

²¹ Madame Roland’s husband is Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière, an influential member of Girondist faction in the French Revolution. In his introductory note to a facsimile edition of Madame Roland’s *Appel* translated in English by Johnson, Jonathan Wordsworth attends to the French lady’s role in her husband’s political activity: “Roland was . . . limited, and more dependent than he knew on his far more intelligent wife. . . . She wrote his letters, directed his thinking, wielded through him at times considerable power.” Stillinger demonstrates that Coleridge was familiar with the relationship between Madame Roland and her husband: see *Instability* 38.

²² Wheeler discusses the note in detail (86-90), but her reading focuses on how it rebukes the devotee—Sara—rather than the atheist.

²³ References to Burke’s *Reflections* are to Marilyn Butler, ed. *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy* (1984).

²⁴ For a convenient summary of the major discussion of the poem's central motifs and oppositions, see James Engell, "Imagining into Nature: This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison."

²⁵ As Stillinger demonstrates, there are at least twelve separate versions of "This Lime-Tree Bower" varying from fifty-five to seventy-seven lines in length: see *Instability* 48-49.

²⁶ Qtd. in Stillinger, *Instability* 48-49.

²⁷ Other than the removal of "wild" in 40, the errata corrections "revise *Annual Anthology* readings," as Stillinger summarizes, "in 3, 6, 41-42 (except for continuing 'when' for 'when yet' in 42), and 71 to the final wording" (*Instability* 48).

²⁸ See Harper, *Spirit of Delight* 11. Also included in the category are: "The Eolian Harp," "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement," "Frost at Midnight," "The Nightingale," "Fears in Solitude," "Dejection: An Ode" and "To William Wordsworth."

²⁹ The earliest extant text of "This Lime-Tree Bower" and Coleridge's letter of July 1797 to Robert Southey containing it are cited hereafter from *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Earl Leslie Griggs.

³⁰ See *Instability* 44-46.

³¹ On the literary interactions between Coleridge and Wordsworth during the late 1790s and early 1800s, see Thomas McFarland's *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation* (1981) 56-103; Magnuson's *Coleridge and Wordsworth*; Richard Matlak's *The Poetry of Relationship: The Wordsworths and Coleridge, 1797-1800* (1997); see also Ruoff and Roe.

³² This pattern represents the structure and style in what Abrams called the "greater Romantic lyric," a genre that was first introduced into English by Coleridge in his "Conversation" poems, and included Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," Shelley's "Stanzas Written in Dejection" and Keats's "Ode to Nightingale." In his famous essay "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" Abrams characterizes the genre as a conversation between the poet—often located outdoors—and a silent listener: "The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely involved with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem rounds upon itself to

end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation” (527-28).

³³ The cult of sketching trips to English countryside was stimulated by William Gilpin, Uvedale Price, and Richard Payne Knight, whose aesthetic treatises and illustrated tourbooks popularized Claude glasses among nineteenth-century picturesque travelers. For discussions of other ideas of landscape suggested by Burke, Thomas Gainsborough, Uvedale Price or John Constable, see John Barrell’s *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (1980); Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (1986) 57-73; James Buzard, “The Grand Tour and After (1660-1840)” 45-46. For the economic and political implications of the picturesque aesthetic in a variety of fields in the Romantic period, see Bermingham 73-83; Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (1989); and Copley and Garside, ed., *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770* (1994).

³⁴ Illustrating how the picturesque perspective on nature can disregard or even give a distorted view of unpleasing social realities, Gilpin remarks in a letter to W. Mason, Feb. 12, 1784: “I am so attached to my picturesque rules, that if nature gets wrong, I cannot help putting her right” (qtd. in Barbier 72). In an oft-cited passage from his *Observations on the River Wye* (1782) Gilpin speaks of the ruins of Tintern Abbey: “Tho the parts are beautiful, the whole is ill-shaped. No ruins of the tower are left, which might give form, and contrast to the buttresses, and walls. Instead of this, a number of gabel-ends [*sic*] hurt the eye with their regularity; and disgust it by the vulgarity of their shape. A mallet judiciously used . . . might be of service in fracturing some of them; particularly those of the cross isles, which are not only disagreeable in themselves, but confound the perspective” (47). For a critical appraisal of Gilpin’s influence on other Romantic writers including Wordsworth, see Charles J. Rzepka’s essay in which the critic disputes Marjorie Levinson’s reading of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” and takes issue with his reliance on Gilpin.

³⁵ See “Coleridge’s ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ and the Categories of English Landscape.”

³⁶ Crawford comments that Switzer and other best-known writers of British garden manuals in the eighteenth century such as Batty Langley and Humphry Repton were at first under the influence of the principles governing the open prospect and large formal parks. See *Vernacular Landscape* 194-99.

³⁷ *Observations* 141. For a discussion of the crucial role of time in the picturesque aesthetic, see Bermingham 69-70.

³⁸ Crawford examines the shift in public perception of British landscape, convincingly arguing that popular garden manual writers at the end of the eighteenth-century modified ideals of the English landscape garden, eventually affirming the relatively new idea that beauty is a product of use. See *Vernacular Landscape* 197-210.

³⁹ As Crawford argues, the passion for the private spaces encouraged gardeners and building designers of the period to choose plants and trees carefully in order to embower rural cottages of laborers or gentry. See *Vernacular Landscape* 228-29.

⁴⁰ Coleridge's final line ("Peace, and this cot, and thee, heart-honoured Maid," 64) evokes the core elements of what Crawford calls Romantic bower poetry, which involves a representation of enclosed green spaces as the "site of a tryst" between a man and a female character (225).

⁴¹ See *Paradise Lost* IV 694, 698.

⁴² Crawford discusses how popular garden manuals and calendars depict the English kitchen- and cottage-garden as Edenic; see *Vernacular Landscape* 203.

CHAPTER III

DE-SCRIBING ROMANTIC AUTHORSHIP:

SELF-REPRESENTATION AND MATERIAL TEXTUALITY

IN KEATS'S *HYPERION* POEMS

Keats's poetics and the language he employs to refer to the process by which poetry is created owe much to the various implications of a scientific procedure such as the world's chemistry, "intensity," "spirit," "essence," or the "ethereal," "sublime" power of the universe, or a "distillation" of its elements, among others. Pointing to some parallels between Keats's notion of the poetic process and certain specialized terminologies for the chemistry of his day, Stuart M. Sperry argues in *Keats the Poet* (1973): "Although the process may begin with the realization of particular identities [of the material forms that confront the poet], these are nevertheless *synthesized* and *purified* by the *intensity* of the poet's imagination which transforms them to a higher state, akin to the 'ethereal.'" Therefore, the poetic imagination involves, he argues, "not merely a *separation* and release of elements but a superior degree of *concentration*" (47, my emphasis). Unfortunately, it appears, for Sperry, all that those chemical dictionaries and treatises of Keats's day could provide the poet was ironically an affirmation of a transcendental reality: "[For Keats] the origin and operation of poetry [is] an immaterial or 'spiritual' power active throughout the universe" (40-41). Despite the ingenious appreciation of Keats's favorite chemical terms that the poet indeed adopts in the realm

of aesthetics,¹ this explanation evokes Wordsworth's all too familiar idea, as suggested most notably in "Tintern Abbey," of the poetic mind as half-perceiving and half-creating, which has been reiterated many times by other Romantics such as Coleridge and Shelley. Paradoxically, the landmark study of Keatsian poetics pays little attention to how the later Romantic poet deals with the interrelated ideas of agency and vehicle, which indeed constitute an integral part of the "chemistry" of a linguistic structure that we call a poem.

Sperry's book is part of a long and distinguished twentieth-century tradition of work on Keats, both biographical and critical. Much twentieth-century criticism of Keats's poems has been preoccupied, often in theoretical terms, with how the poet saw imagination and its relation to the actual world.² While we have claims that the Wordsworthian idea of immateriality is most fundamental to Keats's faith in the chemistry of imagination, the story of Keats's preoccupation with the fundamental uncertainty of Romantic writing, the question of the birth and physical conditions of poetic power, has received less attention. I certainly am not alone, though, among readers of Keats's poems who have emphasized the uncertainties attendant upon a material text of Keats and his writing practices.³ This chapter builds on this literature to explore the ways in which the Romantic notion of "authorship" and the figure of the "author," his or her medium, and material practices have been understood, represented imaginatively, and demystified in the *Hyperions*. I call particular attention to the poems because of their previously overlooked metapoetical subtext, which subtly inserts commentary into the narrative form of the poems, offering the reader a critique of

Romantic writing and its own procedures. Thus the chapter does not focus exclusively on the physical embodiment of Keats's poems as such, so much as Keats's contribution to the Romantics' self-conscious and critical understanding of the depiction, perception and ideologies of their poetry and its mediation. This chapter addresses the missing conversation in Keats studies by exploring the ways in which an enduring mystery of the Romantic poetic process, its medium, and condition of enunciation—thus collectively how Romantic poetry is conceived or *how* a Romantic poet communicates rather than what she does—remains a central question in the *Hyperion* project. It is my suggestion that the *Hyperions* help us account for the way in which the Romantics were aware of and eager to articulate the instabilities of their position with regard to the relations between words and things. In order to suggest material textuality as a site of irreducible conflict in Romantic poetics, I would like to discuss the question of how for Keats, in particular, writing, however refined, is not merely spiritual in any transcendental sense but operates on and has reference to the material world.

“Hyperion” as a Dialogue about Theories of Authorship

“Hyperion: A Fragment” represents Keats's epic passion to dramatize competing ideas of creativity and the poetic method. The ideological implications of Keats's reinterpretation of the fable of the fallen Titans and the emergence of a new race of gods were once noticed by Sperry in an elegant, if perhaps oblique, way:

Using the myth of the Fall of the older race of Titans, [Keats] could dramatize the steady decline of vitality that he sensed in Wordsworth and in much of the poetry of the latter day. At the same time, at the climax of the poem and through the development of the character of Apollo and the younger race of gods, he hoped to express the rebirth of a more primary kind of poetic energy appropriate to his own day but one proceeding from a full awareness of the modern consciousness and from a willing self-surrender to a knowledge of the course of history and the immense pain such understanding must impose. (164)

The arguments for “Hyperion” as an allegory of conflicting poetic theories of the time find expression in this remarkable passage, and Sperry finds his evidence in an important letter Keats writes Richard Woodhouse in October 1818, the very month when the poet was working on “Hyperion.” This important letter about “negative capability” contains Keats’s oft-cited distinction between his own ideal of the “poetical Character” and “the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime,”⁴ which was an outgrowth of the contrast Keats had once drawn between “Men of Genius” and “Men of Power.”⁵ And the critic sees “Hyperion” largely as a portrayal of the superiority of “Men of Genius” over “Men of Power,” though the terms do not imply, he adds, any determinism but only refer to “different aspects, perhaps alternating stages, of a larger cycle of poetic creativity” (163).

However, viewing “Hyperion” in terms of differing poetic ideals involves at least two different approaches to Keats’s poetics. On one hand, it may call for a careful

scrutiny of Keats's historical imagination in his response to established literary-cultural values of his own day; on the other, it may also address the poet's troubled engagement with his own artistic self. In the above study Sperry points to the contemporary aesthetic theories Keats rehearses and evaluates, albeit rather metaphorically, in the *Hyperion* project, but the overall intention of his admirable monograph—to develop an intellectual biography that explores certain affinities between the development of Keats's creative mind and a psychological subtext in Keats's 1818 and 1819 fragments—prevents his examining *Hyperion*'s larger literary-cultural import in detail. The book depends heavily on the contention that the poem actually represents Keats's inquiry into the “constitution of his own poetic creativity”; in order to prove the case the commentator evokes some of Keats's famous letters that allude to the poet's “hypersensitive and often unstable” imaginative life during the time when he was working on the poem (189-91). Nonetheless, there is strangely little analysis of the text in its local context. Further, there is an irony about this view of “Hyperion” as a projection of Keats's troubled artistic self, for Sperry takes the phrases—the “poetical character” and the “Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime”—from a letter in which Keats is less concerned to see a piece of poem in terms of a poet's struggle for reintegration of personality than he is to express the idea that the work of a true poet involves an *effacement* of his own life, thus Keats's chameleon poet. When it comes to the implications of “Hyperion” as an allegory of competing theories of authorship, clues are not lacking in the letters; nevertheless, the chief evidence for the assertion does lie within the poem itself.

Narrative Self-Fashioning and Romantic Material Textuality

The silence of the beginning of “Hyperion,” for example, pertains in a number of ways to the writing subject, with the prevailing atmosphere of gloom suggesting the condition of poetic power.

A stream went voiceless by, still deadened more
By reason of his fallen divinity
Spreading a shade; the naiad mid her reeds
Pressed her cold finger closer to her lips.⁶

The nymph’s iconic numb finger placed firmly on her muffled lips involves a gesture of a negation, or, as commentators recently suggested, at least the poem’s problematizing of its own narrative form, setting the scene for its dominant trope of suppressed speech.⁷ Bennett, among others, explicates the opening of “Hyperion” in terms of “the lack of speech and inability to speak,” arguing that the narrative of “Hyperion,” usually described as “fragmentary” with a number of disjunctions in and even failure of narration, symptomizes Keats’s anxiety over tellability (*Audience* 147). And there is undeniably an element of truth in Bennett’s observation that the poem’s glaring trope of negation and its plot of revolution represent Keats’s reaction to the public responses to his earlier romance-epic, *Endymion* (1818) (145-46).⁸ When “Hyperion” first appeared in *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820), the publishers’ Advertisement to the volume stated, too, that the fragmentary nature of the poem was

due to the reviews of *Endymion*: “The poem was intended to have been of equal length with *Endymion*, but the reception given to that work discouraged the author from proceeding.” However, the chronology of this assertion is dubious because, as researchers have documented, Keats *started* working on “Hyperion” after the reviews of *Endymion* had appeared; furthermore, in a copy of the 1820 volume Keats states firmly via his own marginal note next to the very Advertisement that his publishers’ printed excuse is “a lie.” A more convincing explanation, then, might be that the unfriendly reaction to *Endymion* actually made the aspiring, young poet more confident on his ability as an independent writer and judge of his own works; I agree with Motion that Keats took the ferocious attacks on him as a kind of “tribute to his own equally defiant beliefs,” for “Hyperion” shows how bold enough the author of it actually was to air a cultural protest against those he regarded as his “natural enemies” (*Keats* 303).

The rhetoric in the early criticism of *Endymion* was overtly political in motivation and what really troubled Keats’s early readers, including Wordsworth, was “the sorry company he keeps” (the “Cockney School”) rather than the many “faults” in his verse.⁹ A posthumous review of 1848 looks back on the circumstances:

“It was the misfortune of Keats as a poet, to be either extravagantly praised or unmercifully condemned. The former had its origin in the generous partialities of friendship, somewhat obtrusively displayed; the latter in some degree, to resentment of that friendship, connected as it was with party politics, and peculiar views of society as well as of poetry.”¹⁰

Indeed, Keats's early reputation was set by the iniquity of reviews in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1817 whose primary target was Leigh Hunt but included Keats and William Hazlitt. The political, reformist agenda and the democratic ideology of Hunt and Hazlitt were offensive to the *Blackwood's* reviewers and Keats was similarly accused of "incongruous ideas" and "uncouth language" when John Wilson Croker attacked *Endymion* in 1818 in the *Quarterly Review*.¹¹

One might read the *Hyperion* project as a "negation" of *Endymion* or its early readers, thus finding in it an inquiry into the nature of the poet-reader relationship, but either way such a relationship is crucially mediated by the question of the materiality of poetry: the critical space *Endymion* had formed and now "Hyperion" inhabits is nuanced by the poet's highly deliberate ideological involvement with the question of the physical conditions of poetic power. In other words, what is perhaps more important in "Hyperion" than the reaction to the "Cockney" politics of the authors are those cultural questions the poem raises about the model of literary production and authorship that *Blackwood's* and other conservative literary institutions implicitly acknowledge. Keats was deeply conscious of the principal cultural imports of the controversy surrounding *Blackwood's* campaign against the "Cockneys", and perhaps nowhere more so than in the opening to the fragment. An indication of such a planned move is found as early as when the narrator concedes his incompetence to convey Thea's speech:

some words she spake

In solemn tenor and deep organ tone,

Some mourning words which in our feeble tongue
 Would come in these like accents (oh how frail
 To that large utterance of the early gods!) (I, 47-51)

In the first instance of the poem's overtly self-referential moments the narrator, with that note of irony in his voice, could not hide his resentment of a disjunction between the language of men and that of gods. Both this opening passage and Keats's revision of it in "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream" refer to the question of the narrator's status as a creator or poet, although their respective narrative strategies differ. As to how the narrator's persona is developed in each opening, first, what is interesting in "Hyperion" is how the earlier beginning portrays the narrator as extremely self-effacing; in fact, he even self-fashions himself as in some way "unreliable": "she spake . . . Some mourning words which in our feeble tongue / Would come in these like accents (oh how frail / To that large utterance of the early gods!)" (I, 47-51). Here an implicit commentary on the nature of writing is suggested in terms of an acknowledgment of the fundamental limitations of language, though the precise nature of the self-belittlement is far from clear yet. When the narrator refers to events or narratives that ostensibly cannot really be told, and when "Hyperion" is structured as an alternative narrative that paradoxically asserts its power by referring to the threatened silence of the fallen Titans and their sense of their impotence, we find an ironical force of the self-effacement in "Hyperion."

The sense that an apparent acknowledgment of poetic ineptitude conflicts with a Keatsian foregrounding of voice—an assertion of the materiality of voice—is given once

again by the opening to “The Fall,” which is marked by a comparable force of self-reflection and a further assertion of the materiality of written text.¹² For Keats what distinguishes poets from fanatics, who “weave / A paradise [only] for a sect,” involves the wider—or perhaps universal—appeal of poetry (I, 1-2); “The Fall” goes even further to suggest that the distinction concerns, more importantly, material conditions of poetry’s existence:

pity these have not
 Traced upon vellum or wild Indian leaf
 The shadows of melodious utterance.

 . . . Poesy alone can tell her dreams,
 With the fine spell of words alone can save
 Imagination from the sable charm
 And dumb enchantment. (I, 4-11)

The eccentricity of Keats’s ideas is well represented in the ironic message that the fundamental power of poetry originates from its reliance on “the fine spell of words” put down by “this warm scribe my hand” that will decay eventually (I, 18). This physicality of “The Fall”—prefigured in “Hyperion” in terms of the negative force of “tongue,” “accents” and “utterance”—accommodates a materialist critique of Romantic spontaneity and immediacy, putting forward a radical cultural statement that poetry is essentially dependent upon *things* such as “vellum or wild Indian leaf.” Usually taken as

an attempt to define the poet against the dreamer/fanatic, the Induction also vitally asserts an empiricist rather than a metaphysical view of the poetry.

Although the predominant critical representation of the poetry of the period has viewed it in terms of the Romantic ideology of authorship which envisions literary (re)production as dependent upon the activity of a mind, Romantic poetry might better be viewed as a site of contestation between differing notions of media(-tion).¹³ Keats's "vellum or wild Indian leaf" is an equivalent, for example, to what Shelley denounces in his "Defence of Poetry" as "enfeebling clouds"—other materials and instruments of art he regards as an extraneous addition to the ideal relation between conception and expression (513). While Shelley views medium as a possible contaminant of poetic feeling, thereby discrediting the poetry in the word that Keats upholds, several other Romantic writers perceive poems as both ideas and material fact. As evidenced by the metaphor in the title of his *Sibylline Leaves: A Collection of Poems* (1817), Coleridge calls attention to the special and *spatial* nature of the poetic collection, with "leaves" referring to both the leaves of plants and the pages of a book of poetry. In his preface to the volume Coleridge writes modestly that the collection "has been entitled *Sibylline Leaves* in allusion to the fragmentary and widely scattered state" of individual poems included in it (4); yet, the allusion to Petrarch's view of poetic collection as a whole may indeed suggest a bigger picture of a Romantic materialist poetics. As Fraistat suggests, "[piecing] together the scattered leaves of the Sibyl" is not only likened to an act of recognizing "the contents of a prophecy," but also indicates how reading poems in their

“place” might challenge the essentially New Critical approach of conceiving each poem as self-contained (*The Poem and the Book* 20).¹⁴ Byron’s oft-cited phrase in *Don Juan*, “words are things,” is just another refutation of the Wordsworthian belief that poetry can be independent of language or its material embodiment.¹⁵ Keats contributes to this counter-current of Romantic material textuality when an ironical reading of the narrator’s statements of incompetence in “Hyperion” effectively prefigures the overtly reflexive and materialist overtones in the opening to “The Fall.” And the Induction to “The Fall,” too, suggests the poet’s growing consciousness about the medium of his poetry and its status, making an implicit challenge to the validity of the Shelleyan proposition regarding poetry’s existence.

The Bower, the Picturesque and the Image of the Romantic Poet in the Making

An image of Saturn as a Romantic author is represented by the “grey-haired” Titan’s sense of his failure and the role of landscape in his spiritual renewal. While dramatizing the silence of the dethroned king of the Titans, Keats characterizes the opening scene of “Hyperion” by a comparable force of negation: “No stir of air was there / Not so much life . . . not one light seed . . . the dead leaf fell . . . A stream went voiceless by, still deadened more . . . No further . . . nerveless, listless, dead / Unsceptred . . . realmless eyes were closed” (I, 7-19). An analogy, then, might be drawn between the silence and negation figured in these lines and the enclosed scenery often represented in the “retirement poems” of Wordsworth and Coleridge as a refuge from

social circumstances. The beauty of the landscape surrounding Saturn is muted somewhat by the intensity of the fallen Titan's sadness, but the site of seclusion shares some crucial qualities with the place and type of surroundings where the first-generation Romantics' retirement poems are often represented as happening. First, the contained scenery where Saturn retreats at the moment shares the eighteenth-century ideal of enclosed herbaceous sites as a feminized locus of productivity. By figuring Saturn as an ousted dreamer looking for creative reinvigoration, the start of "Hyperion" evokes a poetic tradition Crawford calls Romantic "bower poems," which involves a representation of enclosed green spaces as the "site of a tryst" between a man and a female character (or feminine object) which, she asserts, is integral to the terrain.¹⁶ Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" is just another example of how the female agent—Coleridge's "pensive Sara," in this case—has positive influences on the male speaker's "thoughts / Dim and unhallowed" and helps him regain the generative conditions of inspirations and composition (50-51). Coleridge makes explicit his gratitude to Sara as she "holily dispraised / These shapings of the unregenerate mind" and concludes the poem by neatly identifying the core elements of literary bower conventions: "Peace, and this cot, and thee, heart-honoured Maid" (54-55, 64). Keats's *Hyperion* poems echo the intrinsic relations between the key components of bower poetry: in "Hyperion" there is Thea, who wakes the defeated leader of the Titans from the vale of "shady sadness"; Mnemosyne, too, with "A wondrous lesson in [her] silent face," plays a crucial role in inspiring Apollo to "die into life" and transform into a god (112); in Keats's revision of

the fragments in “The Fall,” although botanical descriptions are relatively subdued, the interaction between the protagonist and the chief female character becomes even more intense as the birth of poetic power is now explored not merely as a matter of influence but in terms of an extended dialogue between Apollo and Moneta.

Keats’s portrayal of Saturn retreating “[d]eep in the shady sadness of a vale” overlaps Coleridge’s “Valley of Seclusion,” too, described in “Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement” (1797), as in both poems their respective protagonist’s disillusionment with politics is contained in a deceptively tranquil domestic setting, where “Low was our pretty Cot” and “Our tallest rose / Peeped at the chamber-window”; “In the open air,” Coleridge continues, “Our myrtles blossomed; and across the porch / Thick jasmines twined” (1-6). The beauty of this place of refuge is spelled out by the itemized objects of vernacular landscape design. The poet uses the enclosed environs of the cottage to confront subjective concerns about poetic production as “the little landscape round” makes him “muse / With wiser feelings” and “[pause] and [look] / With a pleas’d sadness, and [gaze] all around” (6-15). “Reflections” is often said to be the first poem by either Coleridge or Wordsworth to capture the ascent of a mountain as a meeting with divine forces,¹⁷ but what is equally noteworthy is that it codifies such a moment of sublime apprehension of nature in distinctly “picturesque” terms:

The bare bleak Mountain speckled thin with sheep;
 Grey Clouds, that shadowing spot the sunny fields;

.....

The Channel *there*, the Islands and white Sails,
 Dim Coasts, and cloud-like Hills, and shoreless Ocean—

 the whole World
 Seem'd *imag'd* in its vast circumference. (30-40)

Coleridge's representation of the scenes as a view "*imag'd* in its vast circumference" is mediated through reference to the late eighteenth-century cult of the picturesque and a view mirrored in a Claude glass, popularized in Britain by Richard Payne Knight, Uvedale Price and, most notably, William Gilpin. In the 1780s and 1790s political turmoil in mainland Europe brought about an explosion of British domestic tourism, and Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye and several parts of South Wales, etc. Relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; Made in the Summer of the Year 1770*, which appeared initially in 1782 and went through five editions before the turn of the century, has publicized practices of contemplating nature as if it were a landscape painting and offered a means of recording and evaluating the topographies of rural Britain and its empire. In *Observations* readers are encouraged to view British rural scenery as if they were looking at a composed landscape painting codified as irregular in line, rough and rugged in texture, intricate in detail, and sharply contrasting in light and shadow. A tinted portable mirror sought after then by British domestic tourists to frame and darken the scenes they visited, the Claude glass allowed these picturesque tourists to sketch or at least discuss what they saw in rural Britain in terms of landscape painting. Gilpin

downplayed the seriousness of his work by calling his work a “hasty sketch” meant to offer “only a general idea of a place, or scene, without entering into the details of portrait” (vii-viii), but *Observations* and a series of illustrated tourbooks he published in the 1790s played a key role in introducing a new generation of British travelling audience to what is essentially an aestheticized, “softened” view of specific locations, and encouraged them to adopt a viewpoint which effectively obliterates the reality of a chosen view, thereby fixing the landscape in a state of “stillness.”¹⁸

In the opening scene of “Hyperion” Keats comments on both picturesque sensibility and a popular image of the Romantic poet by evoking the theme of stasis in which the fallen poet-artist is primarily figured as an object in a still life. The scene’s general elegiac mood and deathbed melancholy are in line with the picturesque love of the ruined and the dilapidated. Time plays a key role in determining the picturesque. As Bermingham observes, in its emphasis on the erosions of time the picturesque “harken[s] back nostalgically” to an old order and “sentimentalize[s]” the loss of it while implicitly addressing “the precariously temporal nature of the new order that replaced it” (*Landscape and Ideology* 70). The conflict fundamental to the picturesque effects of time involves the politics of landscape, on the one hand: a decline of rural paternalism confronted with the forces of agricultural industrialization, which swept over the English countryside in the period 1790-1825 to replace the old order eventually.¹⁹ Keats reveals the complexity of the historical moment inscribed in the aesthetic conventions crossing each other by alluding to the way Wordsworth and Coleridge envision their own public

persona as a “contemplator” detached from petty politics—as evidenced by Saturn who, with his “realmless eyes . . . closed . . . [and] his bowed head,” “seemed list’ning to the earth, / His ancient mother, for some comfort” (19-21)—and by closely tying the affected expressions of rustic naturalness codified in the first-generation Romantics’ retirement poems to picturesque sensibility.

One of the poem’s reflexive statements of poetic incompetence might be discussed further in terms of the figure of the hand. Readers have pointed to two hands playing a key role in the opening lines of “Hyperion”: first, there is the hand of the Naiad—“the Naiad mid her reeds / Pressed her cold finger closer to her lips” (I, 13-14)—who bespeaks the silence of the whole scene, as Michael Ragussis observes in *The Subterfuge of Art: Language and the Romantic Tradition* (1978) (43). The admonitory hand of the Naiad strongly figures negation at the start of the poem. Further, it underscores a meta-poetic tone of the poem, which is concerned, at the moment, to alert the reader to the “failure” and abandonment of the narrative. The hand of the Naiad visibly “interdicts speech, language, poetry,” as Bennett puts it, and anticipates the dead hand of Saturn four lines later; hence the second instance where the hand plays a part in “Hyperion” (*Audience* 150).

Upon the sodden ground

His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,

Unscptred (I, 17-19)

By stressing the image of voicelessness and the role of Saturn's invalid, paralyzed *right* hand in regeneration, Keats achieves the paradoxical effect of highlighting the narrativity of the Romantics' sense of their impotence. In the opening fourteen lines of "Hyperion" Keats imagines the topography of the secluded place creating a sort of natural amphitheater for Saturn, where the image of the Romantic poet is "*postured* motionless" until Thea comes and prompts him to deliver a "large *utterance*" on his woe and aspired return to prominence (I, 85, 51; my emphasis). Part of the message in the reference to the stage and theatricality is that the preenclosed landscape is undergoing—or has the potential to undergo—profound change as a result of an awareness of the poet's own complicity in self-serving poetic performances. The poem's implicit reference to the cult of picturesque draws attention to how only the juxtaposition of images—a viewer's choice of what to show, and what not to show—can be crucial to understanding him or her as a storyteller. And a further assertion of the satiric effects of narrative self-fashioning in "Hyperion" appears in the portrait of Saturn as the Wordsworthian conception of the imaginative mute, the silent poet. Keats's representation of the fallen Titan through the popular image of a Romantic poet "list'ning to earth" in sheer solitude has additional subversive effects, as it calls for a radically revisionary reading of Romanticism's own thoughts, desires, images and language of self-representation.²⁰ As a result, "Hyperion" takes on dual roles as Keats appropriates highly codified expressions of the picturesque in representing Saturn as a poet figure fixed in stasis, and his deadened right hand a synecdoche for the failure of his

poetry, with the question of the narrator's status as a creator or poet getting repeatedly placed in suspense.

“Son of Mysteries” and the Romantic Ideology of Authorship

It will be very interesting to see what Coelus, father of the Titans, comes up with regarding the origin of his sons' power and woes. Looking down on dispirited Hyperion, the only Titan still in sovereignty, the primal god of the sky whispers in his son's ear: “Oh brightest of my children dear, earth-born / And sky-engendered, son of mysteries / All unrevealed even to the powers / Which met at thy creating” (“Hyperion” I, 309-12). Usually taken as a reference to conservative political discourse and literature in England and Europe in the 1790s, Coelus's speech reminds us of Burke's emotional rhetoric in his political tract on the events in Revolutionary France and their influence on British domestic politics: in *Reflections* Burke defends the “natural landed interest” of England and the divine (“sky-engendered”) rights of her monarchs whose power and the espoused “moral order of things”—social relationships based on inheritance, landed interests, and the chivalric ideals of “proud submissions”—he sees conform to nature and express what he calls “wisdom without reflection, and above it.”²¹ This sense of a monarch as an embodiment of sensibility and unchanging, primal “mysteries” of society (which both Burke and Coelus privilege over reason) was then jeopardized, Burke laments, “under the hoofs of a swinish multitude” on the streets in France (46). Coelus's rhetoric, too, appeals to similar sentiments when he regrets, in quintessentially

patriarchal terms, that Saturn's woe comes from an unlawful "rebellion / Of son against his sire" (I, 321-22).

When Coelus calls Hyperion "son of mysteries / All unrevealed even to the powers / Which met at thy creating" (310-12) the "mysteries" involve at least in part the unintelligibility of the affairs of the world. Keats alludes to Wordsworth's affirmation of the restorative power of the "forms of beauty" found in nature by which "the burthen of the mystery, / . . . the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world / Is lighten'd" ("Tintern Abbey" 24, 39-42). In his letter to Reynolds, May 3, 1818 Keats indeed makes admiring comments on Wordsworth for his ability to illuminate a world "full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression." He alludes to Wordsworth: "We feel the 'burden of the Mystery.' To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey' and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages" (*KL* I, 281). In "Hyperion," too, composed late in 1818 and abandoned early in December 1819 Keats acknowledges Wordsworth by generally portraying how the "burden of the mystery" or knowledge of human suffering transforms Apollo into a god of the Sun, poetry, healing and prophecy replacing Hyperion, the former god of the Sun.²²

Still, the political and intertextual connotations of Coelus's speech can only supplement, not supplant, its contribution to a vision of writing and inspiration because the mysteries of Hyperion's power involve an underlying assumption about a creative process as well. When Coelus describes his son as a product of "symbols divine, /

Manifestations of that beautiful life / Diffused unseen throughout eternal space” (I, 316-18), his rhetoric is closely Wordsworthian, with an echo even of Wordsworth’s pantheistic belief in *The Pedlar* that “in all things / He saw one life, and felt that it was joy” (217-18). The key idea of this statement is elaborated in some of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* including “Tintern Abbey” composed only months after *The Pedlar*:

And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,

 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. (94-103)

There is little doubt that Coleridge, too, is imagining the source of poetic inspiration in terms of a universal, pantheistic life force when in “The Eolian Harp” he assimilates “all of animated nature” to “organic harps diversely framed” which receive, just as the Eolian harps receive the breeze, the spiritual (“intellectual”) apprehension of the universal soul (44-48). In that poem Coleridge uses the phrase “one life,” too (26).

Despite Keats’s respect for Wordsworth as an explorer of human suffering, his departure from the earlier Romantic is clear when it comes to the fundamental premise of the production of poetry: the younger poet’s doubt about a Wordsworthian vision of

Romantic writing finds an echo in the way he characterizes Coelus and the deity's conception of Hyperion's origin. In some sense Coelus's words of consolation for his son is an accurate metaphor for the Romantic concept of genius, as his speech may be thought of as referring to a fundamentally Wordsworthian configuration, I would suggest, of poems as "[m]anifestations" of "symbols divine," an embodiment of "that beautiful life / Diffused unseen throughout eternal space" (I, 316-18). Coelus's account of Hyperion, then, might be re-read in terms of the way in which it articulates a vision of Romantic poetry which part of Keats challenges:

Oh brightest of my children dear, earth-born
 And sky-engendered, son of mysteries
 All unrevealed even to the powers
 Which met at thy creating . . .

 I, Coelus, wonder how they came and whence,
 And at the fruits thereof what shapes they be,
 Distinct and visible (I, 309-16)

This passage suggests an important clue about the nature of literary production in an age of "solitary genius," where the proper way to approach poems is based increasingly on a modern sense of the *author* as originator, thus placing an emphasis on the subjectivity of an isolated individual.²³ Indeed, Keats is often most effective when using the rhetoric of the Saturnian golden age to expose, albeit allusively, contradictions inherent in the

exaltation of a single authorial mind or personality as sole controlling intelligence in a work; by characterizing a poem as a sort of revelation, a product of “mysteries . . . unrevealed even to the powers” involved in its creation (310-11), Keats in fact helps us speculate about how similar the way his literary peers perceive genius is to the ways they perceive the ignorant. The passage reveals just how ignorant genius paradoxically is as to the origin of his own creativity and, more importantly, what physical, “[d]istinct and visible” form (or “shapes”) the product of his innate artistry will finally take (315-16); the absence of the self and unawareness of the materiality of poetry, the lines suggest, are thus ironically the essential characters of the Wordsworthian conception of poethood.

Keats’s extended comment on the Romantic ideology of authorship is embedded in Saturn’s talk with Oceanus, who also represents pre-Olympian order and values (“Sophist and sage from no Athenian grove” II, 168):

Thou art not the beginning nor the end.
 From chaos and parental darkness came
 Light, the first fruits of that intestine broil,
 That sullen ferment which for wondrous ends
 Was ripening in itself. The ripe hour came,
 And with it light, and light, engendering
 Upon its own producer, forthwith touched
 The whole enormous matter into life. (II, 190-97)

Characterizing Saturn as a product of “chaos” and “darkness,” Oceanus goes on to describe the dethroned leader of the Titans as “Light” that, while arising out of “its own producer,” is in fact “ripening in itself” for some “wondrous ends.” This language plays with a pair of meanings; apparently, Oceanus’s metaphor echoes Wordsworth’s famous figuration of literary composition as an “overflow” of the feelings of the poet, anticipating Abrams’s phraseology in *The Mirror and the Lamp* in which he explores how the primary purpose of literature by the mid-eighteenth century was no longer a reflection of nature, but can be represented instead by a lamp emitting light from a singular source, the poet: the mirror previously held up to nature is now imagined to be transparent—thus the illusion of media transparency and immediacy—while pointing to the subject as *the* source of significations.

In practice, however, the solitary genius or *auteur*, an assumed agent of creativity and innovation, represents neither “the beginning nor the end” of the creative process, as “Hyperion” suggests (II, 190).²⁴ The irony of Oceanus’s lore, Keats stresses, is that in it Romantic writing is still depicted as having profoundly *unconscious* power inspired by forces “ripening in itself” for some “wondrous ends” that even the author himself may not foresee (II, 193-94). “Hyperion,” then, may be thought of as a deconstructive rewriting of the Abramsian paradigm as a narrative in which the individuality of the Romantic writing-subject is rendered increasingly at the center of the institution of literature, while in the expressive model of poetry the notion of genius involves at the same time an articulation of an absence, inability or ineffectuality of the self, ultimately

renouncing the ontological stability he or she sees in nature. The figure of the author as divinely inspired and even “out of his mind” is one that may well be traced back to ancient Greek culture;²⁵ and yet, as Bennett observes, the celebration of the poet as uniquely separate from society, “as in touch with higher, non-human wisdom, as divinely mad and as outside of society but therefore better able to judge it,” is fundamental to the emergence of the “Romantic” author during the eighteenth century (*The Author* 38). “Hyperion” invites the reader to bear witness to the crucial paradox of the Romantic notion of the poet as visionary mute when Oceanus conceives of the poet as present and absent simultaneously, a figure of a mouthpiece who, he declares, is still mysteriously empowered to rule the “new and beauteous realms” of poetry (II, 201).

The myth of imaginative mute, which Keats expounds via the Titans’ speech, stands for an important dimension of Romantic material textuality as well, and indeed of a fundamental gap between *meanings* not precisely measurable (“mysteries/ All unrevealed”) and their linguistic *manifestation* (“shapes . . . Distinct and visible”) (I, 310-16). Although language seems to be a superior medium for Wordsworth because, as he suggests in the Preface to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, it is “purer, more lasting, and more exquisite” in nature (760), for him it is, in the end, not language but in fact the human mind with its “inherent and indestructible qualities” that functions as the only medium free of distortion (747). Such an illusion of language’s transparency can be reexamined in terms of a Romantic formulation of poetry as a direct *utterance* or projection of the poet’s mind. The myth of unmediated transmission reminds us of a

conflict involved in Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (744). Despite the assertion that poetry is a product of a sudden inner impulse expressed in an uninhibited and unrehearsed manner, Wordsworth contradicts himself by saying that poetry still arises "from emotion *recollected* in tranquillity" (756; emphasis added). As Bennett suitably points out, the "origin" of poetry, then, is at least one remove from the emotion the poet originally experienced; therefore, the emotion so "recollected" and "contemplated" during the act of composition is inexplicably both a copy and an original itself (*The Author* 63), doubly complicating the incongruity of *conception* and *writing* in the Wordsworthian paradigm of poetry. In Keats's poem this paradox of Romantic poetry finds a close parallel in an inherent irony of Hyperion, who is characterized as mysteriously "earth-born / [but at the same time] sky-engendered" (I, 309-10).

Moneta and a Radical Vision of Language in "The Fall"

Keats's preoccupation with language takes on a new significance in the revision of the fragmentary epic now recast as a first-person narrative. This and other stylistic and structural changes have persuaded Kenneth Muir that in "The Fall" Keats is restraining Miltonic mannerisms that fill the earlier version, reevaluating Dante as his new model as he restructures the poem.²⁶ In contrast, pointing to a parallel between *Paradise Lost* and the *Hyperion* poems—more so in "The Fall"—Sperry asserts that what Keats really attempts to achieve in the latter part of "The Fall" in particular is an

“allegory of sin, expiation, and atonement that,” with the metaphor of the Fall and the structure of redemptive ascent in the revision, “could give genuine relevance to the old epic action” (*Keats the Poet* 326). Despite the controversy over the sources of the poetic influences on “The Fall,” many commentators have agreed to see the revision largely as a stylistic, structural reformulation of the earlier version and demonstrated how Keats was reassessing literary traditions, in particular, of Milton and Dante in the revised fragment. But my emphasis here is to read the poem as an indicator of Keats’s growing consciousness about the medium of his poetry and its status.

As he rewrites the fragments into a first-person narrative, Keats conducts a major reevaluation of the role of Moneta—the Roman equivalent of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory and the mother of the Muses—in the project, redefining her relation to the poet-narrator, who is now engaged in an increasingly self-conscious quest for knowledge. In the poem’s earlier counterpart Apollo’s rebirth consists of numerous *unanswered* questions to Mnemosyne, and Keats presents the final deification of Apollo primarily through the “Knowledge enormous” the soon-to-be god of the sun and poetry finally has to “read” in Mnemosyne’s curiously blank countenance:

Oh tell me, lonely goddess, . . .

.....

Tell me why thus I rave about these groves!

Mute thou remainest, mute! Yet I can read

A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:

Knowledge enormous makes a god of me. (III.108-13)

The adequacy of language becomes suspect in the climactic scene as Apollo becomes acutely conscious of the contention of Mnemosyne's "silent face," which effectually teases Apollo—as well as the reader—out of linguistic involvement and into a Wordsworthian confrontation with uncommon revelation. In the revised fragment, however, Apollo (now the dreamer) carries on a continual dialogue with Mnemosyne (now Moneta) regarding the contrasting effects the true poets and the dreamers have on "the miseries of the world" (I.148). In doing so Moneta does not merely answer, correct, or silence the words the human poet-dreamer speaks; she also informs and is continually informed by the protagonist's language as they exchange ideas that finally lead the dreamer to a sad realization that he is actually "favoured for unworthiness," that he is allowed to enter the temple because, essentially, he falls into the category of "mock lyrists, large self-worshippers, / And careless hectorers in proud bad verse" (I.182, 207-208).

With Apollo's orgasmic transformation now recast as an outcome of the dreamer's extended conversation with the goddess of memory, unquestionably this mind-debate in "The Fall" is remarkable for Keats's effort to train his sensuousness of style to what Paul Sheats calls "an artistic self-discipline that was ethical and philosophic in its authority" ("Stylistic Discipline" 76). And such a self-discipline no doubt reflects Keats's well-known distrust of the dogmatic strain in literature, the "egotistical sublime" as he refers to it in a letter written to Reynolds on the 3rd February, 1818: "We hate

poetry that has a palpable design upon us,” he asserts, “and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket” (*KL* I, 224). A few days later he goes on to maintain that poetry should not operate “impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at” (I, 232), referring, for example, to how Wordsworth departs from his early ideal of “wise passiveness” towards philosophical moralizing and how Hunt narrowly insists on his own presuppositions about beauty thus circumscribing the reader’s creative independence. “The Fall” is a graphic illustration of the Keatsian ideal of poetry’s unobtrusiveness as the poem’s protagonist’s misgivings about “large self-worshippers, / And careless hectorers in proud bad verse” come almost as a logical, if at times disordered, fulfillment of the idea of poetry as “half knowledge” characterized by its incompleteness and open-endedness,²⁷ and of the growth and new understanding he achieves through an interchange of ideas with Moneta. Their conversation in this revision is manifestly less supernatural or dogmatic than the confrontation between Apollo and Mnemosyne or the elaborate Titanic oration in the earlier “Hyperion.”

In addition to the changes in narrative form in “The Fall,” Moneta—a cognate of Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses who inspire the creation of literature and the arts—embodies a model of discourse that, at the time Keats conceived it, was novel—even, some have thought, alien—to the world of writing and authorship as it had come to be known and understood. For instance, when the dreamer awakes to encounter Moneta in the sanctuary devoted to Saturn, he cannot see the priestess’s face, and she in the first place is recognized as a “language pronounced,” a voice with an “accent feminine”

(I.107, 215). This moment illustrates, I would argue, how Moneta's vision and the poet-dreamer's—and certainly Keats's—imagination are arrested by polyvocality and engaged in a process of endless redescriptions of the world. While O'Neill sees Moneta's apparent illogicalities as an index of Keats's "uncertainties" as he speaks through her ("When This Warm Scribe My Hand" 161), I would rather agree with Vincent Newey that such a mode of logic—disordered but unconsciously organized—is associated with the fact that the revision is cast as a dream vision ("Keats's Epic Ambitions" 78). Unlike *Lamia* in which dreaming generally represents the metaphorical opposite of life in the actual world, dreaming in "The Fall of Hyperion" is recognizably different and focused in meaning as it denotes poetic creation, even the writing of "The Fall" itself.²⁸ Mnemosyne (Now Moneta), then, is not merely an "embodiment of the poetic conscience and humanitarian concern" as Sperry puts it (313) but involves Keats's ambitious experiment this time with Moneta's far more fluid and decentered rhetoric, which represents also the poet's reaction to the Romantic ideology of authorship that poetic power is a product of a heroic mind and philosophical solipsism rather than a result of a dialogic quest for knowledge.²⁹ As a result, what the general public might once have thought of as authorial agency—the Romantic concept of the solitary genius or *auteur*—is now submerged in an elaborate tissue of talks, feedback, narrative intervention and negotiations, and textual instability.³⁰ The significant alterations made in "The Fall" in terms of narrative form, Moneta's inner visions and her interactions with the poet-narrator thus speak eloquently about Keats's maturing

reflection on the relationship between modes of language and knowledge, illustrating his vision of the poet as an agent of language rather than a controlling consciousness.

Notes

¹ Advancing on Mario L. D'Avanzo's study of Keats's idea of the poetic imagination and its importance in the imagery of his poems, Sperry contends that the poet's sense of imagination and its activity has grown out of his own studies at Guy's Hospital during 1815-16 and especially the courses he took there in chemistry: Sperry writes, "[t]he notion of an ethereal matter forever at work in the world's atmosphere and bringing about continual changes in its elements offered Keats a useful and suggestive parallel to the operation of the spirit of poetry" (40).

² For example, in *The Mind of John Keats* (1926) Clarence Thorpe has suggested that for Keats poetry is a means of imaginative "release" culminating only in flight to a world apart, analogous to the real world, although it is unclear in what sense Thorpe believes the poet brings his relationship to the actual world up to the imaginary realm. By contrast, other readers including Walter Jackson Bate have been contending that for Keats the creative process constitutes an imaginative "vitalization" of the actual and material with the poet's power of sense experience immensely extended. Thorpe's and Bate's accounts of Keats provoked Stillinger to repudiate what he saw as common misconceptions about Romantic poetry. In "*The Hoodwinking of Madeline*" and *Other Essays on Keats's Poems* (1971) Stillinger argues that prevalent ideas of British Romanticism are largely based on misreadings of Wordsworth and Keats whose poetic practices cannot be contained within what has been called the "romantic." And the "other sense" of "romantic," he suggests, involves how both poets manage to achieve both realism and transcendence by positing imagination as a means of remedy, how they reconcile the unreal and the real without resting on any such outdated system. Sperry, again, reads Keats in terms that look apparently more obvious and immediately recognizable. However, attentive readers will find that he advances in fact a surprisingly metaphysical interpretation of Keats's idea of the creation of poetry as he claims that for Keats "the essential forms of poetry are refined and liberated from the world of material identity by the intensifying power of the poet's imagination" (*Keats the Poet* 47-48).

³ Stillinger's work of bibliographical and textual analysis still remains insightful and influential addressing the current state of Keats's texts and the complicated publishing history of his poems; see *Texts of Keats's Poems* (1974); the notes in his standard edition of Keats's work, *Poems of John Keats* (1978); and *Reading The Eve of St. Agnes: The Multiples of Complex Literary Transaction* (1999). See also McGann's 1979 essay "Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism," reprinted in *The Beauty of Inflections* (1985), in which he traces the publication history of *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and *Other Poems* (1820), finding it to be a "politically reactionary" book at the time of its publication, marking Keats's profoundly self-conscious recoil from the turbulent political scene of contemporary England (53). Terence A. Hoagwood, "Keats and the Critical Tradition," explores the history of Keats

studies in terms of both its “inside” and “outside” stories; he offers a critical overview of the tradition of modern, professionalized criticism on Keats, while he also raises some insightful suggestions for work to be done about the ways in which the “circumstances of the print trade, publishers’ decisions, and the ordinary purposes of business” affect the production and meanings of individual poems of Keats (157).

⁴ *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, I, 386-87. References by volume and page number to this edition of Keats’s letters, cited as *KL*, are hereafter included in the text. Unless otherwise noted, italics are mine.

⁵ “[M]en of genius are great as certain ethereal chemicals operating on the mass of neutral intellect—but they have not any individuality, any determined character. I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self, men of power” (*KL* I, 184).

⁶ *The Poems of John Keats*, Book I, lines 11-14. All further references to both “Hyperion: A Fragment” and “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” are to Jack Stillinger’s edition of Keats and are included in the text by Book or Canto and line numbers.

⁷ In *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing* (1994) Bennett offers a nice breakdown of recent accounts concerning how the narrative form of the “Hyperion” project is symptomatic of its metapoetic move; see 222-23, fn. 9.

⁸ As to Keats’s response to the criticism of *Endymion*, see also Bate, *John Keats* (1963) 366-73, Andrew Motion’s *Keats* (1997) 571-72, R. S. White’s *John Keats: A Literary Life* (2010) 76-95, John O. Hayden’s *The Romantic Reviewer: 1802-1824* (1969) 190, Lewis M. Schwartz’s “Keats’s Critical Reception in Newspapers of His Day” 170, and Kim Wheatley’s “The Blackwood’s Attacks on Leigh Hunt.”

⁹ Wordsworth, *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, III, Part 2, 578.

¹⁰ *New Monthly Magazine*, lxxxiv (September 1848), 105 as qtd. in Matthews 1.

¹¹ Qtd. in Matthews 111. For the class-based, reactionary insults *Blackwood’s* hurled at Hunt, Keats, and their colleagues, see also Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle* (1998) 16-37.

¹² For appraisals of the materiality of voice suggested in “Hyperion,” see Bennett’s *Narrative* 148-51; and Martin Aske, *Keats and Hellenism: An Essay* (1985) 94-96.

¹³ As Stephen K. Land has demonstrated, for Wordsworth “the poetic feeling does not in itself either entail or constitute a language and may therefore subsist in independence of any linguistic formulation” (“The Silent Poet” 162).

¹⁴ Seminal discussions on the state and values of the medium of literature have been provided in D. F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1999); Robert Darnton's *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (1990); Roger Chartier's "Labourers and Voyagers: From Text to the Reader"; Gerard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997); and McGann's *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1992) and "Keats and the Historical Method." These practitioners of the so-called "sociology of text" do not take a literary work of art in isolation as a purely verbal construct or "a special arrangement of linguistic units," but instead explain it in terms of what McGann calls "(presumed) networks of social relations," attending to the effects of "bibliographical codes" and other physical, graphical, paratextual elements of a poem or book on the overall meaning of it ("Keats and the Historical Method" 18); from a more language-oriented (still, media-focused) perspective, Fraistat's and Stillinger's "reading-poems-in-their-place" approach focuses primarily on how an act of selecting and arranging poems into a Romantic collection inevitably affects our understanding of them and how the Romantics used their poetic collections as a means to construct their public personas. I am grateful to Prof. Terence Hoagwood for drawing the Coleridge volume to my attention.

¹⁵ *Don Juan*, III, 88. All further references to Byron's work are from McGann's *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works* (1980-93). Canto and stanza numbers (for longer works) or otherwise line numbers only will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁶ Crawford 225. Focusing on the interchange between literary convention and architectural design for domestic sites at the end of the eighteenth century through the beginning of the nineteenth century, Crawford draws attention to "[c]ontained, vernacular spaces such as town and kitchen gardens, which did not assist in the conceptualization of England's national agenda . . . [but] were part of a more muted conversation conducted among a thriftier audience" (4). The contained sites, she claims, attracted various sorts of "architects of space" in the period including building designers, agriculturists and even poets.

¹⁷ Marjorie H. Nicolson's work is a bit dated, but nevertheless remains informative regarding the changing implications of mountains in English literature across the long eighteenth century, while one might find Paul de Man's and Geoffrey H. Hartman's works more suitable for the current discussion of the Coleridgean and Wordsworthian revivification of the biblical mountaintop topos, and the principal value of the mountaintop epiphany as some kind of religious experience for the Romantics. For a detailed discussion of the activity/passivity and sublime/social issues raised by Romantic poems set on mountaintops, see Fred V. Randel, "The Mountaintops of English Romanticism."

¹⁸ Andrews offers a comprehensive account of the contested nature of picturesque taste in Britain in the eighteenth century, paying particular attention to the relations between geographical discourse, tourism and landscape poetry. See also Bermingham 57-73, Buzard 45-46 for accounts of the picturesque in terms of its relation to other aesthetic ideas of the time including those of Burke, Price, and Thomas Gainsborough, among others.

¹⁹ As to the economic and political implications of the picturesque, see Bermingham 73-83.

²⁰ McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) is absolutely important as to Romanticism's own self-representations perpetuated by artistic and critical traditions. For other insightful discussions about the artistic and critical representation of Romantic poetry, see also Butler, Chandler, and Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender*, among others.

²¹ Burke, *Reflections* 43, 47, 44, 39. The most prominent spokesman for the anti-Revolutionary cause, Burke warns the reader against the "sentiments" expressed and espoused in Dr. Richard Price and other radical Dissenters' discourse, while at the same time committing himself to a rhetorical project that establishes sentiments and passions as a foundation of "the moral order of things," an order based on the aristocratic concepts of paternalism, loyalty and the hereditary principle.

²² The sources of poetic influences on the *Hyperion* project have been discussed before and some readers indeed took the issue and explained the poems in terms of Keats's allegory of poetic election evident in them. For example, Bate finds the poems to be Keats's attempt to negotiate the inherited literary tradition and his place in it; see *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1972). For a number of critics, from Marjorie Levinson to Marlon B. Ross, the Romantic fragments represent the poet's troubled engagement with a developmental narrative and with questions of legitimation and empowerment; see Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form* (1986) and Ross, "Beyond the Fragmented Word: Keats at the Limits of Patrilineal Language." In his study *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), a more elaborate application of his oedipal model of literary history to this question, Harold Bloom sees Keats's fragmented discourse as a reflection of his strife with an elite masculine literary tradition of Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth, whereas Sperry explores the poet's commitment to the poems in terms of his own emotional and psychological life, claiming that in the *Hyperion* poems Keats draws upon Milton's conception of sin and expiation through suffering as a means to express "his tragic sense of life and human destiny" now reordered into an "allegory of the poetic soul" (*Keats the Poet* 316).

²³ In *The Author* Bennett offers a brief history of the concept of authorship, assessing the changing theoretical implications of the writing subject in ancient Greek

culture through the invention of copyright, the Romantic age, and the most recent discussion of collaborative authorship, while in his study *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (1991) Stillinger examines case histories from Keats, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Mill and T. S. Eliot, as well as from American fiction, plays, and films, demonstrating that the reality of how an author produces a work is often more complex than is expressed in the Romantic notion of the author as solitary genius.

²⁴ New Historicists question the concept of literary works as a product of solitary genius. For example, Butler claims that neither the individual author nor his or her work should be thought of in isolation, nor should the relationship between the two be considered a closed system. She argues that a book is not so much the product of one man as an outcome of a collective activity powerfully conditioned by social forces, and authors are not the solitaries of the Romantic myth, but citizens: see *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*.

²⁵ In Plato's *Ion* (c.390 BC), Socrates engages the Homeric rhapsode Ion in a debate about the nature of poetry and the idea of the poet. Far from being an art, poetry, Socrates argues, is a form of divine madness: "For a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him. As long as a human being has his intellect in his possession he will always lack the power to make poetry or sing prophecy" (41). A logical extension of the thought is the concept of the poet as divinely inspired but as therefore ignorant. The poets, Socrates maintains, "are not the ones who speak those verses": rather, "the god himself is the one who speaks, and he gives voice through them to us" (42). Plato's Socrates goes a step further in *Republic* (c.375 BC) by launching a stinging attack on poetry as inferior and deceptive mimesis compared to the knowledge of charioteers, fishermen, or philosophers. Poets, Plato argues, ought to be banished from the ideal republic because, he declares, they lie and establish "a bad system of government in people's minds by gratifying their irrational side" (Book X.78).

²⁶ See Muir, "The Meaning of 'Hyperion'" 111.

²⁷ In a letter written to his brothers George and Thomas on the 21st December, 1817 Keats employs the phrase "negative capability" to refer to the ability of a poet to suppress his ego, to be "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason"; Keats's theories regarding poetic imagination and negative capability are also reflected in his criticism of Coleridge for "[letting] go by a fine isolated verisimilitude . . . from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge" where he should realize that "Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration" (*KL I*, 193-94). For discussions of this famous phrase, see Bate's *Negative Capability: The Intuitive Approach in Keats* (1939) and *John*

Keats; Nicholas Roe's *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1997), 230-39; and Greg Kucich's "Keats and English Poetry," 193-94.

²⁸ For an insightful analysis of the metapoetic turn in Keats's poetry, see Irene H. Chayes, "Dreamer, Poet, and Poem in *The Fall of Hyperion*" 499-515; Stillinger's *Hoodwinking* 46-66.

²⁹ Ronald A. Sharp, *Keats, Scepticism, and the Religion of Beauty* (1979), draws attention to Keats's determination to pursue knowledge, by which he primarily meant not didactic and dogmatically philosophical "reaching after fact & reason" (*KL* I, 193) but essentially an "understanding of human life" with its inherent limitations (76). The nature of Keats's developing conception of knowledge is suggested, as Sharp observes, in the increased emphasis in "The Fall" on the primacy of the *process* whereby Apollo—who stands for Keats the poet as Sharp supposes—learns from the goddess, rather than on the product of knowledge, "[a] wondrous lesson" in Mnemosyne's "silent face" (112). Similarly, in *The Obstinate Questionings of English Romanticism* (1987) L. J. Swingle draws attention to Keats's preoccupation with the activity itself rather than the product of the mind; he argues that the dramatic debate between the major characters in "The Fall" involves not so "exclusively a matter of pursuing synthesis, unity, and reconciliation of opposites as Romantic criticism sometimes proposes" but the ways in which the mind "also strengthens itself through activities of comparative analysis, focusing upon differences and learning to class them like a botanist" (135).

³⁰ I am grateful to Terence Hoagwood for his insightful comment on how often a Keatsian destabilizing of the self-sufficient *auteur* turns out to evoke the stylistic features of Romantic Gothic fictions in prose, such as the attendant mixture of "low" and "high" styles of discourse, the elements of narrative anomaly, multiplicity, incompleteness and fragmentation in such texts. For a discussion of the male Romantic fascination with the Gothic features of language historically constructed as "feminine," see Anne Williams's *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995); for a discussion of the conflicted Gothic-Romantic relationship, including the dismissal of Gothic features by the "first-generation" Romantic writers including Wordsworth in his 1800 Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, see Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic* (2000); for a case study of the ideological implications of the Gothic features of Romantic works, especially Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes," see Jerrold E. Hogle's "The Gothic-Romantic Relationship: Underground Histories in 'The Eve of St. Agnes.'"

CHAPTER IV
PUBLIC IDENTITY, PARATEXT, AND THE AESTHETICS OF
INTRANSPARENCY: CHARLOTTE SMITH'S *BEACHY HEAD*

This chapter discusses the significance of the materiality of text in *Beachy Head* (1807), where Charlotte Turner Smith uses the margins of the printed page to challenge cultural formations of authoriality as they developed historically in relation to *Lyrical Ballads* first published in 1798 jointly by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Recent work in the burgeoning field of gender and authorship studies has turned to the analysis of Romantic women poets' contribution to the discourse of subjectivity, and to the complex issues of authority, the public image of (female) authors, "Romantic theatricality," entrepreneurialism, and gendered resistance to dominant male Romantic forms of poetry.¹ This chapter builds on this literature to explore how, and whether, the material book pertains to the ways in which Charlotte Smith interrogates putative, "feminine" and "masculine" models of writing and self-fashioning in her contemplative blank-verse long poem, *Beachy Head*, which was published posthumously in 1807 but remained largely unread until the modern republication of her poetry in 1993.² Participating within a broader revisionary current in Romantic women writers studies, this part of my dissertation challenges received notions of Romanticism by attending to the signal role that Smith's material practices play in the way she offers an alternative discourse of authorial personae and/in the book, a contribution that remains

little acknowledged in most accounts of *Beachy Head*. Thus the chapter focuses on how Smith considerably enlarges the notion of what constitutes the “lyrical” by reimagining the authorial persona as a socially- *and* textually-embodied self as her use of print apparatuses and textual spaces in the poem radically re-defines and ultimately rewrites the print culture which effectually confines feminine writing.

The Public Figure of Smith and the Autobiographical Impulse

With the revival of scholarly interest in Charlotte Smith and other Romantic women writers in the early 1990s,³ modern readers began to explore how gender and poetic identity constitute a productive sphere of conflict within the poetics of loss and self-fashioning that Smith forged and Wordsworth, one of her greatest admirers, soon took up in *The Prelude* (1805, 1850).⁴ For example, Sarah M. Zimmerman, notably in *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (1999), argues that Smith and Wordsworth share a Romantic impulse to fuse biography and poetic ambition, individually fashioning a lyric persona that is an autobiographical fiction.⁵ In fact, this modern explication of Smith’s poetics of self-defense and self-promotion chimes with Smith’s contemporary readers, who used to recognize the poet’s autobiographical impulse as the most salient feature of her works; with the publication of *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Poems* in 1784, followed by the multiplying editions of the collection from the same year onwards, and the appearance of *The Emigrants* in 1793, Smith has become a popular cultural figure whose literary success—as well as critical discredit—are catalyzed primarily by her personal

appeal and the fashionable side of her melancholy speaker.⁶ In 1786, for example, the *Critical Review* writes that they are “sorry to see the eye which can shine with so much poetic fire sullied with a tear,” and goes on to admit that they “hope the soothings of the favored muse may wipe it from her cheek”;⁷ in so doing, the *Critical Review*’s reader tacitly accuses Smith of exploiting popular taste and femininity for the success of her *Elegiac Sonnets* volume, which was first published in 1784 and went into its third and fourth editions two years later in 1786 and five more revisions during Smith’s lifetime. *The Elegiac Sonnets* enjoyed immense popularity among the sympathetic reading public of the late eighteenth century, which readily identified with the grief and resigned melancholy of its author.⁸

Given the cult of Charlotte Smith’s public figure and her appealing self-portrait in the widely successful *Elegiac Sonnets*, it is no wonder that, when *Beachy Head, with Other Poems* was published a year after her death in 1806, by Joseph Johnson, reviewers and readers alike showed a keen interest in seeing the posthumous volume as a kind of coda to the story of Smith’s earlier poetic speaker and her habitual mournful tenor. For instance, the conservative journal *The British Critic*, which had been highly unfavorable to *The Emigrants* for its evident “egotism” and interest in “propagat[ing] popular cant against order,” wrote that *Beachy Head* was “distinguished by great vigor and, by what was the characteristic of the author’s mind, a sweet and impressive tenderness of melancholy.”⁹ *The Universal Magazine*, too, found the untimely addition to the oeuvre of Smith a steadily personal, unusually effusive and unartificial meditation on one’s life

and nature as they saw it suggestive of “the quaint moralizing of Cowper, and the plaintive tenderness of Gray.”¹⁰ The critical consensus was reiterated shortly after by the *Monthly Review*, which found the posthumous appearance of *Beachy Head* an opportune occasion to pay tribute to its author, while the reviewer for the periodical clearly saw the 1807 collection as comparable to *The Emigrants* in both its subject matter and the image of the poetic self developed in it:

The same tenderness and sensibility, the same strain of moral reflection, and the same enthusiastic love of nature, pervade all her effusions. It appears also as if the wounded feelings of Charlotte Smith had found relief and consolation, during her latter years, in an accurate observation not only of the beautiful effect produced by the endless diversity of natural objects that daily solicit our regard, but also in a careful study of their scientific arrangement, and their more minute variations.¹¹

The *Monthly Review*'s writer is clearly encouraging readers to take their interpretive cue from Smith's earlier poems, especially *The Emigrants*, which is apparently a political work for its immediate historical and political context of Revolutionary France in 1793, but is essentially a personal work as modern critics have suggested.¹² For all the contemporary reviewers cited above Smith's posthumous volume *Beachy Head*, especially its title poem, supposedly constitutes a culminating, if subdued, account of her personal misfortunes and sufferings as all the readers curiously draw autobiographical parallels particularly between the poetic speaker of the title poem and Smith's public

profile—a lady “sullied with a tear”—developed in the earlier stages of her literary career.¹³

The contemporary reception of Smith has been reiterated of late by Labbe, although to different critical ends. In *Charlotte Smith, Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender* (2003), Labbe claims that Smith’s rhetorical goal in *Beachy Head* is to efface her own earlier public profile by presenting readers with a new authorial persona that she wants to establish. Labbe finds in the poem a sort of transformation of the lyrical autobiography of the *Elegiac Sonnets* into a narrative of a multi-vocal poetic identity, which she assumes to be coherent, if “fluid,” in nature and at ease with the competing voices and gendered perspectives Smith employs in the poem; for Labbe the poem’s multi-vocal features exemplify the author’s “manipulations of gender and her understanding of the expectations and requirements of her culture” placed on a woman writer, while, interestingly, the contending perspectives are claimed to merge into *an* authorial persona, ultimately constituting an interior Romantic self (19). However, I hope to challenge the proposition that in *Beachy Head* Smith manages her autobiographical ethos along with other voices and gendered perspectives; I suggest instead that what the poem indicates is Smith’s critical engagement with the very idea of writing about oneself or the nation in a manner that is culturally—and formally—cohesive.

Audience, Rhetorical Situation, and Publishing Context

My discussion of a shift in the textual politics of Smith's autobiographical appeal is manifold, and I want to address the matter, first, in terms of the changes in Smith's own understanding of her audience, and in the ideological constraints on the production of the *Beachy Head* volume. Despite Smith's influence as a popular cultural figure and her willingness to capitalize on it to address her financial and emotional needs—including what Stanton calls, quoting the poet, her “literary business,” i.e., Smith's close involvement on her own part in the processes of her literary production¹⁴—Smith's popularity and the impact of her autobiographical appeal were in the process of waning for various reasons, including her prolific output and her own turn to political topics especially with the publication of the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* and *Desmond* in 1792, *The Old Manor House* in 1793, *The Emigrants* in 1793, and *The Banished Man* in 1794.¹⁵ The sixth edition of the *Elegiac Sonnets* indicates a “turning point” in the collection's publishing history, as Zimmerman has suggested, in that Smith begins to allude more explicitly to the biographical sources of her melancholy speaker's unhappiness and sorrows, which mainly involve prolonged litigation over Smith's father-in-law's estate; but, as Zimmerman agrees, it is worthwhile to bear in mind that Smith's increasing explicitness about the sources of her speaker's despair ironically gave her lamentations important political implications, too, that helped the author not only bring her own case against her husband, who had a legal entitlement to his wife's earnings despite their separation, but also speak for her “fellow sufferers” of the juridical

system, lawyers and abusive husbands (“Dost thou not know my voice” 117-18).¹⁶ The political overtones of Smith’s apparently autobiographical self-defense have been confirmed by Curran, too, who argues in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986) that many of Smith’s works indicate “her recognition that the law is a social code written by men for a male preserve, and that the principal function of women within its boundaries can only be to suffer consequences over which they have no control” (xxi).

With the potentially inflammatory elements in her literary self-defense Smith’s public image was facing a drastically different political situation in the year 1793 and afterwards: a period affected by the September Massacres of 1792, the execution of the French king in January 1793, followed by France’s declaration of war on Britain in February, and the more tangible risks in Britain associated with the Seditious Libel Act, published in May 1792. Smith’s carefully nuanced portrayal of the French emigrants and her equally meticulous embedding of personal and literary imagery in *The Emigrants* show the author’s understanding of the multiple bind over her literary career—the climate of the times, the desperate financial circumstances in which she was writing, and her own recognition that her habitual practices of self-promoting her sorrows could alienate an audience that was increasingly turning its back to her public image and political rhetoric.

The *Beachy Head* volume was published posthumously, in early 1807, by Joseph Johnson, although two years earlier Smith had offered it to Thomas Cadell, Jr. and William Davies, as Labbe notes, “asking £335 for the poems and presenting it as a

potential third volume to the *Elegiac Sonnets*.¹⁷ However, the *Beachy Head* volume contains fewer sonnets than the first published volume of her *Elegiac Sonnets*, offering longer, more experimental verse forms with highly decentered narrative strategies. Given the inherent differences between the collections, I would not think of Smith's idea of printing the new poems under the rubric of the *Elegiac Sonnets* as an evident sign of *Beachy Head*'s reliance on the author's earlier public reception but rather an indication of her own unease about there being not enough poems in the collection for a full volume, or of how desperate Smith was for money to provide for her family despite her literary success. When Johnson, too, raised similar concern about the collection's independent publishability, Smith corresponded with him about printing the poems as an addition to her *Elegiac Sonnets*: "the volume should be printed uniformly with the other two [volumes of the *Elegiac Sonnets*] because the probability is that those who are in possession of the other two Volumes will purchase this."¹⁸ The letter clearly illustrates Smith's mercenary motives for offering the new volume as a sequel to *Elegiac Sonnets*.¹⁹

Despite her desire to make more money with the new poems by relying on the success of her earlier volumes of the *Elegiac Sonnets*, it seems that Smith still thinks of *Beachy Head* not simply as her "literary business" but a chance to prove herself to her audience, especially her "less partial judges"; in an earlier letter to Cadell and Davies, August 18, 1805, she writes: "I shall endeavor not to do what I see too frequently done—sacrifice quality to quantity & empty my port folio [*sic*]. And I shall publish

nothing,” she asserts, “that is not allowed by less partial judges than myself to be worth publishing” (*SL* 706). Importantly, given the negotiations between the cultural and textual boundaries Smith narrates so visibly in *Beachy Head*, which was conceived by herself as the last collection in her lifetime “on which much of [her] credit depends” (*SL* 704), I would like to suggest that the title poem is a particularly intriguing example of a Romantic literary project in which the writer deconstructs the putative lyric subject—the fiction of a stable self—by highlighting the *material* constraints on his/her own literary production, and by contemplating on the nature of his/her access to communication media.

Paratext, Cultural Boundaries, and Textual Politics

The rediscovered Romantic poetess carries out the task of narrating a scene of gender and cultural conflicts by effectively splitting her book into a proper text and what Genette calls “paratext”—a “fringe” of the printed text, which in effect situates the text and suggests an interpretive frame.²⁰ For example, *Beachy Head* draws on numerous endnotes containing quotations from, and allusions and references to other works of literature, science and human and natural history, as well as other paratextual devices such as a list of botanical terms with authorial explanations and publisher’s introductory “advertisement.” To some extent the author of *Beachy Head* exploits the margins of her book as a means to self-fashion a persona who, with a voice that is factual and informative, challenges male prejudice against women’s culture and writing practices. It

is not a complete surprise that Smith's contemporary readers saw the poem in simplistic terms of a woman writer's claim to authority; praising Smith's precise and sensitive documentation of the flora and fauna around her, the *Literary Panorama*, for example, acknowledges her claim to authority especially in her extensive use of the notes, which the reviewer saw as "proofs of her general attention and accuracy."²¹

Smith's preoccupation with paratextual practice is central to her poetic experiment in *Beachy Head*, but the implications of the "split" voice and its relation to the problem of authority and the author's sexual/cultural/textual politics are still under debate among scholars. A feminist interpretation of the matter has been articulated perhaps most clearly by Labbe, who attends to the rhetorical adeptness with which Smith allegedly achieves a coherent, if flexible, poetic self in the poem.²² Labbe's interpretation of the role that Smith's paratextual devices play in her self-fashioning in the poem is recapitulated well in her statement that "[Smith's] Readers were accustomed to associating their speakers—forn, lost, despairing—with the poet herself"; curiously, Labbe claims further that the author even "encouraged this by surrounding the poems [in the collection] with a print apparatus that linked author and speakers: that embodied the author as an acquaintance of the reader" (*Culture of Gender* 20). The assumption here is that Smith's experiment on the margins of her text helps her reinforce the elegiac image of herself as received by the reading public and thus inscribed in the text proper, and that the periphery of her printed page was arranged essentially to achieve this goal as the woman writer's display of learning in the paratext primarily supports her claim to

authority and implies her unquestioning conformity to the established, male-centered writing practices.

Gender and the poetics of self-fashioning provide a measure of the poem's apparent achievement as Smith's formal and rhetorical craft in *Beachy Head* helps the Romantic woman author mourn her own marginal, inadequate relations to the male traditions of the literary world; but I would argue that it is equally worthwhile to note how Smith's experiment with formal features and multi-vocal narrative marks the poem's linguistic difference, too, from her habitual elegiac tenor associated with her public figure, thus removing the poem from the autobiographical impulse with which she established herself in earlier works. Of Charlotte Smith's two long narrative poems (the other being *The Emigrants* published by Cadell in early summer 1793), *Beachy Head* is more historically ambitious and more attentive to natural history. Wordsworth, one of the greatest admirers of Smith, acknowledged the ingenuity and influence of her poetry on his own enthusiasm for rural nature as he admitted in his note to his late poem, "Stanzas Suggested in a Steam-boat off St. Bees' Heads": "English verse is under greater obligations [to Smith], than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered. She wrote little, and that little unambitiously, but with true feeling for nature."²³ This general direction of Smith's thematic interest, as well as her achievement and inventiveness in dealing with the subject, are perhaps best evidenced by what Curran has called the "multitudinous, uncanny particularity" of *Beachy Head*.²⁴ As many readers have suggested, that particularity depends not only on a close knowledge of local flora

and fauna of south-east England, but it also is a product of many years' labor—indeed, Smith's bold attempt to record the history, traditions and inhabitants of the region since prehistoric times.

The local poem clearly shows a particularly Romantic engagement with the natural world, as does the collection as a whole, in a manner similar to Gilbert White's *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* (1789). Writing in the form of a series of letters addressed to Thomas Pennant and Daines Barrington, known for their writings on antiquities, natural history, geology and geographical expeditions, White's goal that he proclaims in his Advertisement to *The Natural History* is to “[lay] before the public his idea of *parochial history*, which, he thinks, ought to consist of natural productions and occurrences as well as antiquities”; White shows his passion for the subject by encouraging readers to pay attention to the surroundings of their residence and essentially “publish” their thoughts. “[S]uch materials,” White believes, will eventually allow them to obtain “the most complete county-histories, which are still wanting in several parts of this kingdom, and in particular in the county of *Southampton*” (iii, original emphasis). White thus collects information and analyzes data in *The Natural History*, incorporating a large number of tables, statistics, quotations of different genres and periods in the history, as well as engravings and catalogs of plants and animals of the region with detailed description.

Smith's copious endnotes in *Beachy Head* constitute as a whole a condensed natural history of the chalky headland of south-east England as they offer the scientific

classification of the genus, family or category of numerous birds, plants and minerals that are indigenous to the region and are referred to in the main text; and while the result is partly a matter of displaying her learning in the paratext, it is simultaneously a matter of interrogating masculine and imperial authority inscribed in the paratext as the poem provides supposedly descriptive but characteristically symbolic accounts of events, persons, things or places of historic interest that bring the very problem of writing history into question; and in doing so she explores, with a motive that is very different from that of White, the very scene and language of imperial encounter we notice in numerous writings of travelers, artists, captains, collectors and poets of this period of rapid expansion. Presenting herself as witness to an often-violent confrontation between different cultures, Smith records a compromise, transaction or even undermining of social mores and cultural beliefs occurring on the south coast of England *and* on the page of her poem.

In the opening stanza, for example, Smith presents Beachy Head as a natural habitat of many species of wild birds recorded in southern England. Attaching descriptive notes in which she catalogues the binomial name of each species in Latin, she identifies the genus to which the species belongs, and the species within the genus: “Terns. *Sterna hirundo*, or Sea Swallow. Gulls. *Larus canus*. Tarrocks. *Larus tridactylus*” (217n). However, unlike the scientific language she employs on the fringes of the book, through her distinctive vocabulary choice and style of expression in this portion of the main text, Smith portrays the “rifted shores” of southern England as a kind of natural

prison (9), with its people and the wild flying “inmates” described as held there as a punishment for some unexplained crimes they have committed:

. . . inmates of the chalky clefts that scar
 Thy sides precipitous, with shrill harsh cry,
 Their white wings glancing in the level beam,
 The terns, and gulls, and tarrocks, seek their food,
 And thy rough hollows echo to the voice
 Of the gray choughs,* and ever restless daws,
 With clamour (20-26)

*gray choughs. *Corvus Graculus*, Cornish Choughs, or, as these birds are called by the Sussex people, Saddle-backed Crows, build in great numbers on this coast. (218n)

Despite the impersonal tone of her notes explaining the “gray choughs” and other indigenous species of birds, the figurative language of the text proper helps us read Smith’s criminal and punitive metaphors as a sign of her social commentary on her country’s bigoted hostility to France at the present time. These lines provide additional political meanings, too, to both the opening emphasis on the “awful hour / Of vast concussion” (5-6) and a vision of a glorious sunrise over the English Channel described in the succeeding lines, since the sunrise—an icon of revolutionary hope—is marked by a picturesque mode of description and the conventional night-light symbolism, both of

which in this case effectively reinforce the socialized senses of the nature-culture opposition highlighted in the opening stanza.²⁵

Landscapes and material culture furnish Smith with symbolic imagery, with which she projects her socio-political radicalism. Given British government's repression of seditious statements published on its own territory during the revolutionary decades, Smith's democratic contentions against slavery in lines 41-68 are embedded understandably in a figurative language, in a particularly Romantic engagement with the sensitive appreciation of nature watched impressively on top of Beachy Head.²⁶ A magnificent prospect of the English Channel at midday is starkly juxtaposed here with the image of a "ship of commerce richly freighted," a ship engaged in Britain's cotton trade with "the orient climates," especially India or the East or West Indies (42-44). This image of British imperial expansion is closely followed by Smith's repulsion to her country's involvement in the enslavement of men in exchange for cotton and jewels: "The beamy adamant, and the round pearl / Enchased in rugged covering; which the slave, / With perilous and breathless toil, tears off / From the rough sea-rock, deep beneath the waves" (50-54).

Smith's "abhorrence" of her country's cruelty and inhumanity to "fellow man" is important (57, 59), but here I want to pay particular attention to the roles of authorial notes in her comment on the problem of cultural dominance. After she has appended a note to line 47, explaining a species of cotton ("*Gossypium herbaceum*") essential to Britain's cloth-making industry, Smith adds another, this time explaining the phrase,

“The beamy adamant”:

Diamonds, the hardest and most valuable of precious stones. For the extraordinary exertions of the Indians in diving for the pearl oysters, see the account of the Pearl fisheries in Percival’s *View of Ceylon*. (219n)

Renowned as a material with superlative physical qualities and optical characteristics, diamond, combined with efficient marketing, constitutes one of the most valuable commodities that have attracted miners, industrialists, imperial governors, and military men like Robert Percival. And Percival’s *View of Ceylon*, to which Smith refers in her note and is better-known as *An Account of the Island of Ceylon* (1803), is one of the many examples of how British men at home and abroad produced poetry, natural history writing, landscape paintings and botanical prints that played a crucial role in developing the idea of the tropics as simultaneously a rural idyll and a place in need of British intervention.²⁷ Interestingly, the eighteenth-century enthusiasm for accounts, catalogues and drawings of colonial land, subjects and materials has been appropriated by Smith in *Beachy Head*, to different artistic and philosophical ends. By summoning the masculine authority in her endnotes while simultaneously indicating how Percival’s and other British writers’ intellectual mastery of the tropics accompanies her country’s material appropriations of land, labor, and natural resources of the regions, Smith doubly challenges her culture’s patriarchal and imperial abuses of power the masculine literary space typically signals. Therefore, as far as gender is concerned, Smith’s use of the paratext is not a defensive gesture simply imitating an authoritative writing practice;

rather, as a woman writer whose previous works indicate her exceptionally acute understanding—and, sometimes, adept exploitation—of her culture’s essentialist view on gender, race and national identity, she reinvents the periphery of the text as a means to contextualize cultural tropes within a broader lens of discursive construction and historical cause and effect. She engages with the paratextual elements in order to alter, maneuver, or reimagine them as a means to publicize the site *and* glossary of imperial and patriarchal confrontation.

Multi-Vocality and Social Vision

Complicating the relationship between the text proper and the notes, the poem contains dramatic reversals, too, in the narrative’s trajectory. A striking example can be found in the contrasting messages offered by the poem’s first two speakers: the initial “I” and “Contemplation.” When the initial “I” describes a sunset’s unique atmospheric conditions and intense colors, this speaker uses the magnificent visual rhetoric to call attention to the English nobility’s “poor” fetish for jewels (71), while this radical social comment is starkly juxtaposed later with Contemplation’s essentially nationalist and militant call for actions to regain England’s “naval fame” against “foreign arms,” especially France in this case (145, 157). Despite its disposition toward epic eloquence in dealing with the military history of England’s south coast, Contemplation assumes its own form of authority as the long note devoted to an account of the Norman invasions since the eighth century supplies detailed historical information from the margins.

Seemingly impersonal in his prose, gauging the note-speaker's ideological orientation is tricky, though, as his account of the "North-men" on the distant coasts of France, Italy and England is invested ultimately in providing support for Contemplation's patriotic account of England's south-coast defense against foreign powers in the past and then; when the note-speaker is engaged in representing the northern "invaders" ironically as a race of valor and dignity, who drove a group of Muslims off the shores of a town in Italy "notwithstanding the inequality of their numbers" and still declining "every reward" from the natives (222), the subtle shift in the note-speaker's intrinsic viewpoint facilitates Contemplation's retelling of the story of the Norman conquest of England in lines 131-153 from William the Conqueror's peculiarly *hybrid* standpoint as both invader and ruler—he invaded England and became the first Norman king of the country in 1066, ordering "unceasing . . . requiems for the slayers and the slain" alike on the scene of the battle of Hastings near Beachy Head, as Contemplation reminisces (141-42).

And when, musing on the history of south-coast invasions from the Vikings to the Normans, Contemplation refers to an impending invasion from France ("modern Gallia" 143) and to the Italian and Spanish responses to the Napoleonic war, this discourse of strife and feudal ruins involves not an individualistic or nostalgic preoccupation with "the proudest roll" of English monarchs or the turbulent years of the region's past (167), but rather a uniquely metaphoric vision of England's current public unease about societal and historical change attendant on the revolution and its aftermath. Therefore, the productively complex interaction between Smith's speakers, and the

figurative and poetic projection of her views on pressing social issues constitute a crucial feature of Smith's historical discourse, which contrasts strikingly with White's idea of the fossilized past or his primarily ecological respect for the natural world of south east England. Smith's account of the regional environment contrasts, too, with Percival's interest in tropical nature's potential for agricultural productivity. Concerning the scale of geologic and historical time involved in her poetic contemplation, Smith indeed presents "an unusually large vision of social and cultural issues" by "layering [England's] present over its determining history," as Hoagwood observes ("Charlotte Smith" 143-44).

Adding to the disagreement between the political awareness of the initial "I" and Contemplation, the poem takes a further turn when Contemplation is replaced by "the reflecting mind," whose persona dominates the next 114 lines until the reintroduction of the "I." The reflecting mind cheerfully recoils "From even the proudest roll [which is] by glory fill'd" and "returns / To simple scenes of peace and industry" (167-69). Interestingly, the reflecting mind's uniquely poetic voice here is marked by a note of irony when its reference to "the proudest roll" alludes to the images of the book (of national history) highlighted earlier in Contemplation's proud and affected account of England's past resistance to foreign nations on its own southern coast: "Contemplation here, / High on her throne of rock, aloof may sit, / And bid recording Memory unfold / Her *scroll voluminous*—bid her retrace / The period" (117-21, my emphasis). In other words, when the reflecting mind evokes the trope of written record at this crucial narrative juncture, the speaker is imitating—with ironical overtones—Contemplation's

earlier grand and patriotic style, with which the preceding speaker has just retraced history's "scroll voluminous," from the time of the Scandinavians landing on the British coast, to "a list" of "illustrious [British] men" who later took a stand against France to compensate for the defeat of Beachy Head, "one day of triumph" the Allied forces of the English and Dutch allowed earlier to Admiral Tourville's 1690 French fleet (159-63).

Given the linguistic acuteness characteristic of the reflecting mind's seemingly lyric persona the speaker's panoramic overview of the "simple scenes of peace and industry," delivered in a deceptively personal manner in lines 167-281, involves not an individualistic meditation on a rural life and private sorrows, but rather Smith's imaginative treatment of social and cultural unrest during the Napoleonic wars, showing her persistent use of the landscape and natural imagery as political icons. The reflecting mind starts with an otherwise picturesque account of a "lone farm" quietly "bosom'd in some valley of the hills" (170-71), but the mind quickly distinguishes this vision of pastoral beauty as secretly involving war and public disorder, with an ordinary shepherd surprisingly engaged in smuggling, "Quitting for this / Clandestine traffic his more honest toil" (182-83). The socialized messages of this suspicious landscape become more prominent when the mind and the note-speaker univocally highlight the discontents and anxieties of the working class living on Beachy Head; the speakers jointly develop the idea of the ordinary shepherds and laborers of the Sussex coast as victims of current political turmoil, who are led to abandon "what the earth affords / To human labour" and instead to "hazard their lives to elude the watchfulness of the Revenue officers, and to

secure their cargoes” (191-92, 225n). The unusual combination of voices toward their shared end contributes to the effect of portraying the ordinary men’s engagement in “the perilous trade” in a compassionate light, presenting the problem as essentially a matter of human suffering under the political climate, rather than a personal moral issue (188). Smith thus interprets coastal landscape as a site deeply involved with social changes, suggesting Beachy Head’s symbolic situation in the contemporary political scene. Furthermore, the reflecting mind’s somber meditation on the human “commerce of destruction” nicely parallels the poem’s opening emphasis on the “ship of commerce” (42), a seascape watched on top of Beachy Head and associated with Britain’s imperial identity and thus with Smith’s anti-slavery argument. The recurrent trope of transaction jointly involves the issues of class and race as Smith links the suffering of the natives of England’s southern coast to that of a colonial slave in India, who “With perilous and breathless toil, tears off [pearl oysters] / From the rough sea-rock, deep beneath the waves” (53-54).

The poem’s tone becomes increasingly confessional as the “I” appears again in line 282 and directly addresses reader in the first-person, reflecting on his own peaceful childhood, youth and other personal experiences. This portion of the poem appears to develop an unusually intimate relationship between the “I” and the reader partly through the speaker’s brief reference to his experience of “A guiltless exile” in line 288, which some readers have taken literally as an allusion to a distressing event of Smith’s married life.²⁸ However, the speaker’s sense of unhappiness must not be construed too narrowly

on a personal level, since Smith uses her speaker's love of Nature ("An early worshipper at Nature's shrine, / I loved her rudest scenes") to show her engagement with issues of public concern (346-47). When the contemplative speaker invokes, for example, the images of a happy, but ignorant, rural boy whose martial fantasies "[Have] led him on, till he has given up / His freedom" to find only misery "While yet a stripling" (280-81, 279), the imagined prospect of pastoral beauty embeds a stark Blakean contrast between the innocent and experienced states of human lives. A similar treatment of England's social reality is involved in the speaker's recollection of his own younger self looking down on "the sturdy hind" toiling with his "panting team" of oxen up "the hollow way" (307, 308, 305). This hilltop vision, unlike that of Wordsworth or Coleridge, conveys Smith's acute social awareness, presenting the surrounding view as a site free from the destructive forces of social evils, such as "illegal acts" (211), "hostile war-fires" (228), greed ("frequently the child of Luxury / Enjoying nothing, flies from place to place / In chase of pleasure" 245-47), and even London's polluted atmosphere ("the polluted smoky atmosphere / And dark and stifling streets" 291-92).

The Problem of Authority and the Rhetoric of Science

The poem's consistent emphasis on the language of science supplements the effect of Smith's detachment from the language of subjectivity she once employed in her earlier collections of elegiac self-fashioning. The "I" who meditates on "Science' [*sic*] proudest boast" functions in this way when the speaker finds contemporary treatises on

geological findings (including White's *Natural History*) practically unable to explain the origin of "the strange and foreign forms / Of sea-shells" found on the chalky headland of East Sussex (390, 373-74). After the "I" has dismissed the "vague theories" of the earth as generally irrelevant to the quotidian reality of the herdsman on the knoll, Smith continues to use the perimeter of the volume in order to attack the authority and rhetoric of science involved with the explanations of "the teeth and bones of an elephant" discovered at Burton in Sussex in 1740:

[T]he Rev. Dr. Langrish, minister of Petworth at that period, . . . was present when some of these bones were taken up, and gave it as his opinion, that they had remained there since the universal deluge. The Romans under the Emperor Claudius probably brought elephants into Britain. . . . This [Milton's account in the Second Book of his *History of Britain* (1670) confirming this claim] is given on the authority of Dion Cassius, in his *Life of the Emperor Claudius*. It has therefore been conjectured, that the bones found at Burton might have been those of one of these elephants, who perished there soon after its landing; . . . I think I saw, in what is now called the National Museum at Paris, the very large bones of an elephant, which were found in North America; though it is certain that this enormous animal is never seen in its natural state, but in the countries under the torrid zone of the old world. (234n)

In this explanatory note the reader is provided, first, with two different speculations about the elephant's bones: that of the Reverend Langrish tracing the origin of the bones as far back as to the time of the biblical Flood, and another pointing to the Roman invasion of Britain in AD 43, based on the authority of the Roman historian Cassius and the English poet Milton. Second, there is a piece of counter-evidence found in North America, which tends to disprove both previous claims. Taken as a whole, the reader sees that the note-speaker has presented the archaeological findings as a matter of dispute, placing those "learned" explanations side by side that are widely different in the space, time, and motives they associate with truth.²⁹

Interestingly, the long note concerning the authoritative accounts of the bones at Burton is followed by another, which supports the main text's brief allusion to a folkloric account of the relation between the bones and the visible features of the South Downs:

The peasants believe that the large bones sometimes found belonged to giants, who formerly lived on the hills. The devil also has a great deal to do with the remarkable forms of hill and vale: the Devil's Punch Bowl, the Devil's Leaps, and the Devil's Dyke, are names given to deep hollows, or high and abrupt ridges, in this and the neighbouring county. (234n)

By showing how the bony remnant of the past is described differently in popular oral myths of the region, Smith represents the contrasting rhetoric of expertise as an almost closed system of discourse posing a threat to the discourse of oral history and fables.

She indicates the failures of scientific discourse to explain the profound human condition in the rural area of south England in a social, cultural and linguistic context.

Furthermore, given Smith's paratextual investment in showing the discrepancy between the accepted accounts of the matter, the poem brings the very idea of scientific or spiritual *authority* into question, which is often based on rhetoric and assumptions (the Reverend Langrish's clerical "conjecture," for example) rather than formal deduction, and the use of inductive reasoning and examples (referring to the bones found at Burton or in North America, for instance) rather than huge amounts of evidence compiled as data.³⁰ An imitation of dialectical arguments is a common goal of using examples and absolute authority (the Bible, for example, which supports the Reverend Langrish's dating of the bones to the time of Noah's Ark), but Smith's notes illustrate that even examples and authority may lose persuasive power when manipulated by outsiders like the priest Langrish or even the poet Milton, whose self-interests and rhetorical motives do not necessarily coincide with that of scientists or philosophers. Using her notes to explore the nature of antiquarian inquiry, Smith shows how the "experts" in those specialized disciplines use their ethos and informational advantage to serve their own agenda.

The Poem in Its "Place" and the Materiality of the Text

Beachy Head echoes the emergent Romantic preoccupation with the precise details of the natural habitat, but it does so to explore the interaction of Romantic

botanical interests and the materiality of text.³¹ For example, early on in the Advertisement to the volume the publisher notes that “Flora” and “Studies by the Sea,” two poems placed in the middle of the volume, have already been published in Smith’s earlier collection of poems, *Conversations Introducing Poetry, Chiefly on Subjects of Natural History for the Use of Children and Young Persons* (1804); “[W]ith his usual liberality,” as the paratext suggests, the publisher “has permitted them to reappear in the present volume” because “as many of [Smith’s] friends considered them as misplaced in that work [the *Conversations* volume], and not likely to fall under the general observation of those who were qualified to appreciate their superior elegance and exquisite fancy, and had expressed a desire of seeing them *transplanted* into a more *congenial soil*” (216, my emphasis). The publisher’s message indicates that the decision to reprint the two poems in the *Beachy Head* volume has probably been made by the publisher himself following the author’s premature death on October 28, 1806 after an illness, though the primary reason for the action is unclear yet. An explanation for the matter might be that there initially were not enough poems in the collection for a full volume, a problem addressed already in Smith’s earlier letters to her publishers.³²

Another excuse is provided by the publisher himself, who refers to an informed plea made by Smith’s “qualified” readers for putting the poems into “a more congenial soil” for them, in this case referring to the *Beachy Head* volume. The botanical tropes of replantation not only echo Smith’s predominant subject in the *Conversations* and *Beachy Head* collections but invoke a particularly Romantic engagement with the idea of the

poem as an aesthetic object that not only conveys meanings in its own right but has special significance as a result of its association with something else in the book, in its “place.”³³

The trope of the material text plays a pivotal role on the level of the individual poem, too, as *Beachy Head*'s fragmentary state generates, if unintentionally, the effects of highlighting its nature as poetic artifice. In July 11, 1806 Smith sends a letter to her publisher, indicating that the *Beachy Head* volume is nearly complete, except that “the close of the [title] poem [she has] not yet sent up [to be printed]”; also in progress are “the notes & two short poems, [and] a long preface” (*SL* 740). While the notes, and possibly the poems, arrive in the end, it seems that “the close” and the “long preface” never do.³⁴ The trope of the text-in-the-making or the text-never-finished effectually underlines the poem's engagement with the aesthetics of self-consciousness; and *Beachy Head*'s closing emphasis on its absence of an aesthetic closure might be taken as a gesture of overcoming the fiction of a stable self through self-intransparency. With all the marks of disparity, cross reference, juxtaposition, reversal, slippage and self-mockery consistently inscribed in the narrative, I see Smith's characteristically multi-vocal self-fashioning in *Beachy Head* as an indicator of her remarkable, if unsettling, meditation on the essential impracticability and absurdity of writing a history of oneself or the nation in a conceptually—and formally—coherent manner. What the formal and narrative discomfort in the poem tells us about its subject is not autobiographical parallels between the author and her speakers, so much as her experiment with—and

difficulty in—writing history itself at so many dissonant levels that are framed in the poem. Perhaps, as Kelley has suggested, Smith accents the formal incongruity of these levels of narrative in order to dramatize the unsettling disagreement between two competing models of Romantic historiography: a narrative of “human and natural particularities that are insistently local,” and “the large, supervisory project often characterized as the grand march of history” as exemplified by Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88) (“Romantic Histories” 287-88). And I want to add that, in comparison to Smith’s earlier works, *Beachy Head* shows a far greater degree of formal discordance, which does not so much embody the poem’s premium on sincerity or a structure of intense identification between poet and reader, as draws attention to the poem’s status as a kind of enclosing structure of narrative, which reports, foregrounds and comments on the narratives spoken by the poem’s inner narrators; as my discussion above shows, Smith’s liberal use of paratextual elements and multi-vocal presence effectually forbids readers from “seeing” the poet as they see her words on the page.

While I agree that for Romantic women writers the paratext itself is essentially a masculine literary space affiliated with established writing practices, my discussion above shows that Smith’s mode of discourse in her notes and its relation to the text proper are never fixed. Even though the display of learning in the paratext partly supports the woman writer’s claim to authority, Smith’s endnotes also indicate her way of challenging the double bind for women writers, summoning masculine authority in

the paratext while simultaneously interrogating essentialist thinking and instructions about one's identity in a culture and on the printed page. Additionally, the poem shows how the fringes of the book can be effectively transformed from a masculinized site of authority to a feminized site of exchange as Smith writes with an awareness of patriarchal, imperial abuses of power in that area of the book. There is a persistent transgression of cultural/textual boundaries occurring in *Beachy Head*, which explores the very scene and languages of imperial encounter.

Notes

¹ A great deal of work has been done on the importance of Romantic women poets traditionally ignored in literary criticism, and of their interaction with dominant male writers in the literary field. For seminal discussions of women Romantics including, but not limited to, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, and of their contribution to the reassessment of the Romantic canon, see Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*; Wilson and Haefner, eds., *Re-Visioning Romanticism*; Feldman and Kelly, eds., *Romantic Women Writers*; McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility*; and Stephen C. Behrendt, *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community* (2009). A number of critics have complicated Romantic accounts of sincerity and theatricality; see especially Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1971) and Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (1997). On the role of literary annuals as a major publication outlet for women writers in the Romantic era, see Terence Hoagwood and Kathryn Ledbetter, “*Colour'd Shadows*”: *Contexts in Publishing, Printing, and Reading Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers* (2005).

² Curran’s *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (1993). References to Smith’s poetry are to this edition and are included in the text by line numbers, while an “n” after a page reference number is used to refer to an authorial note on that page. Smith’s notes were originally attached to the end of the volume but reprinted in this edition as footnotes.

³ For Smith studies, this renewal of interest in Smith’s work coincides with Curran’s groundbreaking essay, “Romantic Poetry: The ‘I’ Altered,” reprinted in Mellor, ed., *Romanticism and Feminism* (1988); the publication of Curran’s modern edition of Smith’s poetry in 1993; and the appearance of Loraine Fletcher’s *Critical Biography* of Smith in 1998 and Judith Phillips Stanton’s 2003 edition of *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*. A few years earlier than the publication of his edition of Smith’s poetry in 1993, Curran proposed that modern critical understanding of the Romantic “I” would have to be reassessed in order to take Smith and other women authors into account; see “Romantic Poetry: The ‘I’ Altered” 200-202. Harriet Kramer Linkin’s 1995 essay, “Taking Stock of the British Romantics Marketplace,” explores how Smith and other women Romantics virtually disappeared from print culture after the mid-nineteenth century as the Victorians largely omitted women authors from their Romantic canon; for more discussions about the historical reception of Romantic women poets and other marginalized writers, see also Linkin and Behrendt, eds., *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception* (1999); Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (2000).

⁴ Bishop C. Hunt, Jr. has tracked the record of Wordsworth’s verbal and metrical echoes of Smith in his 1970 essay, recently reprinted as “Wordsworth and Charlotte

Smith: 1970,” suggesting that Wordsworth and his contemporaries were influenced more by Smith than would probably ever be acknowledged. In “Charlotte Smith: Political Iconography and a Critique of Imagination” Hoagwood also explores how closely the themes, narrative and language of *The Prelude* parallel the features of Smith’s poetry. He notes especially how both poets’ appreciation of nature offers a figurative depth involving both political history and the poetic imagination.

⁵ See Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* 51-72.

⁶ Hoagwood offers a succinct outline of the contemporary tradition of “enveloping [Smith’s] work with a morose concentration on her miserable life” (“Charlotte Smith” 142). See also Zimmerman’s “‘Dost thou not know my voice?’: Charlotte Smith and the Lyric’s Audience.”

⁷ Review of *Elegiac Sonnets*, *Critical Review* 61 (1786): 467-8.

⁸ We haven’t seen yet any book-length study of the publishing history of Smith’s poetry. For shorter accounts of the versions of Smith’s poetic volumes and their current textual status, see especially Jacqueline M. Labbe’s headnotes in her recent edition of Smith’s poems published as part of The Pickering Masters series of *The Works of Charlotte Smith* (2007); see also Curran’s textual notes in his standard scholarly edition of Smith’s poems.

⁹ Review of *The Emigrants*, *British Critic* 1 (1793): 405; Review of *Beachy Head, with Other Poems*, *British Critic* 30 (1807): 171. In *The Emigrants*, Smith’s earlier blank-verse poem in two books, the author meticulously balances the poem’s political elements with a poetics of sorrow familiar to her readers from the *Sonnets*; despite *The British Critic*’s overtly politicized reaction to the poem’s apparent polemical subject, the *Critical Review*, for its part, was unsympathetic to *The Emigrants* on the grounds that the author “Herself, and not the French emigrant, fills the foreground” of the poem; see Review of *The Emigrants*, *Critical Review* 9 (1793): 299-300. This view of *The Emigrants* has been reiterated by some of Smith’s later readers including Carrol L. Fry, who suggests in *Charlotte Smith* (1996) that the poem “resembles *Elegiac Sonnets* in its description of natural scenery, the general tone of melancholy, and the ubiquitous autobiographical persona” (84). Smith indeed employs a highly personalized and sentimental language in *The Emigrants*, but she does so in order to convey her sympathies to the ideals of liberty and reform, and depicts—and in so doing humanizes—the French émigrés who found safety from the horrors of the Revolution through exile in rural Sussex.

¹⁰ Review of *Beachy Head, with Other Poems*, *Universal Magazine* 7 (1807): 229.

¹¹ Review of *Beachy Head, with Other Poems*, *Monthly Review* 56 (1808): 99.

¹² See Zimmerman's "'Dost thou not know my voice?'" for a useful discussion of Smith's quintessentially personal contemplation, in *The Emigrants*, of the biographical sources of her despair, and of a shift in her public image affected by a political inflection that the author increasingly employed in her later works.

¹³ Review of *Elegiac Sonnets*, *Critical Review* 61 (1786): 468.

¹⁴ Stanton, "Charlotte Smith's 'Literary Business': Income, Patronage, and Indigence"; see also Zimmerman's "'Dost thou not know my voice?': Charlotte Smith and the Lyric's Audience," in which Zimmerman offers a convincing account of how well Smith herself understood the nature of "her readers' receptivity to her solitary poet," and thereby crafted the *Elegiac Sonnets* volume to make the most of the market for her dejected speaker (112).

¹⁵ *The Banished Man*—published in 1794, a year after *The Old Manor House* and within just months after *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1794), arguably Smith's weakest novel—is her seventh novel in six years. The same time period had been marked by the publication of *The Emigrants* and three editions of the *Elegiac Sonnets*, which is nothing less than "a remarkable production," as Fry notes, given the author's distressing family duties (*Charlotte Smith* 85).

¹⁶ Smith's increasing political radicalism is also reflected in her fourth novel, *Desmond*, which features an English protagonist who travels to revolutionary France to be affected by its ideals; see Stanton's account of Smith's evident radicalism about social issues as portrayed in her next novel *The Old Manor House*, in which the author sets about "test[ing] the limits of what a woman might write" (Introduction ix); in *Reviewing before the Edinburgh, 1788-1802*, Derek Roper argues that the decline in Smith's popularity actually begins with her next novel, *The Banished Man*, rather than *The Old Manor House*, which was received favorably by most contemporary periodicals.

¹⁷ Labbe's headnote to the volume in her 2007 edition of Smith's poetry, p. 149.

¹⁸ Letter to Thomas Cadell, Jr. and William Davies, July 12, 1806, cited from *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith* 741. References by page number to this edition of Smith's letters, cited as *SL*, are hereafter included in the text. Unless otherwise noted, italics are mine.

¹⁹ For a discussion of how Smith's financial predicament was particularly acute at this time, see Fletcher's *Critical Biography* 321.

²⁰ Genette's focus in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997) is placed on those elements of a book that constitute the so-called "periphery" of the printed page, a space between text and "off-text," such as a book's cover, dedication, title, preface, introductory letters, notes, epigraph, advertisement, and so forth. Though the intermediate area of a book is typically considered marginal to the meaning of the text, Genette suggests that these materials are crucial to our appreciation of the literary work as a social construct. Unlike the common view of the matters as merely representative of "transitional" spaces in the book, Genette sees paratexts as indicative of *transaction* as these materials are often added during the book's distribution process by the editor, the printer, and the publisher, as well as its author(s) (1-2). Genette's study effectively creates a discursive space in which we might examine the "negotiation" between the institutions of publishing and individual authors, which enables a text to become a book and finally offers it as such to its reader.

²¹ Review of *Beachy Head, with Other Poems*, *Literary Panorama* 2 (1807): 294.

²² See especially *Culture of Gender* 3-9.

²³ Quoted from the Cornell Wordsworth volume, *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845*.

²⁴ Curran, Introduction xxvii.

²⁵ For an excellent discussion of how Smith uses the landscape and natural imagery as political icons, see Hoagwood "Charlotte Smith."

²⁶ This shift of openly political polemic into increasingly metaphorical—and practically "safe"—form is often understood as one of the major tendencies of Smith and many other writers of the period, and of the literary culture of Romanticism in general; see Hoagwood's "Charlotte Smith" 143-44; and Roe's *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* 257-75.

²⁷ Beth Fowkes Tobin's *Colonizing Nature: The Tropics in British Arts and Letters, 1760-1820* (2005) and Hermione de Almeida's and George H. Gilpin's *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005) explore numerous depictions of tropical agriculture and landscapes during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Both books examine how the British imagination circulates Britain's imperial identity and economic interest in the Caribbean, the South Pacific, and India; see also Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), an influential account of European travel writing about Africa and South America as one of the ideological apparatuses of empire.

²⁸ Labbe has claimed that the “I” represents “the familiar figure of ‘Charlotte Smith,’ sorrowful and needy,” taking the phrase as a direct reference to Smith’s own enforced residence in France during the 1780s, a period Smith was seeking shelter from her husband’s numerous creditors (*Culture of Gender* 148).

²⁹ The note-speaker’s engagement with the rhetoric of expertise evokes Kenneth Burke’s claim that “a rhetorical motive is often present where it is not usually recognized, or thought to belong. In part, we would but rediscover rhetorical elements that had become obscured when rhetoric as a term fell into disuse, and other specialized discipline such as esthetics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and sociology came to the fore” (*A Rhetoric of Motives* xiii); and the rhetoric of science is no exception as Alan G. Gross has suggested: “the ‘brute facts’ themselves mean nothing; only statements have meaning, and of the truth of statements we must be persuaded. These processes, by which problems are chosen and results interpreted, are essentially rhetorical: only through persuasion are importance and meaning established” (*The Rhetoric of Science* 4).

³⁰ When Aristotle outlines three genres of rhetoric—*deliberative* (dealing with future policy), *judicial* or forensic (dealing with an action in the past), and *epideictic* (dealing with praise and blame)—he makes rhetoric applicable to politics, history, and even beyond; in doing so, he also defines its generic constraints, however. Unlike dialectic, which searches for truth and is based on formal syllogism, Aristotle sees rhetoric only applicable to those matters that admit multiple legitimate opinions or arguments because of its reliance on enthymemes, rather than syllogism; the former deals with issues or things that are at best probable, while the latter deals with certainty. Unlike syllogism, the premises for an enthymeme are drawn from the audience’s “common sense,” and some premises are unstated for the audience to fill in. For the Aristotelian definition and divisions of rhetoric, see George A. Kennedy’s translation of Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (1991), Book 1.

³¹ For discussions of the relationship between female writing, Romantic botanical interests and historiography, see Judith Pascoe’s “Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith”; Donelle Ruwe’s “Charlotte Smith’s Sublime: Feminine Poetics, Botany, and *Beachy Head*”; and Theresa M. Kelley’s “Romantic Histories: Charlotte Smith and *Beachy Head*.”

³² For example, see *SL* 741 for a letter Smith sent to Johnson on July 12, 1806.

³³ On the intertextuality and order of Romantic poetic volumes, see Stillinger’s *The Hoodwinking of Madeline* 1-13 and 116-17; and Fraistat’s *The Poem and the Book: Interpreting Collections of Romantic Poetry*.

³⁴ For a detailed account of the development of the collection, see Labbe's headnote to the volume in her edition of Smith's poetry.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: HYPERMEDIACY AND ROMANTIC SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Wordsworth's enthusiasm about elementary feelings forcibly communicated in a simplistic style not only illustrates his opposition to tastes governed by literary fashion, but also displays his imagination of an aesthetic transaction that appears as if "not intervened" or "unmediated" by the middle thing, i.e., his poetry's medium. With his theory of poetic immediacy Wordsworth imagines a state in which the marking of mediation in one's writing becomes untraceable, thereby an illusion of poetic experiences in which the form of poetry itself becomes paradoxically unnecessary. However, as media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin suggest, a culture's desire for media transparency—a desire to erase all traces of mediation—explains simply a half of what they call a culture's double logic of remediation: "Although each medium promises to reform its predecessors," Bolter and Grusin explain, "by offering a more immediate or authentic experience," they argue that "the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium," as a tangible cultural artifact, thereby suggesting an interplay between a culture's "contradictory imperatives for immediacy and hypermediacy."¹ While the Romantic desire for immediacy is apparent in the triumph of Wordsworth's theorization of the poetic process as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the logic of hypermediacy is also at work in Romantic poetry as a representational practice;

the Romantic awareness of mediation is evidenced, in the words of William J. Mitchell, by the way Romantic poetry “privileges fragmentation, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity and . . . emphasizes process or performance rather than the finished art object.”² The logic of hypermediacy in Romantic poetry is evident in the tension between the ideas of a literary experience as mediated and as a “real” experience that lies beyond mediation.

In this dissertation I have tried to indicate how Romantic writers confront an evolving tension between their culture’s logic of immediacy and a desire to appropriate the division or scission Wordsworth’s discourse paradoxically opened up. I argue that the Romantics discussed in the previous chapters involve alternative theories of Romantic media-consciousness, helping us challenge critical conventions about what matters in privileged Romantic canons, where immediacy had been achieved by concealing signs of mediation from the text. If Wordsworth’s theory of composition suggests a subjective and abstract poetic experience—an experience without mediation—in which its medium’s purpose seems to be to disappear from the reader’s consciousness, an examination of the alternative discourses of self-exposure in the Romantic era reveals the essentially fluid nature of the Romantics’ media-consciousness, which remains little acknowledged in received accounts of Romantic literary culture.

The earlier chapters have all engaged with how Wordsworth’s theory of poetry operates as what Foucault calls a strong author-function (founder of the discursivity) of Romantic literary culture. In his famous essay “What Is an Author?” Foucault suggests a crucial distinction between the “author” and the “real writer,” and goes on to claim that

subjectivity itself is part of the “variable and complex function of discourse” itself (158); the author-function “does not refer purely and simply to a real individual,” Foucault asserts, “since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves” (153) and it is linked to the juridical and institutional system that affects the status of the author’s name within a society and a culture. The point of the concept is to deny the subject (or its substitute such as the “work”) the primal status of the source of significations while instead seeing “the author” as a discursive construct.³ Foucault’s notion of the author-function challenges the Wordsworthian appeal to the autonomy of a solitary author and media transparency, allowing us to explain many different functions of Wordsworth’s discourse in Romantic literary culture and criticism; the concept helps us examine how Wordsworth’s theory works as a “system of constraint” rather than a “perpetual surging of invention” (“What Is an Author” 159-60) on the one hand, while, as Bennett argues, one might explore on the other how the writings of Wordsworth “open up the paradoxical possibility not only of a development of [his] ideas but of the production of ‘something other than [his] discourse, yet something belonging to what [he] founded’” (*The Author* 27). In this dissertation I have thus tried to indicate how Romantic writers appropriated the missing link Wordsworth’s discourse ironically gave rise to, invariably foregrounding its fictiveness.

What Coleridge’s self-conscious poems clearly show us is how Romantic poems highlight the immediacy of emotional response, while an examination of their publishing history and the author’s conflicting motives for *rewriting* them suggests that Romantic

spontaneity is rather a critical construct of literary-historical discourse or, as Angela Esterhammer excellently observes, “a trope, a textual effect” (“Spontaneity, Immediacy, and Improvisation in Romantic Poetry” 321).⁴ I suggest that meta-poems, which abound in Romantic period, used to be considered, erroneously, in terms of a deeply meditative genre in which poets describe a moment of their own personal crisis and confess their private, lyrical impulses at the breakdown of their creative power. These poems appear to be occasional pieces taking their motive and intention from the impulse to pay tribute to a friend or to start the creative process flowing, but my point is that the genre assumes greater theoretical importance as it helps reader understand how Romantic poetry internalizes its own artistic and critical representation.

Romantic lyric as a vehicle for the Romantic mind at work finds one of its most influential formulations in Coleridge’s poetry of poetic failure, which is surprisingly aware of itself as artifice and is essentially self-reflective, commenting on its own genre or on the process—and difficulty—of creating itself. In Coleridge’s description of the Romantic crisis of consciousness the poet’s concern is not with the content of the poetic vision itself, but with his relation as poet to his own vision, as poet to his own act of reflection; but Coleridge’s meta-poems go further than merely writing about writing. In presenting crafted speakers who gain credibility by acknowledging the artifice and insincerity of their medium, the poet is also indicating, I would suggest, the competing impulses he strives to negotiate: one position depends for its emotional power on Romantic tropes of containment and lyric failure, while another aspect highlights self-

reflexive, knowing deconstructions of the monologic lyric persona, implying his own awareness of the drama of the stymied imagination as an artifact that is subject to certain personal, relational, social or political exigencies. Examining the poems in terms of their predominant themes and conflicting motives in rewriting, I argue that Coleridge's self-reflexive poems allow us to recast the gap between the underlying structure and the immediate surface of the genre in more historicist terms.

I challenge the prevailing notions that the poems were written impromptu without apparent external cause other than the feeling of creative impotence, and that poets may have written them in a natural and uninhibited manner without ever feeling a pressing need to make alterations to them. The changing titles and contents of the poems are indicative of Coleridge's varying socio-political stances and the overall rhetorical purpose of the Romantic meditative lyrics shifting over time. One might also find differing poetic, scenic and architectural conventions variously crossing one another in Coleridge's tropes of containment and lyric failure. The poetry of breakdown, then, is not simply a product of moods and whims, but represents an area that makes the premises of Romanticism and the lyrics highly prominent textually, ideologically and visually.

While Coleridge's meta-poems show that the immediacy of inspiration, or even loss of the power of extemporaneous composition, is central to the lyric *effects* of many Romantic poems, Keats's *Hyperion* poems put those figures and tropes of extempore composition on display for an audience, highlighting ambiguities that are already present

in Romantic-era discourse. For example, “Hyperion” represents poetic improvisation as performance. Putting emphasis on theatricality and other tropes associated with the stage, the poem describes ousted Saturn as a figure of the popular male poet of genius who is involved, ironically enough, in performing natural spontaneity on stage or in writing. By representing the Wordsworthian scene of solitary composition as an idea deeply associated with performance and artificiality, “Hyperion” indicates an intrinsic difficulty in the Wordsworthian rubric of “spontaneous overflow” which, as Keats’s emphasis on performing suggests, already involves an immediate relation to an audience.⁵

If the *Hyperion* project centers on the contrasting fates of Hyperion and Apollo, gods associated with poetry, learning, prophecy and the arts, its themes of power, loss, struggle and suffering can be explored, as we have seen, in terms of Romantic conceptions of authorship with their inherent contradictions and instability. I argue that in the *Hyperion* poems Keats makes use of the rhetoric of the Saturnian golden age to expose contradictions inherent in the Wordsworthian idea of authorship and its exaltation of the myths of unmediated transmission and the solitary genius. With an ironic sense of the narrator’s incompetence in “Hyperion” being an early indication of the crucially reflexive and materialist overtones in “The Fall,” the revised fragment is indeed a radical redescription not only of the poet’s role, but of the very nature of poetic discourse as it challenges Romanticism’s predominant focus on the subject who makes the work, rather than the literary work itself or its physical existence. Keats’s

presentation of Moneta in “The Fall” is a graphic illustration of the way in which he confronts his readers, undermining the Romantic ideal of poethood that he has articulated well in “Hyperion” via the fallen Titans’ innately reactionary and stoically optimistic reading of history, language and poetic inspiration.

Keats’s numerous references to “signs,” “shapes,” “form,” as well as “hand,” “book,” “scroll,” “pen of scribe” and “syllables” suggest that as in his shorter Odes Keats’s subject in the *Hyperion* poems is particularly the act and medium of writing. While the earlier opening shows Keats’s preoccupation with dramatizing the agony of the demystified tyrants, the completely rewritten opening of “The Fall” refers back to the writing subject and foregrounds the poet’s reflection on language, immediately establishing a complex relationship between the poetic experience and the medium as the primary concern of the poem’s allegory. If Wordsworth’s idea that poetry’s medium is, or should be, transparent rests on the presumption that language has a direct access to the mind, such a gap between language and the mind is virtually indiscernible for Shelley as he imagines language to be made of the same stuff as thought itself. And “The Fall of Hyperion” involves a challenge to Wordsworth and Shelley’s theorem as the poem highlights Keats’s declaration of language’s dependence on “vellum or wild Indian leaf” (I, 5)—media which Shelley previously called “enfeebling clouds” (“Mont Blanc”)—indicating the complexity of the Romantic ideas of media and mediation. Therefore, when Keats writes, in a letter of February 27, 1818, “if poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all” (*KL* I, 238-39), Keats’s

botanical metaphor puts implicit emphasis on the *material* construction of the natural *effects* many Romantic poems valorize. When “The Fall” stresses that knowledge is meaningful only when it is “Traced upon vellum or wild Indian leaf” (I, 5), it is thus a bold cultural statement about poetry’s opacity, rather than transparency; the phrase confirms Keats’s awareness of poetic experience as mediated—the recognition that a poet or a reader “learns *through* acts of mediation or indeed learns *about* mediation itself,” in Bolton and Grusin’s terms (*Remediation* 71, my emphasis). The *Hyperions* thus offer an allegory for competing ideas of poetry and its mediation, suggesting Keats’s contribution to the Romantics’ self-conscious and critical understanding of their ideas, practice and medium of poetic exchange.

If Keats associates the Wordsworthian scenes of spontaneous composition with performance, artificiality, and topographical conventions, Charlotte Smith reacts against Romantic spontaneity in order to develop a very different notion of natural surroundings, poetic voice and medium. Given the highly ironic relationship between the text proper and the notes in *Beachy Head*, and the persistent negotiations between cultural boundaries Smith narrates so visibly in her notes, it is unlikely that the point of surrounding the main text with paratextual devices is to help reader “link” the poem’s multiple speakers with the woman poet. While there is an argument that Smith manages her autobiographical persona along with other gendered voices, and that the woman poet ironically rehearses an essentially masculine, Wordsworthian and sublime merging of “the constituent parts of the Self, taking them apart so as to recombine them”

mysteriously (Labbe, *Culture of Gender* 147), as far as gender is concerned I want to read *Beachy Head* as a resistance to dominant male Romantic forms of poetry, especially the forms that valorize the sublime. There is indeed an alternative feminist interpretation of Smith's treatment of gender in *Beachy Head*; for example, Pascoe and Ruwe build on Mellor's influential reading of the Burkean sublime and beautiful as essentially gendered categories, seeing the poem as a gendered resistance to the "egotistical sublime" of Wordsworth's *Prelude* in its feminine preoccupation with the stubborn otherness, localities and minute particularities of the natural, mostly botanical, world.⁶ And I want to add that *Beachy Head* is a splendid example of a Romantic engagement with the deconstruction of the putative lyric subject—the fiction of a unified, self-identical, stable self; my discussion above shows that Smith deliberately refuses to integrate the competing voices and styles she displays in the poem, preventing readers from easily associating the hybrid poetic persona with her earlier lyric ethos.

Smith's preoccupation with print apparatuses and discursive modes highlights her awareness of the material *and* ideological constraints on her own literary production, showing her contemplation on the complicated nature of a woman author's relationship to her communication media and print culture. *Beachy Head* presents a radically new mode of writing, drawing attention to the importance of those textual elements traditionally ignored in literary criticism, and of their interaction with literary-cultural meaning. By bringing the propriety of the main text into question, and simultaneously laying bare its troubled relationship to the endnotes in which she explores the very

scenes and languages of imperial encounter, Smith doubly confounds the distinction between the center and the margins of the book and the world, and undermines her culture's hegemonic inscription of the cultural and artistic singularity of the text. Her experiment with the reflexive roles of paratext—a textual space typically associated with masculine and imperial authority—demands a radically new frame of interpretation and thus complicates our notions of authorial agency, Romantic subjectivity and feminine writing practices.

Notes

¹ *Remediation: Understanding New Media* 19, 5. See also Thorburn and Jenkins, ed., *Rethinking Media Change* for an excellent account of media change as a social and historical phenomenon in which emerging and established models of representation, technologies, and socio-economic forces interact and collude with one another. Marshall McLuhan's discussion of the technology and social effects of the printing press in *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) is influential. McGann's *Inflections* draws attention to the importance of materialist aesthetic in analyzing literary work of the Romantic Period.

² *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (1994) 8.

³ Roland Barthes raises many of the same questions as does Foucault, but Foucault's essay seems to me unsympathetic to Barthes's celebration of text as a space for pleasure (*juissance*) because what concerns Foucault most is that there are some notions—like Barthes's notion of text as an endless free play of language—that merely replace the privileged position of the author and, furthermore, undermine the real significance of his disappearance. See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"; for recent discussions of the subject, see also Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (1993); and Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (1994).

⁴ In his study *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (1988) Clifford Siskin, too, argues that the eighteenth-century preoccupation with the lyric effects has contributed to the development of the "sense of 'natural' spontaneity" in the "greater Romantic lyric" (28, original emphasis); see also O'Neill's discussion of how "spontaneous risings of originality were [in fact] the result of much contrivance in poetry of the Romantic period" ("Even Now While I Write" 135).

⁵ For an insightful discussion of an inherent problem in the idea of *representing* immediacy, see Esterhammer's essay in which the critic argues that the Romantic idea of spontaneous composition already and necessarily involves a vital role of an audience or even reader witnessing a poet who claims to improvise a poem: see 322.

⁶ See Pascoe, "Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith"; Ruwe, "Charlotte Smith's Sublime: Feminine Poetics, Botany, and *Beachy Head*." A meaningful shift in the roles of gender in Smith's poems has also been discussed by Mellor, in *British Literature 1780-1830* (1996), in which she reads *Beachy Head* as symptomatic of Smith's effort to connect conceptual discourses on nature and society, while the critic also shows that Smith facilitates her reflection on social issues by her

feminine preoccupation with the otherness, the minutiae of the natural world and “the limitations of human subjectivity” (226).

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